1957

The Fine Central Consciousness in Henry James's Turn of the Screw

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THE FINE CENTRAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN HENRY JAMES'S

TURN OF THE SCREW

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

June

1957
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problems of interpreting The Turn of the Screw cluster principally around the much-disputed role of the sensitive young governess who narrates the story. The dominant Fine Central Consciousness in the story, she is the principal narrator of the three first-person narrators introduced to the reader. The first narrator is the anonymous individual, perhaps Henry James himself, who begins by recalling, "The story had held us, round the fire, . . ." and then introduces a gentleman named Douglas, who promises to tell a ghost story with a special "turn of the screw."¹ Douglas, in turn, introduces the manuscript of an unnamed governess to the group and provides an elaborate testimonial to her good character. She is the daughter of a poor country parson, "the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she'd have been worthy of any whatever."² In answer to an advertisement she comes up to London, and is of-

¹The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York, 1907-17), XII, 147, 148. All quotations of James's fiction will be taken from this edition, to be designated simply as Novels.
²Ibid., 149.
ferred a job by a handsome, rich bachelor who wants a governess for his orphaned niece and nephew. The conditions attached to the position are that she is to take complete responsibility, and never bother the guardian about the children. She accepts; it is admitted that she has fallen in love with her employer. At this point in the narration, Douglas begins to read the manuscript and the principal narrator, the governess, begins to tell her own story in the first person. Douglas and the anonymous individual never return again.

The governess, then, relates her arrival at the beautiful country house in Bly, where Flora, the little girl, had been left with the simple housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, and some servants. Presently, she learns that Miles, Flora's delightfully mannered brother, has been expelled from his school and is at that moment on his way home. No reason is given for the dismissal. There are a few references, sufficiently mysterious, to the death of the former governess, and to someone as yet unidentified who "liked them young and pretty."³

Yet, the children seem so very innocent and charming. After a short time, the governess comes to think all that is needed to complete her happiness is the presence of their guardian, approving her endeavors for them, when suddenly she meets

³Ibid., 169.
her first apparition. She comes out in sight of the house and sees on top of one of the two towers at Bly the figure of a man, remote and somehow disquieting. It is a stranger. Again, late on a rainy Sunday, he appears at the outside of a ground floor window. She sees him at closer range and more clearly. She later describes the man to Mrs. Grose, who immediately identifies him: Peter Quint. The sentence drops, "He died." "Died? I almost shrieked," the governess writes. Quint, says Mrs. Grose, was "too free" with Miles, and "too free" with everyone. The governess believes that Quint has come back to haunt the children and that it is her duty to protect them. "We were cut off, really, together; we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I--well, I had them."

Soon afterwards the governess is sitting by the side of a lake, and Flora is playing near her. She gradually becomes aware of the presence of a third person on the other side of the lake, whom she concludes to be her predecessor. Mrs. Grose later confirms that this Miss Jessel was "infamous," and reveals that she had an affair with Quint. Then it is slowly pried from Mrs. Grose, with frightful implications of evil, that the children knew of and connived at the affair between

4Ibid., 192, 195-196.
5Ibid., 199.
6Ibid., 206.
Quint and Miss Jessel, and had been in some way corrupted by them. There had been a period of several months, says Mrs. Grose, when the children and the man and woman "had been about together quite as if Quint were his tutor—and a very grand one—and Miss Jessel only for the little lady. When he had gone off with the fellow, I mean, and spent hours with him." 7 The governess soon comes to believe that Miles and Flora know their dead friends are haunting Bly.

The apparitions now begin to appear at night, and the governess becomes convinced that the children get up to meet them, though the children are able to give fairly plausible explanations of their own behavior. The purpose of the demons shortly comes home to the governess with unanswerable conviction: "They're not mine—they're not ours," she tells Mrs. Grose about Miles and Flora, "they're his and they're hers!... Quint's and that woman's. They want to get to them.... For the love of all the evil that, in those dreadful days, the pair put into them. And to ply them with that evil still, to keep up the work of demons, is what brings the others back." 8 She finally agrees to write to the master, but no sooner has she sat down to the paper than she gets up and goes to the boy's

7Ibid., 213.
8Ibid., 237.
bedroom, where she finds him lying awake. When he demands to go back to school, she embraces him and begs him to tell her why he was sent away. There is a sudden gust of wind past her, the casement rattles, the boy shrieks. She has been kneeling beside the bed. When she gets up, she finds the candle extinguished. "It was I who blew it, dear!" says Miles. For her, it has been the evil spirit disputing her domination. 9

The next day Flora disappears, and the governess and Mrs. Grose find her beside the lake. The governess now for the first time speaks openly to one of the children about the ghosts: "Where, my pet, is Miss Jessel?" The dead governess appears, dreadfully, across the lake. "She was there, so I was justified; she was there, so I was neither cruel nor mad," the governess tells herself. 10 But Mrs. Grose does not see the apparition, and Flora denies that she sees it, turning in a violent reaction of hatred against the living governess. The little girl continues in this state, becomes feverish, begs to be taken away from the governess, and is sent up to London with Mrs. Grose.

Miles and the governess are left alone together. A scene of rapidly intensified horror ensues. Miles confesses frankly

9Ibid., 267.
10Ibid., 278.
that he is the one who stole her letter from the hall table the previous day. This is the moment of the governess' victory, when Miles's soul is purged by confession. Quint appears at the window threateningly, but Miles does not see him. She presses him to tell her why he was expelled from school. He "said things" to a few whom he liked, and they must have repeated them "to those they liked!" The governess ponders his words. "No more, no more, no more!" she shrieks to the apparition. "Is she here?" demands the boy in panic. No, it is not the woman, she says. "It's he?" She draws him on, asking whom he means. "Peter Quint—you devil!" he screams. "Where?" he asks. "What does he matter now, my own?" she cries. "What will he ever matter? I have you, but he has lost you forever!" The figure has vanished: "There, there!" she says, pointing towards the window. Miles looks and gives a cry, and the governess realizes he has died in her arms.11

What, the reader will wonder, is the cause of Miles's death? In the brief summary of the plot just given, deliberate care has been exercised both to direct the reader's attention to Douglas' remarks in the story's prologue—data often overlooked by critics in their interpretation of the plot—and to hint at the ambiguities and indirect technique of James's orig-

11Ibid., 307, 308, 309.
inal story. There is considerable ambiguity, especially, about the causes of Miles's death. The position of the governess in the story is the cause of these difficulties to the reader. She is the one who narrates, who sees, who feels, who disbelieves, who intuits so agilely the most hidden of motives and acts with the most remarkable certitude. The reader adopts her mind, is wholly dependent on her, utterly at her mercy; he feels her horror, her suspicion and mystification, he accepts her reactions to the gripping situations she encounters—even though he seldom, if ever, discovers objective evidence for her reactions.

