

Philip Rupprecht. *Britten's Musical Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. x, 358 pp.

Reviewed by Lloyd Whitesell

In this wonderful book Philip Rupprecht develops a new, unified theoretical approach to Britten's dramatic vocal music. To that end, he assembles a chronological series of close readings of major works, some extremely well-known (*Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *War Requiem*), others less familiar (*Curlow River*, *Death in Venice*). His approach draws on speech-act theory, as expounded by J. L. Austin (1975) and John Searle (1969), conceiving linguistic utterance as a performative act. This conceptual basis resituates traditional concerns of text-setting, tonal structure, and leitmotivic development by promoting the dramatic context as the central topic of analysis. The focus shifts from details of objective structural integrity to rhetorical effects. Music, words, and gesture are treated not as separable symbolic media but as elements of a composite interactional discourse with "social and institutional force" (3). Broadly speaking then, the book aims toward a renewed evaluation of Britten's stature as a dramatic composer while arguing persuasively for the value of linguistic and literary theories in music scholarship.

There was an intense flourishing of such cross-disciplinary explorations about ten or fifteen years ago, led by scholars such as Lawrence Kramer (1984, 1991), Fred Everett Maus (1989, 1991), and Carolyn Abbate (1991). Loosely grouped under the rubric of "narratology," its inspiration in Anglo-American circles can be traced back to Edward T. Cone's influential book, *The Composer's Voice* (1974). (A comparable inspiration on the Continent was the "semiology" of Jean-Jacques Nattiez [1973, 1987].) Rupprecht's project is a major contribution to this quest for convergent perspectives. Flexible and syncretic rather than programmatic, Rupprecht adapts analytical distinctions from the fields of linguistics (in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Roman Jakobson, Ferdinand de Saussure, and others), narrative theory (G rard Genette, Paul Ricoeur, Gerald Prince), drama criticism (Walter Benjamin, Manfred Pfister), sociology (Erving Goffman), and anthropological theories of ritual (Roy Rappaport, Stanley Tambiah). Yet this wide-ranging erudition is elegantly integrated into an argument very much the author's own. The theoretical heavyweights, when they appear, are handled with a light touch, sometimes furnishing a well-crafted analytical model, sometimes just a handy turn of phrase.

In fact, one of the pleasures of this book is its detail work. Rupprecht's

prose is beautiful, chiselled, and evocative. Speaking of generic allusion in the Blake song "A Poison Tree," Rupprecht writes: "Here, at the opening, is a sacred genre twisted into something unholy—hymnody as private necromancy, not collective praise" (29). On the verbal specification of leitmotif: "Once draped over something, names themselves become objects" (83). On the sensory effects of harmonic processes in *Death in Venice*: "The freezing of the musical action here is a cessation of harmonic motion, and a clarification of the penumbra of dense chromatic cluster-sounds, into one glittering tonally suggestive form" (269). Musical examples are numerous and handsomely set, with rich analytical glosses carefully engineered for clarity. (The only lapse I encountered was in example 5.12 [232–33], where the order of musical excerpts is jumbled.) The endnote discourse itself forms a tantalizing weave of subsidiary critical threads, behind-the-scenes snapshots, and analytical expansions.

The "language" of Rupprecht's title is conceived as musico-verbal "utterance"—that is, "the performative terms of speech acting within a given social situation" (30). Each chapter explores a specific aspect of this conceptual frame, with reference to a particular musical work. Chapter 2 focuses on the act of naming in *Peter Grimes*, tracing the "enormous musical energies" (30) invested in that act within the opera, as a vehicle for the Borough's aggression toward Grimes, as well as the latter's self-alienation. Chapter 3 reexamines leitmotivic discourse in *Billy Budd*, probing its role in the projection of narrative agency and point of view. Chapter 4, on *Turn of the Screw*, explores the ambiguities haunting thematic utterance as a whole in this work and the children's performance of innocent nursery songs in particular. Chapter 5 considers two works intended for church performance (*War Requiem* and *Curlew River*) in order to theorize Britten's problematic enactment of social ritual. Finally, chapter 6 moves in the opposite direction, showing how the aural discourse of *Death in Venice* is inextricably bound to the psychological terrain of the protagonist's interior subjectivity.

