

Hallucinations or Realities: The Ghosts in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*

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Abstract

The Turn of the Screw is an intense psychological tale of terror. It begins in an old house on Christmas Eve. The story focuses on a young, naïve governess who is confronted by a pair of ghosts that she suspects is corrupting the two young children in her charge. The apparitions are those of Peter Quint, a man formerly employed in the household, and Miss Jessel, the previous governess.

The new governess has profound suspicions that the children are involved with the ghosts; she confronts the children individually and during that inquiring one of the apparitions appears to the governess, bringing the action to a calamity. The girl, Flora, denies having seen the wraiths and, apparently hysterical, is sent to her uncle in London. The boy, Miles, dies in the governess's arms during the culmination of a psychic battle between the governess and the ghost of Peter Quint.

This paper is an analytical approach to James's *The Turn of the Screw* which highlights the contradictory interpretations, as well as the ambiguity of the novella. As its core, and for several reasons that will be explained in more details in this analysis of the narration and the nature of the story *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, it is clear that this story is "psychological thriller" based within the Gothic tradition. Nicole Smith (2011 Fiction) insists that if one wishes to place *The Turn of the Screw* in the Gothic tradition of literature, it means, by alternative, the elements of ghosts or the supernatural should be present. However, aside from being a mere ghost story or psychological thriller, the fact that the narrator might not be reliable plays into the classification of this story as well and in fact, the question of whether

or not the narrator is reliable in James's story becomes of principal importance. (2011)

Key words: Apparitions; Ghosts; Governess; Psychology; Ambiguous; Reality; Hallucination

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INTRODUCTION

Henry James (1843-1916), whose mastery of the psychological novel influenced, to a great extent, twentieth-century literature, was born in New York City. He belonged to a very distinguished family; his father as well as his older brother, William James, profoundly influenced the emerging science of psychology. The James children were educated in a variety of schools and with private tutors. In 1855 the James family began a three-year tour of Geneva, London, and Paris, an experience that probably influenced James's later performance for Europe over his native land (Sparknotes.com).

James wrote *The Turn of the Screw* at a low point of his life. In 1895 he had suffered a tremendous personal and professional blow when his play *Guy Donville* was booed off the London stage. Deeply wounded, James retreated from London and took refuge in Sussex, eventually taking a long-term lease on a rambling mansion called Lamb House. Shortly thereafter, he began writing *The Turn of the Screw*, one of several works from this period that revolve around large, rambling houses (ibid). He became a British subject in 1915, a year before his death at the age of seventy-three.

The Turn of the Screw first appeared in social form in *Collier's Weekly* between January and April of 1898. Then, in October of 1898, it was published in both Great

Britain and the United States. Accordingly, the initial reactions to be made are that they were, with very few exceptions, favorable. "Thus, the critical consensus that *The Turn of the Screw* is a great work of literary artistry—a consensus that has persisted throughout endless debates concerning questions of interpretation—was present from the very beginning of the long critical discussion" (Parkinson, Edward).

James had written ghost stories before *The Turn of the Screw*. It was a popular form, especially in England where, as the prologue to *The Turn of the Screw* suggests, gathering for the purpose of telling ghost stories was something of a Christmas tradition.

The *Turn of the Screw* is of the most divisive works in literature, it has inspired a variety of critical interpretations since its publication in 1898. "The novella was generally regarded as a conventional ghost story until 1934 when Edmund Wilson challenged this view with the contention that *Turn of the Screw* is a psychological case study of the narrator, an emotionally unstable young woman whose visions of phantasms are merely hallucinations" (Short Story Criticism, 2002).

Most scholars now agree that James intended his work to remain ambiguous and "allow several contradictory interpretations, although the purposes for and effects of such ambiguity, as well as the various possible interpretations that the text will support, are still widely debated" (ibid).

Thematic Concern

The Turn of the Screw is one of the most critically discussed works in twentieth-century American literature. Due to its relative accessibility and popularity compared to much of James's other work, the novella is often read as an introduction to James (Short Story Criticism). In addition, this tale of mystery is among the classics of Victorian Gothic fiction and has inspired notable adaptations in other media, including opera and film. Considered among James's greatest achievements, *The Turn of the Screw* continues to be admired as one of the most artistic and enigmatic works in literature. (ibid)

The novella starts by a Christmas Eve gathering at an old house, where visitors listen to one another's ghost stories. A guest named Douglas introduces a story that involves two children—Flora and Miles—and his sister's governess. After procuring the governess's written record of events from his home, he provides a few introductory details. The manuscript tells the story of how the young governess is hired by a man who has become responsible for his young nephew and niece after the death of their parents. He lives mainly in London and is not interested in raising the children himself. The boy, Miles, is attending a boarding school while his younger sister, Flora, is living at a country estate in Essex. She is currently being cared for by the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose. The governess's new employer, the uncle of Miles and Flora, gives her

full charge of the children and explicitly states that she is not to bother him with communications of any sort. The governess travels to her new employer's country house and begins her duties. Douglas begins to read from the written record, and the story shifts to the governess's point of view as she narrates her strange experience (Sparknotes.com).