For example, on the second occasion when the governess sees Quint, she does not yet know that it is Quint, or that he is a ghost: "Something, however, happened this time that had not happened before; his stare into my face, through the glass and across the room was as deep and hard as then, but it quitted me for a moment during which I could still watch it, see it fix successively several other things. On the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude that it was not for me he had come. He had come for some one else."^{12}

What would seem to be at least a mere assumption becomes "certitude," or her later "knowledge in the midst of dread." And the reader acts with the governess on this "certitude."

^{12}Ibid., 134.
A similar, an almost clairvoyant awareness is evident in the governess at her first meeting with the ghost of Miss Jessel. The narrator had been sitting down with a piece of sewing on a stone bench beside the pond and "in this position I began to take in with certitude and yet without direct vision the presence, a good way off, of a third person. . . . There was no ambiguity in anything; none whatever at least in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes."13

Moreover, the governess' mind is intensely alert, active. In her many dialogues with Mrs. Grose, she anticipates and flits about with such agility that the reader must trust that each party correctly interprets the implications, the omissions, the nimble logic in the other's words. The governess, for example, questions Mrs. Grose about the possible reasons for Miles's unexplained dismissal from school:

'I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that you've never known him to be bad.'
She threw back her head; she had clearly by this time, and very honestly, adopted an attitude. 'Oh never known him--I don't pretend that!' I was upset again. 'Then you have known him--?' 'Yes indeed, Miss, thank God!' On reflexion I accepted this. 'You mean that a boy who never is--?' 'Is no boy for me!'  

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13 Ibid., 201.
I held her tighter. 'You like them with the spirit to be naughty?' Then, keeping pace with her answer, 'So do I!' I eagerly brought out. 'But not to the degree to contaminate—'

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

Thus, the reader wonders what objective evidence could move the governess through this appalling declension: "be bad," "be naughty," "contaminate," "corrupt." Have her suspicions about the boy's corruption any foundation? Furthermore, are the ghosts themselves in The Turn of the Screw real ghosts, or are they but hallucinations of the governess? Does little Miles finally die worn out by the real struggle between good and evil, or does the governess frighten him to death?

The traditional interpretation of The Turn of the Screw has held that the dead servants, in a dreadful conspiracy of evil, actually returned to haunt the children; the more recent hallucination theory believes that the governess' sexually frustrated mind generated the ghosts and the atmosphere of corruption surrounding the innocent children.

The hallucination theory did not gain prominence until its public expression by Edna Kenton in 1924. Pointing out the naiveté of previous readers, caught, as she puts it, in James's trap for the unwary, she unearthed a second set of horrors under those on the surface. 'There are traps and lures

\[14\text{Ibid.}, 168.\]
in plenty, but just a little wariness will suffice to disprove, with a single survey of the ground, the traditional, we might almost call it lazy version of this tale." Miss Kenton's argument is that it is the governess, "it is she--always she herself--who sees the lurking shapes and heralds them to her little world. . . . So she made the shades of her recurring fevers dummy figures for the delirious terrifying of others, pathetically trying to harmonize her own disharmonies by creating discords outside herself."Miss Kenton cites almost no evidence from the story itself to sustain her interpretation except this fact of the governess' being sole narrator; she does not elaborate on the governess' "own disharmonies"; she merely emphasizes James's remark in the Preface upon his intention: "I need scarcely add after this that it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an amusette to catch those not easily caught. . . ."15

Accompanying Miss Kenton's article in this same issue of Arts were four illustrations for the Turn of the Screw by the

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16 Novels, XII, xviii. Henceforward, quotations of James's Preface to The Turn of the Screw will be taken from the New York edition. Quotations of his other Prefaces, however, will be from the collected and annotated edition of James's complete Prefaces in The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, edited by Richard P. Blackmur, 2nd ed. (New York, 1950). This will be referred to as Critical Prefaces.
critic-painter, Charles Demuth. The scenes he chose for reproduction each had ambiguous meanings and hidden sexual significance. Thus, Demuth supported Miss Kenton's theory of hallucinations, but gave it a distinctively Freudian cast in suggesting the governess had neuroses caused by sex repression.

Some years later, Edmund Wilson set out to provide a more scholarly foundation for the hallucination theory of Demuth and Kenton. Wilson begins with a careful analysis of the narrative, step by step, in which he attempts to prove that the meaning of the story itself is ambiguous, that almost the entire story may be read equally in light of the traditional ghost theory or the Freudian hallucination theory. "Nowhere," he says, "does James unequivocally give the thing away: almost everything from beginning to end can be read equally in either of two senses."17 Did James consciously or unconsciously create this ambiguity? Wilson suspects an unconscious failure in James's artistic perception or communication, or both, but is not too clear about this point. However, he believes that evi-

17 Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1936), p. 130. See A.J.A. Waldock, "Mr. Wilson and the Turn of the Screw," MLN, LXII (May, 1947), 331-334. Waldock argues that since there are passages which prove not everything from beginning to end may be read equally in either of two senses, James unequivocally did give the thing away. The ghosts are real. See also R.B. Heilman, "Freudian Reading of the Turn of the Screw," MLN, LXII (November, 1947), 433-445.
dence external to the narrative itself—James's own prefatory remarks and the position of The Turn of the Screw in a volume of the collected edition that is not devoted to ghost stories—proves that James was writing about hallucinations, not ghosts. With the exception of these passages which he cites from James's Preface, Wilson's full argumentation follows:

In the preface to the collected edition, however, as Miss Kenton has pointed out, James does seem to want to put himself on record.

