

The Turn of the Screw: a Neo-Gothic Tale

By Keiko Beppu

A sad tale's best for winter.
I have one of sprites and goblins.

—*The Winter's Tale*—

Virtuosity is one of the characteristics of modern literature as it is of modern painting. In the art of fiction it has raised the whole intricate question of narrative method. The simple story told by an omniscient author is gone forever. Among modern novelists Henry James seems to be by far the most conscious of fictional aesthetics. In his prefaces, notebook entries and elsewhere, he expounds that the art of fiction must begin with the method used by the writer to tell his story. Since James a great emphasis has been put on "the point of view" (hence on the reliability or unreliability of the narrator), which has become indispensable to the understanding of any modern novel worth serious criticism.

"The story had held us, round the fire..." thus begins James's much debated *nouvelle* (or short novel if you like). It has a threefold interest. First of all it is read for enjoyment—which is its *raison d'être* for itself. Secondly it can be studied for the art with which the tone of hauntedness is achieved. And thirdly, in the process it exposes an appalling story of the frightened governess. There are various readings of the *nouvelle*, which are all convincing and mutually exclusive. Those readers can profit most, however, who read it primarily as a "ghost story" pure and simple. That *The Turn of the Screw* is a "ghost story" does not and should not exclude other interpretations of the *nouvelle*. Yet it is too hasty a conclusion to pin this inexhaustibly complex

work as a neurotic case of sex repression as the Freudian readers have it, or as an Eden myth — a fable of innocence and guilt. It is all of a piece, but more than anything else it is a “ghost story” — in quotation marks as it is not a Gothic tale in the conventional sense. The purpose of this essay being to present *The Turn of the Screw* as a neo-Gothic tale, I'd like to discuss the significance of the anonymous governess as a narrator in this perspective.

The interest in the supernatural persisted in Henry James from the time of his apprenticeship (“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” — 1868) to his major phase (“Jolly Corner” — 1908). He wrote as many as eighteen “ghostly tales,”¹ including one *nouvelle*, *The Turn of the Screw*. He had a series of personal experiences which, it is valid to assume, led the novelist to believe in the supernatural. The first of these experiences occurred to Henry James Senior during the family's stay at Windsor in 1844. Without cause he was overcome with “a perfectly insane and abject terror,”² and felt the presence of some damned figure squatting in the room infecting the air, as it were. For nearly two years the elder James was intermittently a victim of this abject fear. The novelist's brother William was seized, again without cause as in the case of his father, with “a horrible fear of [his] own existence,” accompanied by “the image of an epileptic patient whom [he] had seen in the asylum, a black haired youth with greenish skin.” He knew then “a sense of insecurity beneath the surface of life.”³ The curious thing is that in both cases the “vastation” was accompanied by a vivid visual image.

Henry James himself, as far as we know, had no such experience of his own except what he records as “an immense hallucination” in *A Small Boy and Others*. In his nightmare James desperately defends against an entry of someone into his bedroom. Thrusting the door open, he pursues “a just dimly-described figure” that retreats in terror before his rush and dash, and suddenly recognizes “a huge saloon” as the picture-lined Galerie d'Apollon. Such

was the vivid impression the place had made upon the small boy. He continues in the same autobiography :

The lucidity, not to say the sublimity, of the crisis had consisted of *the great thought that I, in my appalled state, was probably still more appalling than the awful agent, creature, or presence, whatever he was,* whom I had guessed, in the suddenest wild start from sleep,...to be making for my place of rest.⁴

These phenomena are all too familiar to us ; they are part of insecurities which lie latent in us in one form or another. To use the neo-Freudian terminology they are "basic anxieties," unconscious obsessions of the haunted individual. The apparitions in such cases as are mentioned above are not gratuitous but are the ghosts of our hidden self recognized with a shock of terror. The writer has only to prove the validity of our deep-rooted psychological reactions to the uncanny ; he is only dealing with the sinister and strange in the normal and natural. The idea that the terrified person is more terrifying than the apparition constitutes the basis of James's tales on the supernatural or quasi-supernatural theme. It is "the great thought" which has given the conventional Gothic tale another turn of the screw.