The governess begins her story with her first day at Bly, the country home, where she meets Flora and a maid named Mrs. Grose. The governess is nervous but feels relieved by Flora's beauty and charm. The next day she receives a letter from her employer, which contains a letter from Miles's headmaster saying that Miles cannot return to school. The letter does not specify what Miles has done to deserve expulsion, and, alarmed, the governess questions Mrs. Grose about it. Mrs. Grose admits that Miles has on occasion been bad, but only in the ways boys ought to be. The governess is reassured as she drives to meet Miles.

One evening, while the governess leisurely walks around the grounds, she sees a strange man in a tower of the house and exchanges an intense stare with him. She says nothing to Mrs. Grose. Later, she catches the same man glaring into the dining-room window, and she rushes outside to investigate. The man is gone, and the governess looks into the window from outside. Mrs. Grose rushes outside the house, where she meets the governess, who is now pale with shock, and demands to know what is wrong with her. The governess tells her that she saw a man through that window and he was looking in. She tells Mrs. Grose that she does not know who he is or where he has gone but sure she has seen him before in the tower and he is the same man that she has seen peeping through that window where they are standing now.

Though the governess says she was afraid, she ran out after him because she has her "duty" to protect the children. The governess then describes the man to Mrs. Grose.

He's like nobody with curly hair, a pale long face, red whiskers, arched eyebrow, small sharp eyes, and a large mouth with thin lip—like an actor and not a gentleman. He is handsome but dressed in someone else's clothes, with a hat. At this, Mrs. Grose exclaims in recognition: It is Peter Quint, the master's valet, who was at Bly with the master the previous year. He never wore a hat, and while he was there the master's waistcoats were missing. He remained on, in charge after the master left. And, Mrs. Grose concludes, Quint is dead. (*The Turn of the Screw*, pp 29-30)

As readers, one would wish and argue that the governess is mad and she imagines what she sees, or in other words, she is hallucinating about what she has seen. But the fact that she is capable to give precise description which immediately Mrs. Grose recognizes as Peter Quint, seems to offer affirmative evidence that the governess has seen the ghost of the dead man and seems to exclude the possibility of misrecognition and "explains the man's ability to appear suddenly, without barriers to entrance or exit. This is the first time the governess considers

the possibility of a ghost, and it is clear that she has not consciously considered it previously. Mrs. Grose's revelation that Quint is dead comes as a great shock to both narrator and reader" (Sparknotes.com).

The description given above which is taken from chapter (V) has created various perceptions according to the critics. Critics who favour reading the governess as mad and the ghost as figments of her imagination offer various suggestions for circumnavigating this textual obstacle; one of which is that Mrs. Grose, resenting the governess's intrusion to Bly and deliberately attempting to drive her mad, would have identified any man she described as the dead valet. (Sparknotes.com)

The specifics of the man's appearance, however, also have another possible origin- in the study of human physiognomy in the nineteenth century. In other words, the man the governess describes fits the stereotype of the sexually frightening man popularized by pseudo-science and literature of her day.

For Jorge Rodriguez, he tackles the unreliability of the governess as narrator not been acted intentionally. She may be unconsciously repressing important aspects of the story. "This seems to be the case in regard to her relationship with the children's uncle and her infatuation with him. Could it possibly be that the visions the governess sees are just the product of her repressed love for the master?" (Jorge Rodriguez. On Serendip).

It seems that the governess was in love with the master, which is actually one-sided affair and that she continued loving him through the course of the novella. In the prologue to the governess' manuscript, the characters speculate about her affection for a certain man. Even Douglas, who claims to have known the governess, says: "Yes, she was in love. That is she had been. That came out- she could n't tell her story without its coming out" (*The Turn of the Screw*, p.5). As Douglas continues his account of the events and he describes the man she was working for and her reasons for falling in love with him become obvious: "this prospective patron proved a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered anxious girl out of Hampshire vicarage" (p.7). For a girl of a decline class, she had enough reasons to admire the master as he proved to be the promise of prosperity.

