

TELEVISION EUNY HONG KORAL

Fearful descent into insanity

Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* begins in a parlour where gentlefolk are swapping ghost-stories. In the grand tradition of urban legends, the host announces that he has a story to trump all others because his is real; it happened to his sister's governess, he claims, at some prior post.

He unfurls her written testimony to prove it. Therein the governess describes, in the first-person, how she was visited by the ghosts of her master's servants, and how she exorcised them.

A new made-for-television film version of the novel, originally produced for the BBC, skips the light introduction and plunges directly into the governess' story. This has the effect of removing the ghost story aspect and descending into insanity. (PBS. Sunday, February 27, at 9pm. Check local listings.)

In a clever adaptive move, the initial interview between governess and employer - which in the book is merely summarised - is given a fully developed scene in this film.

This altered version evokes the parallel governess-meets-master scene in *Jane Eyre*, and indeed the melancholy reserve of the governess (played by Jodhi May) in this production intensifies the comparison.

In the presence of her debonair employer (Colin Firth), May's unnamed governess is agape with barely suppressed lust - something absent from

previous film versions.

When he informs her that he is never at home, and that the one condition of the job is that "you must never trouble me, but never, never", May shows us a woman at once horrified and drunk with power.

This is most definitely a modern interpretation and not a Victorian one, period costumes notwithstanding.

It taps into fears that probably would not have occurred to the book's original audience: should one not be suspicious of an outsider who demonstrates too much affection for children not her own? Why does the little boy always seem to be leering when addressing his governess as "my dear"?

James' original tale left open a number of possible interpretations, ambiguities that are too difficult to capture on film. This production has opted to pick one thread and run with it: that her sexual obsession with her employer drove her to persecution fantasies.

Though one might worry that too much clarity would ruin the story, in this case the contrary is true: the certainty of madness proves

far more terrifying than the possibility of ghosts.



Was there any rock 'n' roll band weirder than the Beach Boys? They all seemed to have been picked from some California grove that grows blond Adonises. Their lyrics, about letterman sweaters and the radio surf report, were incomprehensible to anyone not living in the American suburbs.

Many jokes have been made about how "white" their music is, yet all their songs are based on 12-bar blues - even if they did use the same 12 bars every time.

An entertaining made-for-TV film proves that even milque-toast musicians can yield a great story. It helps that the actors look the part and are adept lip-synchers, the importance of which cannot be underestimated for this type of programme. (*The Beach Boys*. ABC. In two parts: Sunday, February 27 at 9pm ET, Monday, February 28 at 9pm ET)

The film begins with the boys as teens. The laws of show business dictate that

aspiring stars can only get their first break by promising something they don't have ready; in this case, it's a surf song.

Brian Wilson, the group's moody leader, complains: "I hate the beach." It must have amused him greatly to have to write a song that began: "Surfin' is the only way, the only life for me."

Brian is duly embarrassed, but his brother reassures him: "You do one or two songs like this and you can do any kind of music you want." But, as John Lennon sang, life is what happens while you're doing other things. The Boys got so caught up in success that they never strayed from the original song formula.

Enter the Beatles, exeunt the Beach Boys. This leads to the Boys' spiritual decline, which of course is signalled to us by their change in hair style.

Mike Love gets into Eastern spiritualism. Dennis starts co-habiting with the charismatic killer Charles Manson and company. Brian slips into heavy drug use and the boring friends that come with it.

Most rock dramas use the band's own music to express a band's inevitable dissolution, but the Beach Boys didn't have any dissolute music. To its credit, the programme does not pretend that the Boys were geniuses. Apparently, even drugs didn't help. LSD inspired the Beatles to create Sergeant Pepper, but inspired Brian Wilson to write "Good Vibrations".