The propensity toward the uncanny in James coalesces into his sense of evil. In James evil is something his sensibility accepted as an undeniable reality, a *felt* presence. In *The Turn of the Screw* the supernatural is exploited, in the pattern of Gothic romance, to give a relief to "the depths of the sinister." The ghosts have to be active agents of terror to create the atmosphere charged with evil. Only Henry James dispenses with external *décors* of Gothicism and presents horror in abstraction. Before clarifying the nature of psychological Gothicism achieved in *The Turn of the Screw*, we might as well look at the Gothic romance and its literary fashions and fads.

The origin of what is now called as "the Gothic Romance" can be ascribed to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). It is a curious coincidence that the supernatural in literature

flourished in a period of rationalism in thought. For "philosophy will clip an Angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine — / Unweave a rainbow"⁵ The Gothic writers turned their backs upon their age and chose the delightful obscurity of the Middle Ages; and established a literary tradition, which continues through shifts and changes in the tales of terror and crime still popular today. Even after ghosts and ruins outmode themselves, our craving for the supernatural survives in one form or another. A rational age was succeeded by one which sought the supernatural in the soul of man. The supernatural was perceived as resulting from inner, mental, totally human causes, not from external superhuman forces of good and evil. The supernatural was exploited by the Romantics for different purposes, not solely to create terror for its own sake. Poe may be an exception; he used the supernatural specifically to arouse a creeping horror, exploring the unknown abyss of human psyche; and wrote about people who dream "dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before." The Gothic tradition in America was fostered by Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe or Hawthorne. James also continued to write, among other things, in the supernatural Gothic pattern and improved it. By the time the materials employed by these writers became obsolete, no longer capable of making our flesh creep, Henry James turned to the Hawthornian concern with the darkness of soul. The supernatural was exploited to give a relief to "the depths of the sinister" in the minds of men. James emphasized the pervasive sense of horror caused not by ghosts of the dead but by those ghosts living within ourselves.⁶

The development of psychical researches in the latter half of the nineteenth century furnished a new direction. James must have been acquainted, perhaps through his brother, with pre-Freudian psychology. He read psychical cases, laboratory reports, and pseudo-scientific tales based on these materials. His literary contemporaries wrote on the subject. Daudet's *L'Évangéliste*, to

which James owes the genesis of *The Bostonians* (1885), incorporates mesmerism with religious fanaticism. In the latter novel mesmerism is woven into the vampire theme which, according to some critics, is also the theme of *The Turn of the Screw*. There is Maupassant. "A la Maupassant" is the motto repeated several times in his notebook entries of the 1880's and 1890's. Maupassant's "Le Horla" depicts a process of mental collapse; its narrator-hero shares similar propensities with the un-named governess of *The Turn of the Screw*, though the governess never becomes insane, unlike the protagonist of "Le Horla" who ends his life by violence. The psychical cases *per se*, however, did not hold James's imagination for long. "Recorded and attested 'ghosts'" are static. They are "as little expressive, as little dramatic, above all as little continuous and conscious and responsive, as is consistent with their taking the trouble — and an immense trouble they find it, we gather, — to appear at all."⁷ To be the agents of terror they have to be active, burdened with "the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil."⁸ This is what James designs for Quint and Miss Jessel in *The Turn of the Screw*. "The good, the really effective and heart shaking ghost stories (roughly so to term them) appeared all to have been told.... The new type, indeed, the mere modern 'psychical case,' washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap...the new clearly promised little."⁹ In James there are no creaking doors, sheeted figures, nor blood-stained figures; instead people who see apparitions become the subject of the story — people haunted by phantoms of their own creation. This is the great idea that struck James in his appalling nightmare. These people are his father, brother William, himself, the governess and for that matter each one of us. The apparitions are "real"; they are the very painting of our fear. This may be the reason why *The Turn of the Screw* is capable of arousing horror in this space age when the stars and the moon are conquered by "rule and line."