And note, too, in the collected edition that James has not included The Turn of the Screw in the volume with his other ghost stories but in a volume of stories of another kind, between The Aspern Papers and The Liar—this last the story of a pathological liar, whose wife protects his lies against the world, acting with very much the same sort of deceptive 'authority' as the governess in The Turn of the Screw. When we look back in the light of these hints, we become convinced that the whole story has been primarily intended as a characterization of the governess: her visions and the way she behaves about them, as soon as we look at them from the obverse side, present a solid and unmistakable picture of the poor country parson's daughter, with her English middle-class class consciousness, her inability to admit to herself her sexual impulses and the relentless English 'authority' which enables her to put over on inferiors even purposes which are totally deluded and not at all to the other people's best interests. 18

Later mention will be made of the prefatory remarks Wilson quotes from James in support of his own position.

In love with, first, the master, and then with little

18 Ibid., 130-131. In a subsequent obiter dictum on The Turn of the Screw Wilson seems to modify somewhat his earlier essay, but proponents of the hallucination theory follow the rigor of his initial statements. See "Books," The New Yorker, XX (May 27, 1944), 59.
Miles, whom her emotional cannibalism eventually frightens to death, the governess is responsible for all the evils in the story. They are either pure apparitions of an overwrought and sexually frustrated mind—ghosts, various sexual symbols—or, they are sinister misinterpretations of trivial events in themselves quite innocent (as, for example, the expelling of Miles from school).

More recently, Marius Bewley, in an interesting debate with F.R. Leavis, and the veteran Jamesian critic, Leon Edel, have both written in defense of this same hallucination theory. The latter reconstructs ingeniously the time-scheme contained implicitly in Douglas' initial remarks about the governess, and draws conclusions about the governess' youth, impressionability, and the unreliability of her narrative.

Bewley and Edel both divide the governess' story into an area of fact and an area of fancy. There is the record of her sensations themselves, and there is her interpretation of these sensations. James has presumably written an absorbing study of a troubled young woman, with little knowledge or understanding of the children entrusted to her, called upon to assume serious responsibility for the first time in her life. The reader must establish for himself the credibility of this witness, he must

19 Marius Bewley, "Hawthorne and Henry James," The Complex Fate (London, 1952), pp. 96-149. Mr. Leavis' rejoinders are interpolated as separate chapters.
distinguish carefully between what she actually saw and what she supposed, presumed she saw. Edel stresses her instant intuitions, her groundless certitudes in the ambiguous story-situations already cited by Wilson; furthermore, he observes: "In his revision of the story for the New York Edition he altered his text again and again to put the story into the realm of the governess' feelings. When he had her say originally 'I saw' or 'I believed' he often substituted 'I felt.'" 20

This, briefly, is the evidence supporting the hallucination theory. 21 If there exists any significant fact or piece of dialectic in further proof, it is extremely unlikely that the combined efforts of such able critics as Mr. Wilson, Bewley, and especially, Mr. Edel, should have missed it. All the proponents of this theory seem in definite agreement on at least three points:

(1) The story is riddled with ambiguous situations in which the reader has difficulty justifying the governess' interpretation of her sensations in the light of her record of the sensations themselves.


(2) The characterization of the governess, the psychological case study of her neurotic sex repressions, is James's main concern in the story.

(3) The evils in the story exist only in her mind.

As internal proof of this theory, their combined arguments follow:

(1--positive) Only the governess sees the ghosts. The reader has no evidence of their existence other than her word. Her word is unreliable, because she is young, impressionable, morbidly and groundlessly intuitive.

(2--negative) A careful analysis of Douglas' remarks on the governess' character will discredit his apparently high estimate of her, and disqualify her as witness.

(3--negative) The concrete details of the governess' initial description of Quint to Mrs. Grose can be accounted for in terms of her former experiences.

(4--negative) In the governess' narration of the candle incident in Miles's room, the reader must pronounce her deluded not only in her interpretation of the sense-data but also in her very record of the sense-data experienced. She cannot have felt an actual gust of frozen air, since the windows were reported as closed "tight."

(5--negative) The reader must surmise that Miles got into touch with Flora after the scene by the lake to hear about the governess' use of Miss Jessel's name, although the only objec-
tive sense-data offered by the governess' report is that she kept the two children apart.

As external proof of this hallucination theory, they emphasize the significant place James allots to the story in his collected edition, and cite certain of James's prefatory statements to the story:

(1) "I need scarcely add after this that it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, . . . an amusette to catch those not easily caught, etc." 22

(2) "It was 'dèjà très-joli,' in 'The Turn of the Screw,' please believe, the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities--by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter. . . ." 23

(3) "She has 'authority,' which is a good deal to have given her, and I couldn't have arrived at so much had I clumsily tried for more." 24

(4) "This is to say, I recognise again, that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not 'ghosts' at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft; if not, more pleas-

22 Novels, XII, xviii.
23 Ibid., xix.
24 Ibid.
ingly, fairies of the legendary order, wooing their victims forth to see them dance under the moon."25

All four of these passages come into Wilson's essay, especially the passage on "authority."

Now, it is the purpose of this present thesis to re-examine in the light of further evidence the conclusions and arguments listed above supporting this psychological reading of The Turn of the Screw, refute the hallucination theory, and justify the traditional interpretation. It does not defend one reading of The Turn merely as preferable to the other reading; it denies the validity of the other reading. It will ask this specific question: Who have the principal role in the tale, the governess or the children and the ghosts? Or, to express the problem more technically: Is the Fine Central Consciousness of the governess both story and compositional center, or merely compositional center? To concede even the possibility that both exclusive alternatives in this dilemma are simultaneously true is to judge The Turn an insoluble puzzle, a disunified, unintelligible failure as a work of art. Hence, only a categorical response to this question and a stern refutation of its contradictory response can protect James's artistic integrity.

It is possible to demonstrate that the hallucination theory gives, not only a strained, but an unintelligible reading of

25Ibid., xx.
the text itself. However, the plan of attack in this thesis will not begin with a painstaking textual explication. The procedure will be to demonstrate from external evidence that the traditional interpretation was incontestably James's own interpretation of The Turn. Next, the work itself will be scrutinized for verification of this interpretation, according to Alexander Pope's neatly phrased dictum:

A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit
With the same spirit that the author writ.

This subsequent analysis intends to prove James's reading not merely the preferable reading, but the only possible reading.