This love becomes obvious when the governess sees the first apparition. She admits to have been thinking of someone when she first saw the so-called ghost of Pater Quint: "someone would appear there at the turn of the path and would stand before me and smile and approve" (p.19). What is even more surprising is her disappointment when it turns out to be someone else instead of her loved one: "the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed" (p.20). She, however, never clearly states that she was necessarily thinking of the master, and neither does Douglas state that

it was the children's uncle whom she had fallen in love with. "But from the references made in both occasions, it is inevitable to conclude that the governess was thinking about the master, and, consequently, that the discussion in the prologue was making reference to him" (Jorge Rodriguez. On Serendip).

Though Mrs. Grose has not seen anything, she does not question the governess's sanity but defers to her judgment. The governess tells Mrs. Grose that she finds it strange that the children have never at all mentioned Quint. Mrs. Grose says that Flora does not know that he is dead, but Miles, whom the governess promises not to ask, was "great friends" with Quint. Quint liked to play with Miles and was, in the words of Mrs. Grose "much to free" with him and with everyone, even she refers to Miss Jessel, the former governess, with whom he had an affair. Mrs. Grose speaks specifically of Quint being too free with Miles. She may simply mean that the association of Miles with Quint was part of his development as a little man since there is no presence of his uncle to guide him at this phase of his life, or it could be understood that she means free in the same-sexual-sense. Despite what Mrs. Grose felt about that relation between the two, she justifies her silence to the governess that she could not act against Quint because the children had been placed under his charge, rather than hers, and that she preferred not to complain to the master because he was "terribly short with anything of that kind."

The governess and Mrs. Grose decide to "bear things together," and the governess is certain that she can protect Miles and Flora. Convinced that the ghost seeks Miles, the governess becomes rigid in her supervision of the children, determines to keep the worries from her employer, believing by doing so she will gain his love.

One day, when the governess is at the lake with Flora, she sees a woman dressed in black and senses that the woman is Miss Jessel, her dead predecessor. The governess is certain that Flora was aware of the ghost's presence but intentionally kept quiet. Later, she talks about it to Mrs. Grose who has suggested that Flora has kept her sighting of Miss Jessel a secret to spare the governess the fright. But she wonders if the child likes the ghost that her lack of fear is simply proof of her innocence. The governess agrees but says that Flora's innocence is "proof of- God knows what! For the woman's a horror of horrors" (*The Turn of the Screw*, p.55). At that, Mrs. Grose wonders how the governess knows this about Miss Jessel. The governess explains it is from the gaze of intention which the ghost fixed on Flora and from her wicked appearance. She was dressed in a shabby black dress but was very beautiful, though infamous.

The governess certainty that the woman she saw was Miss Jessel is based on her assumption. She does not bother to physically describe the figure, as she did Quint, before identifying her. She is certain that the woman was Miss Jessel, a woman she never met, largely because of

her “infamous” appearance. Mrs. Grose confirms that Miss Jessel was “infamous” – together with Quint. Miss Jessel, in a psychoanalytic reading of the text, may then exist as a symbolic representation of the desires the governess cannot admit or express (Short Story Criticism. 2006 First Web Report On Serendip). This hallucination has been borne of the governess’s dangerous indulgence in sexual fantasies about her employer. Miss Jessel must therefore be detested as evil by a governess seeking to repress her own similar sexual urges.

At the governess's persistence, Mrs. Grose implies that regardless of the differences in their rank, Miss Jessel and Quint had a sexual relationship and delicately explains that Miss Jessel left because she was pregnant. Unaware of the details of the former governess’s death, the housekeeper has imagined dreadful possibilities. Here, Miss Jessel’s evil has unmistakable sexual element. The cause of her death is uncertain but seen as deserving – “she paid for it”(p.68).

Though Mrs. Grose seems to feel sympathy for Miss Jessel’s punishment, calling her “poor woman,” the governess does not. The dreadful things that Mrs. Grose imagines are the agonies Miss Jessel must have experienced unwed, pregnant, and finally dying. In contrast, the governess offers no sympathy for Miss Jessel. Her “dreadful” imagines are not what Miss Jessel has suffered but what she has done. Hearing this news, the governess feels defeated. She burst into tears and Mrs. Grose attempts to comfort her. She has not protected the children, she realizes. They are already “lost.”