James's design for *The Turn of the Screw* is crystalline, *contra*

the ambiguity of the story itself, which has been mystifying his readers since its publication in 1898. He was to launch a new *fin de siècle* ghost story, resorting to the conventions of the Gothic romance, "a beautiful lost form."¹⁰ The date 1898 provides a clue to the atmosphere of the *nouvelle*. The last decades of a century seem to carry a sense of termination and of death. People delight in the strange, the wonderful, the bizarre, and the abnormal, which exercises a fascination on creative artists. Already before the death of Queen Victoria a new and fragile morality became evident in the upper-class London society. Adultery, promiscuity, or decadence in every aspect of life became too common even for the novelist who had managed to dispense with these aspects of life to ignore. These literary fashions of the decade went into the writing of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Awkward Age* (1898-99) and *What Maisie Knew* (1897). The last two are in a sense criticisms of brittle "Edwardian" morals. All these ingredients are imbedded, therefore, if we look for them in *The Turn of the Screw*. We see in 1970 somewhat similar symptoms of a *fin de siècle*: psychedelic arts, the long hair, anomaly in sex life. (Or do they call the phenomenon normal?) The conventional distinctions between the sexes have completely disappeared. Curiously enough, the literary trend in Japan has recently witnessed the revival of the Gothic romance. Reassessments have been made of Edogawa Rampo and other Gothic practitioners. The very phenomenon reflects the social and political trends of an age which undergoes serious questionings of the established institutions and revolts against orthodoxy.

In an 1895 notebook entry James records the story told him by the Archbishop of Canterbury of the young children left to the care of servants in an old country-house, which constitutes the germ of *The Turn of the Screw*:

The servants wicked and depraved, corrupt and deprave the children; the children are bad, full of evil, to a sinister degree. The servants die...and their apparitions, figures,

return to haunt the house *and* the children...to whom they seem to reckon, whom they invite and solicit, from across dangerous places, the deep ditch of a sunk fence, etc. — so that the children may destroy themselves and lose themselves, by responding, by getting into their power.¹¹

This is a gruesome enough story. In the same notebook entry James writes that the story is “to be told — tolerably obviously — by an outside spectator, observer.”

The Turn of the Screw begins as a “time-honored Christmas-tide” ghost story. The prologue *à la* Boccaccio enhances the tone of felt trouble, creating an atmosphere pervaded by evil, uncanny presences, as Mamillius’ prologue foreshadows the sinister tale of Leontes’ jealousy and Mamillius’ own death. The cold and the uncertainty of a gloomy winter night are contrasted with the warmth and a relative security around the fire. Something tries to intrude, threatening our security, and shakes our grip on reality. We are captivated, compelled to feel “a sense of insecurity beneath the surface of life,” which frightened William James years ago. James lets Douglas introduce the anonymous governess and presents her document written some ten years after the incident at Bly. Thus James establishes a point of view and shifts his responsibility. The narrator, who is also in the story, bears the brunt of the reader’s scrutiny.

Henry James discovered as early as in “The Ghostly Rental” (1876) that the effect of a vague suggestiveness of terror far exceeds the fact, which principle he followed in *The Turn of the Screw* with finesse.

Only make the reader’s general vision of evil intense enough, ...and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself and you are released from weak specifications.¹²

The ambiguity in *The Turn of the Screw* is thus caused by the author's refusal to specify the actions. "Is he really so bad?" The repetition of a seemingly pedestrian rhetoric such as this contributes to intensify the ambiguity, in which James glories, and to bring into relief the portentous evil. We are aghast at our potential ghostliness (or evil if you like) inherent in us. With no verifiable testimony to depend on save an equivocal letter from the school master, the governess presents Miles as a most depraved and corrupt of children. She constructs her theory wholly on Miles's supposed misdemeanor at school. A mere suggestiveness of evil far exceeds the actual infamy. "They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him. That can have *but one meaning*." ¹³ The governess tries to convince Mrs. Grose and herself "that he's an injury to his poor little innocent mates!" ¹⁴ But that "he's an injury to his poor little innocent mates" is as elusive as the contents of the letter. The school master's letter may imply a thousand things instead of "one meaning." The governess cajoles Mrs. Grose into confession and confidence. But they never get to the heart of the matter. In *The Turn of the Screw* there are both "Poe's 'Dupinesque' mode and his emotionally heightened grotesqueness." ¹⁵ It appalls us to watch the governess distort a mere suggestiveness into a convenient fact. But are we not in the same boat with the governess? James probes human nature to its subtlest depths. And hasn't he played *his* game?