And what is the external evidence to be invoked? James's own Preface to The Turn of the Screw implicitly contains sufficient external evidence to support the traditional reading of the story. The Jamesian critic is in one sense exceptionally fortunate to possess James's Prefaces to his own work. James was a meticulous self-critic, and few literary artists have ever explained so frankly and so elaborately what they were trying to do in their work and precisely how they succeeded in realizing their intentions. The Prefaces of Henry James were composed at the peak of his career to form an epitaph for the major monument of his life, the plum-colored, expensive New York edition of his works. Each Preface follows a pattern: a narrative of the how, why, what, when, and where which brought each piece to birth. Customarily first among these accessory facts is an account of the Paris hotel or the old Venetian palace, in which
the story in question was written; then, there is often a statement of the anecdote and the circumstances in which it was told, from which James drew the germ of his story. There is a description of the germ in incubation, and the story of how it took root and grew. Then, finally, there is the important discussion of the techniques the literary artist employs to form his material into an organic whole, with important cross-references to similar discussions in other Prefaces. 26

The Prefaces, accordingly, are extremely useful to the Jamesian critic. Nevertheless, it need not be inferred that such a profuse self-critic is the one artist least in need of explaining by others. These Prefaces were written after 1906, and in the convoluted compressions and oft-parodied discursiveness of his later style which exasperates more often than it communicates. James, too, has his own technical language. Thus, it is possible for Mr. Wilson to read the Preface to The Turn and discover statements which seem to support his hallucination theory; yet, others will discover statements which seem to contradict his theory. These problems seem to result from reading the Preface to The Turn in isolation from the other Prefaces.

In this present thesis, then, the Preface to The Turn will

26 For a description of the Jamesian Preface as a literary type, see Blackmur, Critical Prefaces, pp. vii-x; see also Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New Haven, 1918), p. 2.
itself be read, not as an independent Preface, but as one of James's organically integrated series of Prefaces. James's remarks in the Preface to The Turn will be interpreted in the light of corresponding remarks in other of his Prefaces. Besides this, James's own notebooks will be consulted to discover if his records of The Turn before its creation correspond with his after-the-fact statements in the Preface. Certain statements, too, in his correspondence will confirm the evidence in the Preface. The procedure, therefore, will be to begin with James's more self-evident remarks in the Preface to The Turn, then conclude as a consequence what certain of his more ambiguous remarks must mean, and then, finally, move to evidence internal to the story itself.

The reasons why this procedure of moving from external to internal evidence has been decided upon are threefold:

(1) Avoidance of the wasted cerebration involved in unraveling the admittedly numerous ambiguities within the story itself.

(2) These very ambiguities cluster around the fact that only the governess sees the ghosts, senses the evils. This oddity can be explained on aesthetic grounds alone: it is a natural offshoot of James's conscious striving for an intense impressionism, and of his stubborn clinging to a consistent point of view in narration, his use of the Fine Central Consciousness. James explains at some length this technique in his Prefaces.
(3) Establishing the interpretation of an individual piece of fiction is enhanced when it becomes at the same time a careful study of a master’s techniques according to which he modeled almost all his fiction. The Turn of the Screw is by no means James’s greatest achievement, but it provides an interesting case-history in which one can study his methods as applied to one work, and realize how important it is for a critic to take into account James’s method before he attempts to interpret any of his work. The significance of this thesis, then—although it ostensibly aims at providing an effectual interpretation of The Turn of the Screw, and censuring the intellectual bubble-blowing of a super-rationalized, faulty criticism—is its synthetic study of James’s theory and use of Fine Central Consciousnesses in his fiction. To understand this Jamesian technique is to hold the key to “darkest James,” the James of the later and more forbidding novels. It is to appreciate more the genius and painstaking effort that went into his work; it is to realize his profound influence on the development of the modern stream-of-consciousness novel.

27See Blackmur, Critical Prefaces, p. xix: "Here it is enough to repeat once more—and not for the last time—that the fine intelligence, either as agent or as the object of action or as both is at the heart of James’s work."
CHAPTER II

THE PREFACE TO THE TURN OF THE SCREW:

THE FINE CENTRAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In Volume XII of his Novels and Tales, James has written a single Preface to discuss his composition of The Aspern Papers, The Turn of the Screw, The Liar, and The Two Faces. In that portion of the Preface devoted to The Turn of the Screw, one of the first significant facts he calls to the reader's attention is the story's origin. The germ of The Turn was a little story told by the distinguished host at a gathering round the fire of a grave old country house. "He had never forgotten the impression made on him as a young man by the withheld glimpse, as it were, of a dreadful matter that had been reported years before, and with as few particulars, to a lady with whom he had youthfully talked. The story would have

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1 An appendix to this thesis will give a detailed topical abstract of the ideas James deals with in his Preface in the order of his treatment. The reader might well consult this summary as he proceeds through the present discussion of the Preface. In this chapter, James's thought is developed with more rigid logic than his original discursive treatment permitted him.
been thrilling could she but have found herself in better possession of it, dealing as it did with a couple of small children in an out-of-the-way place, to whom the spirits of certain 'bad' servants, dead in the employ of the house, were believed to have appeared with the design of 'getting hold' of them: 2

This is the original anecdote. There is the mention of "bad" servants, of children, but not of a governess. An even more explicit statement of this anecdote occurs in James's Notebooks:

Saturday, January 12th, 1895. Note here the ghost-story told me at Addington (evening of Thursday, 10th), by the Archbishop of Canterbury: the mere vague, undetailed, faint sketch of it—being all he had been told (very badly and imperfectly), by a lady who had no art of relation, and no clearness: the story of the young children (indefinite number and age) left to the care of servants in an old country-house, through the death, presumably, of parents. The servants, wicked and depraved, corrupt and deprave the children; the children are bad, full of evil, to a sinister degree. The servants die (the story vague about the way of it) and their apparitions, figures, return to haunt the house and children, to whom they seem to beckon, whom they invite and solicit, from across dangerous Places, the deep ditch of a sunk fence, etc.—so that the children may destroy themselves, lose themselves, by responding, by getting into their power. So long as the children are kept from them they are not lost; but they try and try, these evil presences, to get hold of them. It is a question of the children 'coming over to where they are.' It is all obscure and imperfect, the picture, the story, but there is a suggestion of strangely gruesome effect in it. The story to be told—tolerably obviously—by an outside spectator, observer.3

2 Novels, XII, xv.

This report, written as it is but two days after the occasion of the anecdote, is of much value to the critic. Again, there is mention only of children and depraved servants. The note says unequivocally that these spirits corrupt and deprave the children. There is no mention of a governess. James thinks the story will require an outside spectator, observer. Is James speaking of the governess in this last sentence? It will be demonstrated that he most definitely is, and that his remark about her role in the story proves he devised her as a mere compositional resource, not as the center of interest in the story.