Rupprecht introduces the most basic concepts of his approach by means of well-chosen examples from the song cycle *Our Hunting Fathers*. In the second song, "Rats Away!" the vocal line breaks up into a polyphony of diverse "speech events" (6): stage whisper, pious chant, stylized shriek. Attending to the rhetorical function (or in Austin's words, "illocutionary force" [33]) of the utterances allows the mode and purpose of vocal delivery (in this case, "command," "prayer of exorcism," "parody," etc.) to be included as a central term of the analysis. This approach is meant to remedy the blind spots of traditional attitudes toward text-setting that "isolate questions of semantic reference from the other factors that make up the speech event" (14). Furthermore, focusing on the actional aspects of language—its ability to lament, exclaim, or summon, for instance—allows one

to conceive of wordless instrumental music itself as utterance, with similar illocutionary powers. Britten's rhetorical delivery is not limited to the semantic field, nor is it restricted to the verbal element of the dramatic gesture; meaning circulates between sung words and "mute pitched articulations" (13).

Rupprecht uses this fluid, cooperative model of multimedia interaction subtly and productively. But I was distracted and even misled by how the model is first introduced:

There are good reasons, as I will claim, to resist the familiar critical trope that pits words against music as separate media, and it is via the fused and composite notion of the utterance—rather than by an oppositional view of separate strands of the complex single event—that I will approach the coexistence of text and music in Britten's case. (4)

This position seemed to be opting for an impoverished understanding of word/music relations whereby the two media can only operate in parallel, with no gaps or crosscurrents of meaning. As I worked my way through the following arguments, it became clear that Rupprecht's notion of "fused" utterance does not preclude ambiguous, layered signification. Perhaps I was confused into thinking that words and music were to be seen as fusing into a single signified. Then again, I realized that I was still caught up in habitual metaphors of thinking of the two media as intertwined objects ("strands" or "tracks" of meaning) rather than modes of action, as Rupprecht emphasizes. A fused utterance—"words and music forged, in the heat of the dramatic situation, into single, 'multimedia' events" (2)—can no doubt do several things at once. But then does the notion of "fusion" merely refer to simultaneity? Later, in discussion of the leitmotif, music and words are provisionally paired as a "fused signifier" in relation to a single signified. This is Wagner's model, which Rupprecht is careful to move away from: "An adequate account of the operatic leitmotif must pay careful attention to the interaction of musical and verbal signifiers" over time (82). Fusion has misleading implications of unity and singularity that get in the way of Rupprecht's flexible theoretical practice, in which words "impinge" on music, meanings arise "via a chain of verbal-musical relays," and "arbitrary linguistic signs are coordinated with motivated musical symbols" (83–84).

Rupprecht shows the usefulness of Austinian theory through its application to specific scenes in *Peter Grimes*, for which he analyzes the performative force of the unfolding utterances according to broad functional distinctions (directives, assertives, declaratives) as well as dramatic

detail (refusal, dismissal, blame). This has the immediate effect of highlighting the relations of power or affection between characters. The aggressive choruses in Acts 2 and 3, for example, are profitably examined in light of Judith Butler's recent treatise on injurious utterance or "hate speech" (Butler 1997). Such distinctions are far from incidental to the music; at every step of the argument we are shown how Britten projects and amplifies the dramatic rhetoric through discourses of tonality, timbre, textural relations, and the like. The fresh perspective this book offers is conveyed by placing these familiar discourses in the service of an analysis parsed in units of action. The distinct utterance is dynamically conceived, taking its place within a processual span. This approach is thus ideally suited to the study of Britten's dramatic planning. Rupprecht lays out the tragic arc encompassed in the successive acts of naming the protagonist ("Peter Grimes!"), from the opera's opening words fixing him as the subject of legal authority, through the terrifying cries of his neighbors, thirsty for blood, to the self-lacerations in the scene of his madness.