The anonymous governess is given "authority." She is "an outside spectator" employed by the author to tell the story of the two corrupt children and the two wicked servants. Despite Bewley, Wilson and others to their defence, the children *are* corrupt, "full of evil to a sinister degree." For the co-existence of innocence and corruption in young children constitutes one of the mysteries in *The Turn of the Screw*.¹⁶ Their angelic beauty is exaggerated so as to intensify their potential depravity. There are classic examples of the Satan and Mephistopheles. Both Miles and Flora

are contaminated through the influence and example of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel who return for their second round of badness. (There is no doubt as to *their* licentiousness and damnation.) "If he had been wicked he would have 'caught' it, and I should have caught it by the rebound — I should have found the trace, should have felt the wound and the dishonor. *I could reconstitute nothing at all, and he was therefore, an angel.*"¹⁷ As always the governess jumps to but one conclusion: "I could reconstitute nothing at all, and he was therefore, an angel." She is bluntly unaware that there is always a middle ground, where the two extremes meet and merge. It is no wonder that the governess finds no trace, for both children are not old enough to show the effects of their corruption, though, as Dorothea Krook contends, they are old enough (Miles is ten and Flora eight) to be receptive to the corrupting influence.¹⁸ Corruption usually takes the form of a knowledge (there is the ancient identification of knowledge with sin) and this knowledge more often than not happens to be a knowledge of "the forbidden." Children have an excited curiosity to know "the forbidden." Miles and to a lesser degree Flora seem to know more than the governess of "the forbidden." She knows the fact, and therefore fears and feels helplessly incompetent to save them. If Flora denies to bear witness to the vision of Miss Jessel standing across the lake, she does say "things," Mrs. Grose admits. Miles says "things" to those he likes. In *The Turn of the Screw* James dramatizes "the dreadful duplicity of the angelic children," which mystifies and shocks the naive governess.

Now as is often the case with James, the subject of the story shifts during the course of events from the story of "the prowling blighting presences" and their villainous motive to that of the anonymous governess and of the state of her mind. "The outside observer" becomes a confused and distressed heroine who volunteers to be "the expiratory victim" in order to save her charges from the blighting presences. The story now consists of what she sees and feels.

On her arrival at Bly the governess is "in trepidation," which is only natural for the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson, "privately bred." She is "easily carried away" (she frankly admits it herself) by her Prince Charming in Harley Street; she is prone to day-dreaming. This proves nothing against her but her naïvité. She is not *mentally* disturbed (as many critics contend) before nor after the incident at Bly. Only a succession of "flights and drops" sharpens all her senses, makes her susceptible mind even more so. Dreadfully liable to impressions, her active mind is stimulated and she sets her heart on finding out "the mystery of Udolpho," as it were. She is infatuated with the consuming curiosity of Fatima, which deepens almost to pain. The same governess strikes Douglas as "clever and charming" some ten years after her dreadful experience at Bly; she has grown out of "a fluttered and anxious girl." She reflects that "to [her] *present older and more informed eyes* the house at Bly would show a very reduced importance."¹⁹ On her first arrival she views this same house, "a big, ugly antique but convenient house," as "a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all color out of story-books and fairy-tales."²⁰