In the above selection from his Notebooks, James calls the anecdote a ghost-story. It is clear, moreover, from James's Preface, that the Archbishop brought up this anecdote precisely as an especially moving example of the ghost-story type--at the moment when "the good, the really effective and heart-shaking ghost-stories (roughly so to term them) appeared all to have

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4See R.L. Wolff, "The Genesis of 'The Turn of the Screw'," American Literature, XIII (March, 1941), 1-8. The Archbishop is Archbishop Edward White Benson. The story of The Turn of the Screw was first published in Collier's Weekly, February 5th-April 16th, 1898.

5James repeats this anecdote to the Archbishop's son, A.C. Benson: "The vaguest essence only was there--some dead servants and some children."--The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), 1, 279-250.
been told, and neither new crop nor new type in any quarter awaited us." The "new type" of ghost-story never satisfied James. Many writers of ghost-stories at the turn of the century had turned for material to the publications of the Society for Psychical Research. Although James was not a member of the Society, founded in 1882, several friends were active in its affairs—especially, its founders, F.W.H. Myers and Edmund Gurney. His brother, William James, was a corresponding member from 1884 to 1889, vice-president from 1890 to 1893, and president from 1894 to 1896.

Henry James had evidently read and studied the reports of this Society. He is familiar with the typical pattern of apparitions in the "mere modern 'psychical' case": "Different signs and circumstances . . . mark these cases; different things are done—though on the whole very little appears to be—by the persons appearing; the point is, however, that some things are never done at all: this negative quantity is large—certain reserves and proprieties and immobilities consistently impose themselves." This "negative quantity," these rules of decorum

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6 *Novels*, XII, xv.

7 See Francis X. Roellinger, Jr., "Psychical Research and 'The Turn of the Screw'," *American Literature*, XX (January, 1949), 401-412.

8 *Novels*, XII, xix.
to which the modern scientific ghost must conform, impose too great artistic limitations on the imagination of the story-teller. In constructing his own phantoms, James says, "I had to decide in fine between having my apparitions correct and having my story 'good'—that is producing my impression of the dreadful, my designed horror. . . . I cast my lot with pure romance, the appearances conforming to the true type being so little romantic." 

Thoroughgoing exponent of realism though he was, James could never allow his love for truth to conflict with his keen artistic sense. There are times when verisimilitude of effect can be achieved by anything but exact verisimilitude of detail. How could James's story evoke an atmosphere of queerness, of horror? "The new type indeed, the mere modern 'psychical' case, washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap, and equipped with credentials vouching for this—the new type clearly promised little, for the more it was respectably certified the less it seemed of a nature to rouse the dear old sacred terror." 

Around the fire, then, at Addington, stimulated by the guests' general lament for the beautiful lost form of the traditional ghost-story and its unsuccessful replacement by the modern psychical case-story, Archbishop Benson recalled his anecdote.

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9 Ibid., xx.

10 Ibid., xv.
From this story-germ, as James explains in his Preface, he constructed the same traditional type of ghost-story.

Good ghosts, speaking by book, make poor subjects, and it was clear that from the first my hovering prowling blighting presences, my pair of abnormal agents, would have to depart altogether from the rules. They would be agents in fact; there would be laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil. Their desire and their ability to do so, visibly measuring meanwhile their effect, together with their observed and described success—this was exactly my central idea; so that, briefly, I cast my lot with pure romance, the appearances conforming to the true type being so little romantic.

This is to say, I recognise again, that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not 'ghosts' at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft; if not, more pleasingly, fairies of the legendary order, wooing their victims forth to see them dance under the moon.11

Thus, his central idea is the effect of the ghosts as agents. They are to cause the Evil in the story. Psychical "ghosts" would not have been useful to James precisely because they were not agents, actors.

In context, the final sentence of the above passage can admit of only one interpretation. James is not, as Wilson would have him, denying that his Quint and Miss Jessel are ghosts; he is saying they are the traditional type of ghost and not the psychic type. Furthermore, if James had chosen to create mere hallucinations, as the proponents of the Freudian theory maintain he did, he would write the very type of modern

11 Ibid., xx.
psychical case-story he scorns here. Were these "ghosts" carefully devised to haunt the little children or only the neurotic mind of a governess? Another statement of James's main intent occurs in a letter to F.W.H. Myers, one of the founders of the Psychical Society: "The thing that, as I recall it, I most wanted not to fail of doing, under penalty of extreme platitude, was to give the impression of the communication to the children of the most infernal imaginable evil and danger—the condition, on their part, of being as exposed as we can humanly conceive children to be. This was my artistic knot to untie, to put any sense or logic into the thing, and if I had known any way of producing more the image of their contact and condition I should assuredly have been proportionately eager to resort to it."\(^{12}\) Clearly, Quint and Miss Jessel were to haunt the children, to expose them to danger and evil.

More must be said about James's exact classification of *The Turn of the Screw*. It is, he says in his Preface, "a fairy-tale pure and simple," a "full-blown flower of high fancy."\(^{13}\) In this pure fancy, moreover, lies the charm of the fairy-tale, both for its author and its reader. The author

\(^{12}\)Letters, I, 300-301.

\(^{13}\)Novels, XII, xvi, xiv.
is given absolute freedom of his creative imagination, with no outside control, no stale pattern of the usual or the true or the terrible that he must follow. The reader, on the other hand, has the perfect delight of roaming in this annexed but independent world in which nothing is right except as he rightly imagines it. However, James is too much the fastidious craftsman ever to permit an unbridled display of pure fancy: "To improvise with extreme freedom and yet at the same time without the possibility of ravage, without the hint of a flood; to keep the stream, in a word, on something like ideal terms with itself: that was here my definite business. The thing was to aim at absolute singleness, clearness and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance; by which law it wouldn't be thinkable except as free and wouldn't be amusing except as controlled."\textsuperscript{14}

James recognizes two classes of the fairy-tale:

(1) "[T]he short and sharp and single, charged more or less with the compactness of anecdote (as to which let the familiars of our childhood, Cinderella and Blue-Beard and Hop o' my Thumb and Little Red Riding Hood and many of the gems of the Brothers Grimm directly testify). . . ."\textsuperscript{15}

(2) The long and loose, the copious, the various, the end-

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., xvii.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., xvi.
less, where, dramatically speaking, roundness is almost sacrificed to fulness, exuberance—e.g., almost any one of the tales of the Arabian Nights.