The governess again questions Mrs. Grose about Miles’s misbehaviour. Mrs. Grose reveals that Quint had been “too free” with Miles, and Miss Jessel with Flora. The governess is hold to her duties of protecting the children against all odds, but the days pass without incident, and Miles and Flora show increased affection for the governess.

The stillness is broken one evening when something startles the governess from her reading. She tries to investigate, moving to the landing above the staircase. There, a blast of air extinguishes her candle, and she sees Quint halfway up the stairs. She refuses to back down, exchanging another intense stare with Quint until he vanishes. Back in her room, the governess finds Flora’s bed curtains pulled forward, but Flora herself is missing. Noticing movement under the window blind, the governess watches as Flora emerges from behind it. The governess questions Flora about what she’s been doing, but Flora’s explanation is unrevealing.

The governess is unable to sleep well during the next few nights. One night, she is fully awake and sees the ghost of Miss Jessel sitting on the bottom stair, with her head in her hands. Later, when the governess finally allows herself to go to sleep at her regular hour, she is awoken after midnight to find her candle extinguished and Flora by the window. Careful not to disturb Flora, the governess leaves

the room to find a window downstairs that overlooks the same view. Looking out, she sees the faraway figure of Miles on the lawn.

Later, the governess discusses with Mrs. Grose her conversation with Miles, who claimed that he wanted to show the governess that he could be “bad.” The governess concludes that Flora and Miles frequently meet with Miss Jessel and Quint. At this, Mrs. Grose urges the governess to appeal to her employer, but the governess refuses, reminding her that the children’s uncle does not want to be bothered. She threatens to leave if Mrs. Grose writes to him. On a walk to the church one Sunday, Miles mentions the topic of the school to the governess. He says he wants to go back and declares he will make his uncle come to Bly. The governess, shaken, does not go into church. Instead, she returns to the house and schemes her departure. She sits on the bottom stairs but springs up when she remembers seeing Miss Jessel there. She enters the schoolroom and finds Miss Jessel sitting at the table. She screams at the ghost, and the ghost vanishes. The governess decides she will stay at Bly. Mrs. Grose and the children return, saying nothing about the governess’s absence at church. The governess agrees to write to her employer.

That evening, the governess listens outside Miles’s door. He invites her in, and she questions him. She embraces him impulsively. The candle goes out, and Miles screams. The next day Miles plays the piano for the governess. She suddenly realizes she does not know where Flora is. She and Mrs. Grose find Flora by the lake. There, the governess sees the apparition of Miss Jessel. She points it out to Flora and Mrs. Grose, but both claim not to see it. Flora says that the governess is cruel and that she wants to get away from her and the governess collapses on the ground in hysterics. The next day, Mrs. Grose informs the governess that Flora is sick. They decide Mrs. Grose will take Flora to the children’s uncle while the governess stays at Bly with Miles. Mrs. Grose informs the governess that Luke did not send the letter she wrote to her employer, because he could not find it.

With Flora and Mrs. Grose gone, Miles and the governess talk after dinner. The governess asks if he took her letter. He confesses, and the governess sees Quint outside. She watches Quint in horror, and then points him out to Miles, who asks if it is Peter Quint and looks out the window in vain. He cries out, and then falls into the governess’s arms, dead.

Stanley Renner in his article on *The Turn of the Screw* illustrates that the internal sexual conflict is not, however, the true horror of the story. For him, the horror comes upon the emergence of Miss Jessel. The second “ghost” is representative of two things. First, it shows the governess the ruin to which she will fall at the hands of sexuality. Second, it shows her that young Flora will do the same.

At this point, her harm moves away from just herself to the children. She tries to protect Miles and Flora from discovering their own sexuality, strangling their development

on the edge of youth. She tries that “What it was least possible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw more- things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past” (*The Turn of the Screw*, p.71). She is afraid of what they may have already encountered: “possibly encounters with previous wicked guardians, possibly their own fantasies” (Smith, Nicole, 2011 Fiction).

On a literal reading, the first obvious point of doubt as to the ghost's reality as the governess and Mrs. Grose chase Flora to the lake. When she notices that Flora has run out “without a hat,” she assumes that Flora is with Jessel and that they are together at the lake (often seen as a fertility symbol). “There Jessel could teach a ‘naked’ Flora of sexuality. The governess and Mrs. Grose run after her. Mrs. Grose and Flora, however, do not see the ghost which the governess clearly watches. Once again she is manifesting her fantasy (or in this case, her fears) in the form of physical presence” (ibid).