Rupprecht knows his Britten through and through; his analyses show remarkable acumen and sensitivity. Especially impressive is his analysis of the way in which long-range tonal and thematic implications contribute to Britten's grip on the audience. His discussion of the famous "interview" chords in *Billy Budd*, for instance, reveals their significance in terms of such extensional energies. Thematically, the strange emptiness of the passage acts "as a release from the almost obsessive leitmotivic undertow of preceding scenes" (133). Tonally, the chords work to nullify an insidious chromatic progression that has plagued the opera since the prologue, thus cleansing or banishing Claggart's symbolic influence (131). The focus on powerful utterance leads Rupprecht to examine pivotal, epiphanic gestures in the operas, "moments that underline cardinal dramatic points in a single stroke" (5). Such a moment, Rupprecht observes, occurs at the violent climax of the quarrel between Peter Grimes and Ellen ("God have mercy upon me," Act 2, scene 1): "Peter's prayer, as I will call it, is at once the culmination of one event (the quarrel) and—as taken up by the eaves-dropping chorus after his exit—the catalyst of an entirely fresh chain of actions" (48–50), actions which are embodied in verbal, tonal, and thematic gesture. Another lynchpin moment is the unpremeditated love vow uttered by Aschenbach at the center of *Death in Venice*. The analysis of Britten's dramatic artistry here is multilayered and truly illuminating. The force of this moment as a "climactic speech act" depends on a mustering of multiple intensities: styles of vocal performance, harmonic and rhythmic tensions, and an unbearable "crowding-in of motivic references" (277), all of which crystallize in a complex gesture of somatic release. These analytical insights are used to point up distinctions between literary or theatri-

cal genres and “opera’s precise control over the pace, density, and flow of dramatic events . . . A sense of sudden epiphany can be rooted in more dense overlay of reference than is possible in the less polyphonic world of the play, or the linear sequence of literary narration” (277).

Refreshingly, Rupprecht’s holistic approach to musical utterance also takes in subtleties of timbre and texture. The appearance of the rainbow in Britten’s one-act opera *Noye’s Fludde* enacts a promise between God and the congregation through the stratification of a familiar hymn and gamelan-like bell sounds: the hymn’s “daring tonal stasis . . . forms the earthly founding for a celestial canopy of glittering percussion” (28). His description of Aschenbach’s arrival in Venice deserves extended quotation for its dense, evocative prose and its attention to textural detail:

With sinister urgency, [the Barcarolle] arrives at a grotesquely dilated form, its three component melodic strands precariously situated over a gaping registral expanse. In the brass fanfares that follow, registral coherence is restored, only to be abruptly curtailed by the five o’clock chime of San Marco, at once thrillingly realistic timbrally, and yet, in context, deeply forbidding. It is a fissured moment—here are two imposing “views” of the city, related but antinomic . . . The soundscape is antiphonal—an authentically Venetian *coro spezzato* gesture—but riven by schematic oppositions. Warm harmonic consonances (brass, in sixths) are answered by cruder-sounding dissonances (bells and winds, in parallel elevenths). After the liquid but still coherent two-part counterpoint of the Barcarolle, these Venetian phrases are alien polyphonies. (260–64)

Aside from such felicities, Rupprecht’s performative approach enables him to formulate some very intriguing and unconventional categories of gestural analysis, a few of which I would like to mention. In the Prologue of *Peter Grimes*, as Peter is sworn in, he repeats the words of the oath, while nearly every musical parameter (harmony, textural spacing, rhythm, timbre, vocal style) marks his speech and his character in sharp contrast to that of Swallow, the mouthpiece of the Court. In Rupprecht’s gloss: “with its carefully constructed . . . conflicts, the Prologue articulates the ‘semantic reversals’ that animate a dialogue between two speakers” (40; quoting Manfred Pfister quoting Jan Mukarovsky). The notion of “semantic reversal” appears as a delightfully fresh conceptual tool pregnant with implications for the study of operatic dialogue. The example here is provocative in its dual performance of exactly the same words which, through contradictory musical gesture, are held at a distance.

Another concept which Rupprecht makes important use of is the “discursive shift” (first introduced on p. 15). This is not a new concept; it follows, for instance, on Abbate’s accentuation of “discursive disjunction” as a necessary condition of narrativity. As Rupprecht uses it, however, the term is less exceptional, more broadly conceived. “In a musical sense, discourse arises when a given utterance (a theme, say) is set off from surrounding utterances by discernible articulations or shifts (in mood, topic, or stylistic register, for example). Discourse forges a link between a given event and the circumstances of its enunciation” (15). The concept provides leverage for an inquiry into the fluid dynamics of (vocal) quotation in an instrumental piece, *Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of Dowland*. Rupprecht is not after narrative voice per se, but he is after the perception of an uttering voice or “speaking presence” (14), asserted in this case instrumentally. The drama in this piece consists in the unfolding “sequence of moves along a continuum between Dowland’s unmediated voice” and an “indirect discourse” in which the voice from the past is assimilated into Britten’s reflective utterance (15). Through stylistic and textural shifts, Britten enacts the emergence of a discursive agent, more or less directly apprehended, mediated, or disguised. The discursive shift is also central to the performative patterns of the *War Requiem*, in its interleaving of chorus and soloists, standardized Latin liturgy and graphic World War I poetry. Rupprecht probes this troping pattern for its “rhetoric of disturbance.” By the interruptive opposition of “a sanctioned and a rogue text” (200), Britten “challenges the canonical authority of the sacred” (215), opening it up to secular, sceptical, and urgently personal interventions.