Why, James asks, does the reader flounder, lose breath, in the longer fairy-tale? This does not happen in the first class, the more successful class of fairy-tale. "We fail, not of continuity, but of an agreeable unity, of the 'roundness' in which beauty and lucidity largely reside—when we go in, as they say, for great lengths and breadths."16 "Keeping it up" is not the problem so much as how it is kept up. An author, after all, can improvise, expand a subject to almost any length, provided he conceives the entirety with an agreeable unity and "roundness" of form. Now, The Turn of the Screw, if it is nothing more, is most certainly long and copious. In the New York edition, it runs to one hundred and sixty-six pages. Yet, James's technical wizardry manages to give it the compactness of Blue-Beard and Cinderella:

The merit of the tale, as it stands, is accordingly, I judge, that it has struggled successfully with its dangers. It is an excursion into chaos while remaining, like Blue-Beard and Cinderella, but an anecdote—though an anecdote amplified and highly emphasised and returning upon itself; as, for that matter, Cinderella and Blue-Beard return. I need scarcely add after this that it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an amusette to catch those not easily caught (the 'fun' of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small),

16 Ibid., xvii.
the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious.\textsuperscript{17}

Here, it will be opportune to examine Mr. Edel's remarks on the resemblance between \textit{The Turn of the Screw} and \textit{Blue-Beard} and \textit{Cinderella}. He makes capital of the fact that James, in his analysis of the fairy-tale, mentioned four stories out of Perrault--\textit{Cinderella}, \textit{Little Red Riding-Hood}, \textit{Hop O' My Thumb}, and \textit{Blue-Beard}--all "psychological fairy-tales and three of them tales of children caught in the play of terrifying forces of aggression."\textsuperscript{18} Edel notices that the governess, like Cinderella, is a youngest child, and has ventured alone into the world. Prince Charming is her own fine, gentlemanly master in Harley Street. The governess, too, has the prying, badgering curiosity of Fatima, Blue-Beard's last wife. These observations, of course, are meant to strengthen the theory that James was writing a psychological thriller about a deluded governess.

Mr. Edel's findings afford the reader an especially colorful example of the misdirected puzzle-hunting and detective work that taint the valuable work of so many contemporary critics. The context of James's observations on the fairy-tale proves he chose these four fairy-tales as familiar examples illustrative of the short, compact tale. He enumerates four exam-

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Tbid.}, xvii-xviii.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Edel, Ghostly Tales}, pp. xx-xxii.
ples and says there are more. He is writing about the form of the fairy-tale; he indicates any number of examples which resemble The Turn of the Screw in its tight, anecdotal form, not in its subject matter.

Again, there is Miss Kenton's strained interpretation of the last sentence in the above quotation. The sentence must not be lifted out of context, nor must phrases in the sentence. James has been talking about his struggle with The Turn's technical difficulties. He is proud of his technical accomplishment. The Turn is a fairy-tale, but unlike the ordinary fairy-tale, it springs "not from an artless and measureless, but from a conscious and cultivated credulity."

This ghost-story is not intended for the simple mind of a child, but for the sophisticated adult. Here was a challenge. James had to "catch" the attention, the interest of those not easily caught. His audience were "jaded, disillusioned, fastidious" adults; and only "cold artistic calculation" could snatch them into the world of pure romance. Miss Kenton would have James say that he was laying a trap for the unwary—and what better trap for the unwary than to disguise the governess' hallucinations as apparent ghosts? Although a subtle interpretation of certain phrases in this passage, Miss Kenton's reading does not fit the entire context.

19Novels, XII, xvi.
Thus far, the logical progression of thought in James’s Preface should be quite clear. He lists the anecdote of *The Turn of the Screw*, labels it a ghost-story about corrupted children, and describes the session of ghost-stories in which it was first introduced. In the story of *The Turn* itself, he says that his ghosts must be agents; they are to corrupt the children. Therefore, they are not the mere passive "ghosts" of the psychic case-study. *The Turn* is to be a fairy-story, combining the length and copiousness of the developmental type of story with the technical compactness of the anecdotal. It is at this point that James has enunciated the first of the two chief technical problems he encountered in composing *The Turn*:

How could he achieve this intensity of form, this singleness and clearness of effect proper to the short anecdote, this sense of the close, the curious, the deep—all sufficiently gripping to charm, to subdue the reader’s attention?

The second of James’s two technical problems is the interesting question of "how best to convey that sense of the depths of the sinister without which my tale would so woefully limp. . . . If my bad things, for 'The Turn of the Screw,' . . . shouldn't seem sufficiently bad, there would be nothing for me but to hang my artistic head lower than I had ever known occasion to do."20 When Douglas, in the opening pages of *The Turn*,

20Ibid., xx-xxi.
speaks of the "dreadful dreadfulness" and the "general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain" of the story he is about to tell, he throws down a challenge. Few stories could possibly fulfill the promise of this boast. How could James ever succeed in describing these indescribably ghastly horrors hinted at in the prologue?

Portentous evil—how was I to save that, as an intention on the part of my demon-spirits, from the drop, the comparative vulgarity, inevitably attending, throughout the whole range of possible brief illustration, the offered example, the imputed vice, the cited act, the limited deplorable presentable instance? One had seen, in fiction, some grand form of wrong-doing, or better still of wrong-being, imputed, seen it promised and announced as by the hot breath of the Pit—and then, all lamentably, shrink to the compass of some particular brutality, some particular immorality, some particular infamy portrayed; with the result, alas, of the demonstration's falling sadly short.

Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself—and that already is a charming job—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.

There is not only from beginning to end of the matter not an inch of expatiating, but my values are positively all blanks.

James's final statements indicate the process he had to follow in order to avoid specifying the evil. This is his secret of indirection, impressionistic ambiguity, what he calls

\[\text{21 Ibid., 148.}\]
\[\text{22 Ibid., xx-xxii.}\]
his "process of adumbration."  