In the first six chapters the governess sees both ghosts: she encounters the red-haired valet over the battlements and at the window, and Miss Jessel on the staircase. It may be argued that she *evokes* Quint the first time, as she is walking in quest of the gentleman in Harley Street. *If* so, why does she not conjure up her Prince Charming? It is supposed that anything *is* possible in our "psychic life." The governess need not be contented with the meagre substitute! Moreover, the apparition is a stranger. She rationalizes that some unscrupulous traveller, curious of an old house, has taken a rather monstrous liberty. *If* she is mad (at this point) her rationalization seems unnecessary. We may recall the immense hallucination of the Galerie d'Apollon in James's nightmare. We are susceptible to this kind of hallucinations; we

see the objects we have seen in our dream or vice versa. To be sure, a distinction should be made between "psychic reality" and "material reality," however real the image in our "psychic life" may be. Peter Quint *appears* the second time, when the governess is expecting no one at all. The shock she receives is visualized in a superb scene. Going to church the first Sunday at Bly, the governess comes back to the dining room to get her gloves and there she sees Peter Quint looking into the room. On the spot she realizes with the shock of a certitude "that it [is] not for [her] he [has] come. He [has] come for someone else."²¹ More than ever the courageous governess resolves to save the children. Soon after Mrs. Grose enters the room looking for the governess:

It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room. As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred. She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received...²²

The objective reality of Peter Quint is visually established in Mrs. Grose's reaction to the image of "apparition" the governess re-enacts at the window. The appalled person is more appalling than the apparition.

The center of interest thus shifts from the dead servants and their "pupils" to the harassed governess. What happens in the story becomes less important than the reactions of the narrator (and the heroine) to the event. The similar shift is observed in another problematic work of James's, *The Sacred Fount* (1901). The readers are given two alternatives (or maybe more): whether the narrator is a clever and perceptive novelist (he is, like the governess, un-named and un-characterized), or one who suffers

from abnormally active fantasies. The scale can go either way. The obsessed narrator coalesces in the epistemological theme of *The Sacred Fount*. One plain Mrs. Brissenden has improved supposedly sucking "the honey dew" at the sacred fount of her husband, who in turn has been impoverished. The narrator applies the hypothesis to another pair he encounters at the house party. The stupid Gilbert Long has become intelligent and alert. Who can be the "right" woman to fill out the "x" in the equation? Interesting as this riddle may sound, *The Sacred Fount* is more of the story of this anonymous narrator who "[consents] to such immersion, intellectually speaking, in the affairs of other people."²³ The novel exposes the unconscious obsession of the narrator, though James leaves the nature of the obsession undefined. Both the governess and the novelist are un-characterized; during the course of the story they characterize themselves. James employs the first person narrative to reveal the "inner awareness" of his characters. For "psychic existence and its functioning"²⁴ is his major concern as a novelist.

We experience horror and agony by proxy—through those of the governess. What is portrayed is a mind itself receiving and responding to impressions, *because* the governess is un-named with no personal history and un-characterized other than "clever and nice." We see the mind at work as Virginia Woolf might have said. James might have learned this method of self-revelation from his French novelists — Bourget, Maupassant or Flaubert. The protagonist of "Le Horla" resembles our governess. To their active minds solitude is dangerous, "because when [they] are alone for a long time, [they] people space with phantoms."²⁵ The governess is isolated at Bly without company except that of the two children and Mrs. Grose, the *gross* house-keeper. Their guardian in London refuses to assist her; the governess has to face the problem alone—not a small one. It might be agreed that "it constitutes no little of a character indeed, in such condition, for a young person, as she says, 'privately bred,' that she is able

to make her particular credible statement of such strange matters.”²⁶ The Freudian reading is valid in that it takes the *nouvelle* as the story of the governess. They distort this delightfully sinister story, however, by giving it a one-dimensional interpretation. The governess is obsessed and infatuated, we compromise, but not in the way their reading has it. It is only one of the possibilities. Granting that the governess evokes the apparition of the red-haired valet *from the waist up*, how do we explain her failure to understand the nature of Miles’s misbehavior at school? She cannot for the world comprehend that Miles is expelled because he says “things” to those he likes. My objection to the Freudian reading is that such an interpretation so meagrely “washes clean” of the fathomless depths of the sinister evil dramatized in *The Turn of the Screw*. The Freudian readers *are* obsessed by their prejudice that spinsters are neurotic, sexual or otherwise. This of course is not wholly untrue but they seem to make too much of the case. Tricked by the artistry of the super-subtle James, they completely miss the simple dictum that the effect of a vague suggestiveness far exceeds the actual infamy.