When Rupprecht does confront the issue of narrative (diegetic) voice in opera (as distinct from the mimetic voices of the dramatic present), it is in the context of an extended discussion of the second act of *Billy Budd*. He chooses this moment in order to introduce the Genettean questions “who sees?” and “who speaks?” (108). Where Genette (1980:186) makes a case for the strong demarcation of these questions into two separate categories of narrative analysis—perspective (or mood) and voice, respectively—Rupprecht blurs the two into a consideration of “point of view.” This blurring is arguably appropriate for the relative indeterminacies of operatic utterance, where modes of musical “telling” are not always distinct from present-tense “perceiving.” But no such argument is explicitly offered, and Rupprecht seems to be sacrificing a potential articulation in his theoretical model. (For more on the usefulness of the voice/perspective distinction in music, see Whitesell 1993:14–36.)

Discussion hinges on the Abbatean search for narrative “distance,” which is located in voice-orchestra relations: “The key to an operatic point of view would appear to lie in the ‘distance’—if any—perceptible to an

audience between a singing character who is verbally articulate and a wordless orchestral utterance more or less freighted with leitmotivic references pertaining to actions on the stage" (110). Rupprecht is interested in a supple rather than static model of such textural/symbolic relations. He develops a concept of "voice placement" to document the relative degree of distance or "intimacy" among vocal and instrumental "speakers" (116). Intimacy is established through conjunctions of texture (on a graduated range from disjunction through chordal coordination, heterophony, and various degrees of doubling; see the schema on page 117) and motivic association. His example—Billy's stammering response to Claggart's accusation of mutiny—reveals the aptness of the model for scenic complexity and ambiguities of voice/viewpoint. "By simultaneity of viewpoint, the orchestra encompasses the situation of the three men at this supremely tense moment. The orchestral gestures seem poised between simple enactment of Billy's and Vere's attitudes (the Stammer trill, 'Vere's' trumpets) and utterance that is more distanced (the string fifths, as echoes of Claggart's accusations)" (116). According to Rupprecht, the perception of orchestral distance fluctuates constantly in a score like *Billy Budd*, resulting in an indeterminate play of verbal/dramatic action and commenting orchestral utterance. Britten exploits such ambiguity as a reflection of the ironic "dual-voiced discourse" (118) common to many of his librettos; within Budd's pattern of secret motives and blocked powers of articulation, it has thematic force as well.

Building on his well-honed concepts of textural placement, perspectival intimacy, and diegetic presence, Rupprecht arrives at a climactic scene of analysis: the scene of Billy's trial. This passage exerts a powerfully uncanny aural effect; Claggart lies inert and dead before us, while the orchestral utterance is saturated with echoes of his voice. Such an effect ("hearing a voice that issues from a corpse" [136]) provides the clearest evidence within the opera of an instrumental narrative agent. Rupprecht's analysis is masterful in its unpacking of long-range motivic networks, its situation of the posthumous force of this utterance within the complex field of power relations between characters, and its sensitivity to the resonant ambiguities of agency and temporal reference. It also draws on another unconventional category of gestural analysis: the scene of hearing. At several key moments in his book, Rupprecht calls attention to the spatial configuration of aural perception, both as represented within the world of the drama and as it impacts on actual listeners in the theater. Such dispositions have crucial symbolic significance, not least for matters of audience identification with and access to the consciousness of the characters onstage. In the trial scene, the issues are clarified when one asks the question "who hears the uncanny orchestral voice?" As always, Rupprecht is receptive to mul-