(He is amused that readers could write to accuse him of a monstrous emphasis, an indecent expatiation in *The Turn.* ) How, then, can James *adumbrate,* avoid specifying the evils of *The Turn,* and yet make them clear, sharp, intense enough to win the credulity of the reader?

James's solution to these two compositional problems of *The Turn of the Screw* is, certainly, his employment of the most characteristic technical device in all his fiction. Other writers have solved these same problems in much the same way, but James made the answer peculiarly his own, and formulated it in a manner peculiarly his own. For James, the Fine Central *Consciousness* is the most competent artistic device to achieve

(1) roundness of form, intensity, singleness of effect,

(2) and verisimilitude of effect.

When James applied this device to *The Turn of the Screw* as a solution to its problems, he created the figure of the governess. However, before studying this particular Fine Central *Consciousness* in *The Turn of the Screw,* it will be extremely useful to give an extended, tangential analysis of James's general concept as he himself has formulated it.

Nowhere in his writings, it must be conceded, does James specifically use the term "Fine Central Consciousness." The

\[23\text{Ibid.}, xx.\]
term itself has been invented by the author of this present
thesis as a descriptive title of a particular device which
James so frequently mentions in his Prefaces and Notebooks.
He writes, for example, about Newman, his "lighted figure" pro-
tagonist of The American: "[F]or the interest of everything is
all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation:
at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide conscious-
ness we are seated, from that admirable position we 'assist.'
He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he
feels it, treats it, meets it." He gives the "effect of a
centre. . . ."24 In his Preface to The Wings of the Dove,
James mentions his "registers or 'reflectors,' as I so conveni-
ently name them (burnished indeed as they generally are by the
intelligence, the curiosity, the passion, the force of the
moment, whatever it be, directing them). . . ."25 There are
other passages where James traces from one of his productions
to another "that provision for interest which consists in plac-
ing advantageously, placing right in the middle of the light,
the most polished of possible mirrors of the subject."26 Thus,
in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima, he lists, among

24Critical Prefaces, p. 37.
25Ibid., pp. 300-301.
26Ibid., p. 70.
other characters of his novels, Rowland Mallet in *Roderick Hudson*, the "thickly-peopled imagination" of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Lambert Strether, the "mirror verily of miraculous silver" in *The Ambassadors*, the Prince in the first half and the Princess in the second half of *The Golden Bowl*, the "delicate vision" of Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton*, the "small recording governess confronted with the horrors of *The Turn of the Screw*." These characters are, "so far as their other passions permit, intense perceivers, all, of their respective predicaments."  

What, then, is the "Fine Central Consciousness"? It is the "mirror," "register," "reflector," "recorder," which, in an artful and polished manner, communicates the story; it is the small central "window" through which the reader peers at the scene and characters; it is the consciousness of some character with fine sensibilities and alert intelligence, from whose viewpoint the reader is enabled to follow the drama most profoundly and acutely. It is, above all, this fineness of the consciousness which brings out the best in any situation:

At the same time I confess I never see the leading interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (on the part of the moved and moving creature) subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement. It is as mirrored in that consciousness that the gross fools, the headlong fools, the fatal fools play their part for us—they have much less

to show us in themselves. . . . This means, exactly, that the person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away, the value and beauty of the thing. By so much as the affair matters for some such individual, by so much do we get the best there is of it, and by so much as it falls within the scope of a denser and duller, a more vulgar and more shallow capacity, do we get a picture dim and meagre.\textsuperscript{28}

James's use of the Fine Central Consciousness, then, in his narratives will give them, \textit{first}, intensity, singleness, roundness of form. It is worth remarking that seldom has a novelist brought to his work more of a passion for the beauties of artistic form than James did. An admirer and avid reader of contemporary French Naturalists, he was incapable of writing docilely in the tradition of the loose English novel which preceded him. He appreciates, for example, the "great romantic good faith" of Sir Walter Scott's \textit{Bride of Lammermoor}, but deplores its careless, disfigured form. "The thing has nevertheless paid for its deviation, as I say, by a sacrifice of intensity; the center of the subject is empty and the development pushed off, all round, toward the frame. . . ."\textsuperscript{29} James, it must be remembered, though often speaking as the painter, more often uses the language of the dramatist. How frequently,

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 68.
in his Prefaces and Notebooks, for example, readers encounter the expression, "Dramatise it! Dramatise it!" He is perpetually fretting about the "scene," about groupings of characters, about centres. Unfortunately, the early James won a record of notorious failure as a play-writer. Deeply humiliated, rejected by his public more emphatically than ever before, he was still fertile enough and experimental enough to draw profit in his laboratory of fiction from this failure in the theatre. 30

"When I ask myself," he writes a decade later in his Notebooks, "what there may have been to show for my long tribulation, my wasted years and patiences and pangs, of theatrical experiment, the answer, as I have already noted here, comes up as just possibly this: what I have gathered from it will perhaps have been exactly some such mastery of fundamental statement--of the art and secret of it, of expression, of the sacred mystery of structure." 31

Thus, his lessons taught him by French Naturalism and his own play-writing experiment prompted his almost symbolistic fin-de-siècle concern for a fine unity and intensity of form. "One's work," he writes, "should have composition, because composition alone is positive beauty. . . ." For the beauties of

30 For a description of the failure and James's response to it, see F.W. Dupee, Henry James (New York, 1951), pp. 165-174.

31 Notebooks, pp. 207-208. (Entry: August 11, 1895).
composition, then, he created fine consciousnesses such as Strether's in The Ambassadors: "But Strether's sense of these things, and Strether's only, should avail me for showing them. . . . It would give me a large unity, and that in turn would crown me with the grace to which the enlightened story-teller will at any time, for his interest, sacrifice if need be all other graces whatever. I refer of course to the grace of intensity. . . ."32 If the author adheres rigidly to this single point of view, his entire story will achieve an invaluable unity of form and impression, besides possessing all the borrowed dignity and beauty of this fine consciousness. As a synthesis of James's observations on the use of the Fine Central Consciousness purely for compositional intensity, there is an excellent passage in a letter to the novelist, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, which will bear extended quotation. Mrs. Ward had consulted James on certain details, especially certain particulars on the American background of one of the characters in her forthcoming novel, Eleanor. James, in his answer, finds fault with her use of the Fine Central Consciousness of Eleanor:

[Y]ou don't give him / the reader / a positive sense of dealing with your subject from its logical centre. This centre I gathered to be, from what you told me in Rome (and one gathers it also from the title), the consciousness of Eleanor--to which all the rest (Manisty, Lucy,

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the whole phantasmagoria and drama) is presented by life. I should have urged you: 'Make that consciousness full, rich, universally prehensile and stick to it--don't shift--and don't shift arbitrarily--how, otherwise, do you get your unity of subject or keep up your reader's sense of it?' To which, if you say: How then do I get Lucy's consciousness, I impudently retort: 'By that magnificent and masterly indirectness which means the only dramatic straightness and intensity. You get it, in other words, by Eleanor.' 'And how does Eleanor get it?' 'By Everything! By Lucy, by Manisty, by every pulse of the action in which she is engaged and of which she is the fullest--an exquisite--register. Go behind her miles and miles; don't go behind the others, or the subject--i.e. the unity of impression--goes to smash.'