The Turn of the Screw consists entirely of what the governess thinks, feels and sees, as what Tiresias sees is the substance of Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” James so manoeuvres that the reader believes what *she* sees, what she says she sees. When it comes to the “material reality” or actions at Bly, however, we are left in the dark. How much of her crystalline record is “material reality” — to use the Freudian terminology — and how much is the interpolation of her active mind? In this highly artificial world of ours it becomes difficult to distinguish reality from appearance.²⁷ There is no immutable reality behind appearance. There is no such thing as “the known” nor the absolute in this world. The awful fact of our existence is that while our scientific and technical innovations penetrate the quite incredible universe, we still have not a slightest clue to our own fate. Hence the dilemma of a highly reflective mind. The governess is caught

by the ultimate incapacity of an enquiring mind. The governess possesses a highly perceptive mind; she sees the unseen behind appearance. At Bly the sounds of evening drops in the intense hush, when "the friendly hour [loses] for the unspeakable minute all its voice."²⁸ In this hushed moment obliterated from "the friendly hour," the governess sees what she says she sees. Without the witness, however, she cannot verify what she knows she sees. Flora denies to testify. Mrs. Grose, who earlier identifies the apparitions the governess encounters as those of the red-haired Quint and Miss Jessel, grossly betrays her at the crucial moment. The ghosts are both real — fairy-tale-wise — and the illustrations of our inner torment, guilt and fear of the unknown. They exist for us to see; but to the "sealed" eyes they remain invisible. Like the ghosts in Shakespeare — except King Hamlet's, which appears to Horatio and others — they appear only to those whose inner distress first calls for their adventure. The horrifying shock the governess suffers, and the reader by proxy, is not that of the apparitions but of her (and the reader's) own inner ghosts.

Whether the ghosts are real or hallucinatory (they are both) is not a vital question here. The unutterable horror is the one constant in *The Turn of the Screw* — the horror that comes from the helpless incapacity to know what one knows as reality. Dorothea Krook in her discerning chapter on the *nouvelle* designates the governess' tragedy as "an epistemological disaster." The appalling horror reaches its climax when the governess forces Miles to confess and at last gets the answer:

Those he liked? I seemed to float not into clearness but into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for *if he were innocent what then on earth was I?*²⁹

Is this not then, if nothing else, the very proof of her sanity or reliability as a narrator? "What am I?" is a tormenting question,

more so if unanswerable. People would rather long for their physical destruction in such cases than lose their identity. The governess is driven nearly insane — but she is not insane before nor after the crisis — not by the obscene presences of Quint and Miss Jessel but by her own active mind. She falls a victim to “a trap not designed but deep — to [her] imagination, to [her] delicacy, perhaps to [her] vanity, to whatever in [her] most excitable,”³⁰ and heroically survives.

What the supernatural in *The Turn of the Screw* is intended to express is James's sense of the mystery and final inexplicability of absolute evil.³¹ The origin of evil is inscrutable just like the sudden perspiration on Leontes' brow. Leontes is a classic example of those victimized by their own obsession. Causelessness may explain the origin of evil. Both the elder James and William were seized causelessly with “the abject fear.” The apparent ambiguity of the *nouvelle* is of “cold artistic calculation”; it enhances the mystery and final inexplicability of evil. “Is he really bad?” The governess' inquisition harasses the housekeeper. Now “bad” can imply thousand things. This kind of semantic uncertainty contributes to the *nouvelle* “the tone of tragic yet of exquisite mystification.”³² The calculated ambiguity makes the *nouvelle* complex and poetic, creating numerous superimposed impressions. The evil and horror in *The Turn of the Screw* is abstracted and etherealized. The individualized crimes such as violence (the murder of the Bellegards), the odious rapacity of Kate Croys and Mrs. Lowders, or *les liaisons dangerse* of Beale and Ida Faranges, all fall too short of raising our emotional hackles, while our vision of unlocalized evil is limitless. “Present fears are less than horrible imaginings”; thus the imaginative Macbeth hurries down the road to self-destruction.