William Veeder points that the governess appears to get more intense about her believes and further convince Mrs. Grose of the reality of her observations; the more insane she might appear to be (47). This could be because as a woman of the late Victorian period in Literature and society, all of her desires about her master and her wish to appear as the perfect caretaking woman coupled with the isolation of the house were making her slightly insane and prone to hallucination. She sounds almost desperate when she attempts to convince Mrs. Grose of the existence of these “horrors” saying to her, when she questions the existence of Miss Jessel, “‘then ask Flora- she’s sure!’ But I had no sooner spoken than I caught myself up. ‘No, for God’s sake, don’t!’ She’ll say she isn’t-she’ll lie” (*The Turn of the Screw*, 50). Times like this make her seem as though she may be going mad and trying to tell others what she sees. In that same concept the children might also become so troubled because she is trying to scare them with ghost stories. The story “only concerns the narrating governess to the extent of her involvement in narrative space, that ‘beyond,’ where everything is ungraspable. She draws the children into the indecisive space of narration, into that unreal beyond where everything becomes phantom” (Sheaffer-Jones, 231). In other words, she is so caught up in her crazed visions based upon her own repressed desires that she is blind to what she is doing to what is most important to her- the children.

The understanding of the story is quite perplexing. Upon a first consideration Henry James seems “to be asserting that the ghosts are objective entities- not hallucinations- but entities different in kind from those studied by the Society for Psychical Research, of which his brother William was president for two years” (Parkinson, Edward J. PhD. Thesis, 1991).

Francis X. Roellinger and E. A. Sheppard point out that Quint and Jessel are very much like the apparitions frequently studied by the Society. As a matter of fact,

they particularly resemble the scientific apparitions in that “very little appears to be done by the persons appearing” in *The Turn of the Screw*. Quint and Jessel never speak, never perform noteworthy actions, or even approach the governess or the children. For example, the conversation of the governess with Mrs. Grose in chapter five immediately was following the second appearance of Quint in chapter four. In their discussion of the first apparition, Mrs. Grose asks, “What was he doing on the tower?” the governess answers, “Only standing there and staring down at me” (188). Later, in chapter seven, describing to Mrs. Grose the first appearance of Jessel, the governess says, “She just appeared and stood there...” (*The Turn of the Screw*, p.204). It sometimes seems the most peculiar things about Quint are that he does so little. In relating her vision of Quint on the staircase just before dawn in chapter nine, the governess goes out of her way to stress this point:

It was the dead silence of our gaze at close quarters that have the whole horror, huge it was, its only note of the unnatural. If I had met a murderer in such place and at such an hour we still at least would have spoken. Something would have passed in life between us; if nothing had passed on of us would have moved. (ibid. p.223)

Roellinger goes on so far as to assert that Quint and Jessel “conform precisely” to the typical patterns found in psychological research:

In the majority of cases reported to the Society, the ghost does not appear at any known fixed time of day or year. It is usually seen distinctly ‘in all kinds of light; from broad daylight to the faint light of dawn.’ It is described in detail, and appears ‘in such clothes as are now, or have recently been, worn by living person.’...Sudden death, ‘often either murder or suicide, appears to be connected with the cause of the apparition’ in many cases. If several persons are together when the ghost appears, ‘it will sometimes be seen by all and sometimes not, and failure to see it is not always merely the result of not calling attention to it.’ (p.405)

According Roellinger point of view, it is easy to see how closely Quint and Jessel fit the above criteria. The ghosts appear in both summer and fall and in various kinds of light. Quint appears on the tower near twilight (chapter three), outside the parlor window in late afternoon (chapter four), on the staircase before dawn (chapter nine), and outside the dining room window while Miles and the governess are having their evening meal (chapter twenty-four). Miss Jessel appears by the lake twice in the middle of the afternoon (chapters six and twenty), once in the classroom in the middle of the afternoon (chapter fifteen), and once on the staircase shortly before dawn (chapter ten).

Both Quint and Jessel have died recently and perhaps violently when the apparitions begin- Quint in an apparent accident which may have been a murder, and Miss Jessel possibly through suicide or as a result of complications of childbirth. Miss Jessel’s final appearance is not seen by Mrs. Grose, even though the governess frantically calls her attention to the apparition, and the governess frequently suspects that Quint and Jessel are in the same room with herself and the children, unseen by the governess in full communication with her “little charges.” (Parkinson, Edward J. PhD. Thesis)

As Edward J. Parkinson places the question of how, then, are we going to interpret the author's disclaimer that Quint and Jessel are ghosts of psychical research? In view of the above striking parallels, Roellinger suggests that James viewed the story as an interesting tour de force to create "... 'A lost form,' and rouse, as he puts it, 'the dear old sacred horror' without departing any more than artistically necessary from the then current knowledge of phenomena" (405).