tiple possibilities (though hampered by his diffuse approach to “viewpoint”; this is an instance where a foregrounded distinction between narrating voice and perceiving position would have provided useful leverage). It could be that Vere’s sudden awareness of Claggart’s influence is being represented by his hearing of the wordless voice; but this is problematic in that he never directly heard Claggart’s private statements which the orchestra is now recounting. Or the unusual perceptual access here could refer to the opera’s dramatic frame as a flashback: “As scenes recalled by the old man, the murder and trial might be imagined as playing out from his viewpoint” with the wisdom of hindsight (123). But perhaps Vere is not really aware of the orchestral burden, in which case responsibility for receiving it falls solely on the audience. The symbolic interpretation of aural relations will affect our complicity with or distance from Claggart and Vere as agents in the drama, as well as our consciousness of a separate narrating voice.

Another analysis of spatial relations occurs in reference to the chorus in *Peter Grimes*, which often appears only sonically, as chanting congregation or approaching mob. “The role of the chorus is always indirect, yet powerfully coercive” (43), enacting fatal consequences by mere offstage proximity. The entire chapter on *Death in Venice* is in fact geared to the question of perceptual position—whose awareness is being represented through orchestral utterance? Rupprecht shows how the audience is restricted almost exclusively to a position of identification with Aschenbach’s sensory and psychological viewpoint. In this context, the moments when the listener is granted greater access stand out as achieving a kind of transcendence. At the opera’s conclusion, as Aschenbach dies, his utterance detaches from his body and migrates to the orchestra, “revoiced at the distanced level of myth . . . [E]loquence resides beyond the word, and finally, in a prolonged dying-away motion, the orchestral voice recedes to an aural vanishing-point, beyond hearing” (295–96).

All in all, the book succeeds extremely well at both intended goals: the contribution of a fresh critical perspective to well-known Britten works, and the detailed elaboration of a performative-theoretical approach to opera in general. The first three chapters in particular present a tour de force in their seamless blending of the two goals and their crescendo from fundamental concepts to authoritative reexaminations of leitmotivic signification and musical diegesis in light of the new approach. I found that the book’s overall design faltered with chapter 4, on *Turn of the Screw*. Rupprecht was not as successful here at establishing a truly new perspective on familiar interpretive territory. His focus on adult constructions of childhood as inaccessible interiority, indebted to arguments by Carolyn Steedman (1995), does not have the same heft or applicability of the issues framing other chapters. Nor is it as clear here how his specific reading of the opera con-

nects to and furthers the general conceptual framework already established. He recovers his impressive balancing act for the final two chapters. The concluding discussion of *Death in Venice* is especially welcome for its brilliant technical and rhetorical analyses of a work which has received comparatively less close attention.

Another drawback of the *Turn of the Screw* discussion is its awkward handling of the homoerotic and pedophilic undercurrents in the opera as bearers of meaning. For instance:

The homoerotic implications of Quint's threat to young Miles may be stronger these days than they were for Britten's first British audience. It is not simply that we see the opera today aware of the composer's complex sexual identity . . . [W]e must consider the very specific cultural conditions attendant on all interpretations . . . Quint's ability to "corrupt" the boy, in other words, need not be understood solely—or even primarily—in terms of an active homoerotic desire. (183)

The logic of this syllogism is not apparent. It comes too close to a program of returning to the willful ignorance and enforced restrictions about sexual knowledge in place at the time of the opera's writing. (Rupprecht goes even further, implying that we should project ourselves back to the attitudes of "James's late Victorian readers" [183].) Surely the cultural conditions shaping our own interpretations are not always contaminating accretions to be stripped away? Rupprecht cites critics who have related the thematic discourse in the opera to Britten's personal sexual identity, but he is ultimately dismissive of such a direction, seeing in it nothing more than "a kind of encoded personal history" (156). This is a serious oversight. The private details of Britten's life may not be legible in his works, but his perspective as a member of an oppressed sexual minority undoubtedly is. The challenge in this area is to define how Britten transformed private concerns into public discourse (about sexual subjectivity, proscribed knowledge, societal oppression, etc.) through his dramatic compositions. The fact that Rupprecht forecloses such theorizing is doubly disappointing given that he has been interested from the start in the situational aspect of the artwork: "To recognize that all utterance is, to an extent, social and interpersonal in nature, is to understand language as political" (2–3). It follows that the critic may ponder how Britten found ways to bring his urgent concerns to voice in a forbidding, hostile cultural environment.