The Turn of the Screw is a new type of ghost story, as this essay has attempted to demonstrate. It is a neo-Gothic tale with a maximum power to arouse “the dear old sacred fear.” If

Hawthorne's romances demand "a certain latitude," the like licence must be allowed in *The Turn of the Screw*, as James casts "his lot for pure romance."³³ This granted, we need no scientific rationalization of the ghosts or of Miles's death at the end of the story. We can take his death either symbolically or literally. For death is an enigma here as elsewhere; death comes in a mysterious manner and individually. Morgan Moreen dies from "the shock, the whole scene, the violent emotion,"³⁴ which explains nothing except the fact of his death. The similar case can be made of Owen Wingrave's death and even of Milly Theale's. We may recall Mamillius' death.

Virtuosity is one of the characteristics of modern literature. We tend to abstract life and art. In *The Turn of the Screw* James abstracts horror and presents it in its spiritualized essence. We have a number of superimposed simultaneous impressions, like the multiple patches of colors peculiar to modern painting. We need no "weak specifications"; our vision of evil quickened we make "an excursion into chaos." James exercises a pirating hold on our imagination, which supplies "a local habitation and a name" best suited to our speculation and appreciation. *The Turn of the Screw* is "an excursion into chaos," as James says, — chaos of our psyche which remains impassable for most of the clock hour.

In this space age when the universe is controlled by computers, the old familiar ghosts evoked by Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe or Brockden Brown disappear in the glaring electric light. We have seen enough of horror and evil in the two world wars. Our nerves have become immune from terror and wonder. We suspect mystery, "unweave a rainbow"; "we make trifles of terrors..., when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear."³⁵ Yet for all this we are frightened by the ghosts within us. Henry James makes us aware of these ghosts, which are far more mysterious, inscrutable, therefore, more terrifying than the headless knights or the sheeted ghosts of "a lost beautiful form." Ghost tales now naturally turn to the subliminal. "Irrationality, insanity,

and surrealistic babblings bobbing up out of the stream of consciousness furnish excellent materials for modern ghost stories of guilt and terror.”³⁶ In *The Turn of the Screw* Henry James seems to have established the pattern, reminding us of that unknown abyss of human mind and transformed a new psychological Gothicism into an art form.

Notes

1. Leon Edel, "Introduction" to *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James* (New Brunswick, 1948), p. xxvi.
2. Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Untried Years* (London, 1953), p. 31.
3. Graham Greene, "The Private Universe," *The Lost Childhood and Others* (London, 1954), p. 26.
4. Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (New York, 1913), pp. 347-348. Italics are mine.
5. John Keats, "Lamia," *Selected Poems and Letters* (Cambridge, 1952), Pt. II, 11. 234-237.
6. Virginia Woolf, *Granite and Rainbow* (New York, 1958), p. 63.
7. Henry James, "Preface" *The New York Edition* (New York, 1936), XII, p. xix.
8. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
9. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen & Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1961), p. 178.
12. Henry James, "Preface" pp. xxi-xxii.
13. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (New York, 1936), p. 166. Italics are mine.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
15. Martha Banta, "A Look at Jamesian Gothicism" *The Yale Review*, October, 1967, p. 56.
16. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (New York, 1967), p. 109.
17. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 182.

18. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, p. 110.
19. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 163.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
23. Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (London, 1959), p. 72.
24. Robert Humphery, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley, 1968), p. 8.
25. Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla," *Short Stories* (New York, 1956), p. 325.
26. Henry James, "Preface," p. xix.
27. Marius Bewley, *The Complex Fate* (London, 1952), p. 80.
28. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 176.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 307. Italics are mine.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
31. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, p. 129.
32. Henry James, "Preface," p. xviii.
33. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
34. Henry James, "The Pupil," *The Short Stories of Henry James*, ed. Clifton Fadiman (New York, 1945), p. 267.
35. William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, II, iii, 4-7.
36. Martha Banta, "A Look at Jamesian Gothicism," p. 58.

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