Glenn A. Reed's interpretation of James's insistence that the ghosts are "agents in fact" is different: "... the ghosts carry the burden of creating an atmosphere of horror and of exerting the worst possible action on the children..." (417). Charles G. Hoffman, another apparitionist critic, comments thus on James's remarks on "psychical" apparitions:

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not 'stage' ghosts who clank chains and whirl across the stage in white sheets in order to frighten a character and trill an audience. They are agents who create an atmosphere of evil. It is their evil effect, not their appearance, that is important ("Innocence and Evil", 102).

Robert Heilman reads the story as a moral and religious allegory, he sees the ghosts as "symbolic ghosts." According to him, they differ from the ghosts of psychical research in that "we are never permitted to see the apparitions except as moral realities" (182).

Graham Greene has very concisely summed up the problems we encounter when we read James's statements about *The Turn of the Screw*: "We must always remain on our guard while reading..., for a certain level no writer has really disclosed less" (40). We can see then, as readers, that James took no obvious stand of the central problems of the interpretation, those questions which critics have debated ever since the story's publication- for example, the reality and nature of apparitions, the sanity and moral stature of the governess, the innocence or corruption of the children, the moral or religious message if there is one. Rather, we have seen that critics of opposing views "frequently cite the same passage from James to prove that, were he alive, he would be in their side in a critical debate. Even his estimation of the artistic worth of the novella is open to serious question, although the preponderance of the evidence seems to suggest that his ultimate opinion of the work was very high" (Parkinson, Edward J. PhD. Thesis).

CONCLUSION

One of the most troubling aspects of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* is determining whether the apparitions that the governess sees are real ghouls or mere hallucinations. Even after its conclusion, the novella provides no definite evidence that may help the reader decide and consequently, this question remains open to the interpretation of the reader. Usually one is eager to believe the governess as a trustworthy narrator and to conclude that

the two children Miles and Flora were being threatened by the alleged ghosts of Peter Quint and the previous governess, Miss Jessel. But one needs to remember that since we are supposed to be reading the governess' manuscript, she could have omitted important facts and manipulated the truth according to her own choosing.

The hallucinationist, or Freudian, interpretation posits the apparitionist position in every significant detail: the ghosts are seen as hallucinations of the governess; the governess is viewed as unreliable narrator, neither obsessed or actually insane; and the children are considered either uncorrupted or corrupted by the treatment of the governess herself. Edna Kenton considered the narrative to be a complex hoax, with both the ghosts and the children imagined by the governess's diseased consciousness. Edmond Wilson expounded on this hypothesis and explicated the story with aid of Freudian psychoanalytical principles. According to Wilson, the governess is a neurotic spinster whose repressed passion for her employer, the children's bachelor uncle, causes her to hallucinate.

Speculation concerning the subjective believability and objective truth of the events in *The Turn of the Screw* depends upon the reader's acceptance or rejection of the governess reliability as a narrator. It is this question which, until the early 1960s, divided critical interpretation of the novella. Drawing from this division, the debate concerning the novella has focused on three main issues: the reality of the ghosts, the sanity of the governess, the corruption of the children. According to the apparitionist reading, the ghosts are real, the governess is a rational and plausible narrator, and the children, according to the majority of apparitionist critics, are to some degree corrupted by the ghosts. The consensus among critics for twenty years after the publication of *The Turn of the Screw* was to accept the novella as either a literary ghost story or an account of demonic possession of the children.

In his article on *The Turn of the Screw* Stanley Renner emphasizes that the true terror in the novella is not in the ghosts. They give the story a nice framework and a literal interpretation which is both entertaining and thought provoking. This framework also sets up many different viewpoints from which to observe the text. Is the story about a vengeful ghost haunting an old manor and attempting to kill their former charges, or is it rather a story of a sexually frightened and disturbed young woman who drives a nurse nearly insane, endangers the children she is put solely in charge of and eventually kills one of them? The governess is never named. By this could James be trying to tell us that anybody could fall to the same level of psychological distress as the governess? The ghosts seem more fictional, more easily conquered. If the ghosts are psychological, then it is not our old houses which are haunted but rather something more difficult to deny or escape: our own minds.

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