This can be seen as a question of authorial voice (compare the "S3" or third-tier sender position in his model of artistic communication [109]), as distinct from narrative voice. In other words, his theory already makes

room for such theoretical connections—his foreclosure of them in favor of a more narrowly circumscribed textual meaning is an unfortunate blind spot. Nevertheless, at many points throughout the book, Rupprecht's strong and provocative readings suggest possible keys to a queer authorial interpretation. As he points out, Britten's dramas overwhelmingly thematize the problematic utterance: the secret that must be revealed in a fatal, climactic speech act (*Turn of the Screw*, *Death in Venice*), the "yearning for what is absent" (21), the "utterance occluded or held back" (21), the "melodramatic failure" (208) of canonic forms of reassurance. Such tropes are ripe with meaning for a queer-sensitized listener. But in a symmetrical way, Rupprecht has left the contingent details of the actual spectator/listener (the "R3" receiver position of the model) unexamined. He seems to regard his readings as more powerful when they are geared to a generic listener stripped of ideological resolution. For instance, while some listeners sense in *Peter Grimes* "a drama of fairly precise [homosexual] symbolism," the "alluring specificity of such readings does not . . . account for the opera's continuing hold over audiences" (34). This reasoning is spurious and question-begging. Later: "A problem with such [homosexual] readings . . . lies in their very specificity; to put too fine a point on Peter's utterance is to risk misrepresenting the raw force of the moment" (51). Too specific for whom? Rupprecht appears to object to such interpretations as coming from a particular ideological or experiential perspective. But this objection is hardly tenable, since all interpretations derive from a particular perspective. It should not be too hard for us as listeners to recognize the impact and conviction of a well-defined subjective experience whether or not we identify with that experience. The queer interpretations he cites (by Philip Brett and Clifford Hindley) are intended to enrich our understanding of authorial and character motivations, not reduce them. To frame this issue in terms of the Jakobsonian model of the speech event (13), our awareness of Britten's (and our own) sexual subjectivity forms part of the "context" by which his operatic messages may be sent and understood. The contingent, partial, and volatile nature of this context, and the degree of autonomy open to the addressee in responding to (or constructing) it, are not subjects that Rupprecht confronts.

None of this means that his theoretical framework is flawed. Rupprecht develops a model of signification that is sound, well-articulated, and highly flexible, with conceptual resources that can easily accommodate further explorations and refinements. In fact, if I may conclude on a speculative note, I found myself perversely wondering if the framework ought to be more flawed. That is, given the preponderance in Britten's dramatic works of failed communications, of utterances that come up short, I wonder if a robust, confident model of messages sent and received is altogether ap-

appropriate. Rupprecht in his critical practice is completely attuned to nuances of “semantic unreliability” (in *War Requiem*, 210), “evasion and displacement” (in *Turn of the Screw*, 148), thematic “uncertainty” and “inarticulacy” (in *Billy Budd*, 77, 131), and the like. But perhaps it would be productive to fold some of this skepticism back into his conceptual model. At the moment, I only have vague ideas of what this might entail, other than gesturing in the direction of those theorists (such as deconstructionists and certain queer theorists) who emphasize the slipped gears or gaps in the chain of communication: the unreliable, arbitrary, and uncontrollable aspects of utterance. A haunting sense emerges from working through the sophisticated and finely-balanced interpretations in this book that not all is well with the scene of signification. The same things that make meaning possible are the things that persist in going awry. Illocutionary force escapes intentions: “What is disturbing . . . is the ease with which Ellen and Balstrode . . . by uttering [Peter’s] Prayer theme, affirm an active role in his destruction” (52). Leitmotivic specificity arises by association—except when associations overload and infect the musical surface with “confusions of reference” (168). In *Turn of the Screw*’s sinister allegory, the “fusion” of musical and verbal powers escalates into a fusion of friendly and hostile agents. Audiences and critics have long been aware of the cryptic, double-edged impact of *Turn of the Screw*’s climactic speech act, when Miles shouts one set of words at two interlocutors, and gives up the ghost. Perhaps we could pay more attention to the cautionary message of the penultimate scene, where Flora is caught in a similar tug of war. The Governess, oversure of her own perspective, points with such force to the baleful sign appearing to her (“Look! She is there!”) that her little charge breaks down, protesting: “I don’t know what you mean.”

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