James's indirectness, his ambiguity, his process of adumbration, therefore, is seen as an essential part of his aim at unity and intensity of form.

The Fine Central Consciousness James devised, moreover, not only for intensity of effect in his fiction, but also to achieve verisimilitude of effect, as has already been noted. Perhaps his clearest observations on handling the problem of verisimilitude are in his Preface to The Princess Casamassima. In this novel, he was writing about the lives of anarchic conspirators in the London underworld. And how could the limited, sheltered experiences in the aristocratic life of Henry James be of any help to him in creating a real and vivid underworld? "Face to face with the idea of Hyacinth's subterraneous politics and occult affiliations," he says, "I recollect perfectly feel-

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33Letters, I, 322-323.
ing, in short, that I might well be ashamed if, with my advantages, . . . I shouldn't be able to piece together a proper semblance of those things, as indeed a proper semblance of all the odd parts of his life. 34 There was always the chance that readers with a much greater knowledge of this London underworld life would challenge the realism of his narrative. Yet, James cleverly observes, they could not challenge his own knowledge of this world if he rendered nothing but his own knowledge of this world. If he could but make his scant shadowy impressions live, he need offer no defense whatever for the sketchiness and vagueness of his picture. If he lacked verisimilitude of detail, he could still take up the impressionistic painter's brush for a verisimilitude of effect. He justifies this artistic expediency in the following terms: "[T]he value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what 'goes on' irreconciliably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface." Or, again: "My scheme called for the suggested nearness (to all our apparently ordered life) of some sinister anarchic underworld, heaving in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague

34 Critical Prefaces, p. 77.
motions and sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and
general looming possibilities."  

Probably nowhere is James more preoccupied with achieving
this impressionistic effect than in his stories of the "supernatural." Here, the effect is lost when the horrible is pre-

sentated directly.

Here prodigies, when they come straight, come with an
effect imperilled; they keep all their character, on the
other hand, by looming through some other history--the
indispensable history of somebody's normal relation to
something. It's in such connexions as these that they most
interest, for what we are then mainly concerned with is
their imputed and borrowed dignity. . . . We but too pro-
bably break down, I have ever reasoned, when we attempt
the prodigy, the appeal to mystification, in itself; with
its 'objective' side too emphasised, the report (it is ten
to one) will practically run thin.  

In this Preface to The Altar of the Dead, James recalls the por-
tentous climax in Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, where the story fails,
the effect is lost, the imaginative effort wasted. Why? Be-
cause "the indispensable history is absent, where the phenomena
evoked, the moving accidents, coming straight, as I say, are
immediate and flat, and the attempt is all at the horrific in
itself." Poe ought to have filtered his narrative through some
Fine Central Consciousness, through some mystified, horrified
perception of the phenomena. "The moving accident, the rare

35 Ibid., pp. 78, 76.
36 Ibid., p. 256.
conjunction, whatever it be, doesn't make the story—in the sense that the story is our excitement, our amusement, our thrill and our suspense; the human emotion and the human attestation, the clustering human conditions we expect presented, only make it. The extraordinary is most extraordinary in that it happens to you and me, and it's of value (of value for others) but so far as visibly brought home to us."37 Readers want to grasp the horrors clearly, but they cannot be held without a gripping atmosphere of mystification, suspense, "thickness."

"We want it clear, goodness knows, but we also want it thick, and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets it. That indeed, when the question is (to repeat) of the 'supernatural,' constitutes the only thickness we do get. . . ."38 More will be said later about this "thickness" as James speaks of it in the Preface to The Turn of the Screw.

To achieve this intensity and verisimilitude, furthermore, James employs the Fine Central Consciousness in two distinctly different ways in his fiction. The importance of making this distinction cannot be over-emphasized. If the critic grasps this distinction, he will grasp with clarity the meaning of the problem in interpreting The Turn of the Screw as technically

37Ibid., pp. 256-257, 257.
38Ibid., p. 256.
formulated in the first chapter of this thesis: "Is the Fine Central Consciousness of the governess both story and compositional center, or merely compositional center?" Thus, the assumption is that James uses the Fine Central Consciousness device in some narratives as both story and compositional center, and in others as compositional center alone. In other words, he uses his device in both groups of stories to solve compositional problems, to attain intensity and verisimilitude in the manner already described; he creates a character or characters to act as compositional centres. However, in one group of stories, this same Consciousness is the center of interest, the leading character; in the other group it is not. In one group, James is chiefly interested in studying a particular human consciousness from the inside; in the other, James is chiefly interested in something outside, something seen, felt, mirrored by a particular human consciousness--it is not so much the Consciousness as such that concerns him, but the Consciousness as an intense perceiver, recording phenomena more interesting than itself. James, with less indirection than usual, sharply distinguishes between these two disparate uses of his Fine Central Consciousness in the Preface to The Golden Bowl. He has much to say, first of all, about using the device as a compositional resource alone.

I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, and even to extravagance commented on, my preference for dealing with
my subject-matter, for 'seeing my story,' through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. Again and again, on review, the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it—the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. The somebody is often, among my shorter tales I recognise, but an unnamed, unintroduced and (save by right of intrinsic wit) unwarranted participant, the impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied.39

This particular type of Fine Central Consciousness, then, is "unnamed," "detached," "not strictly involved," mainly a critic, an interpreter of a situation outside himself. The Consciousness need not, of course, be unnamed, or be strictly outside a situation, to function merely as a compositional center alone. His viewpoint must be near to the situation, after all, if his reporting is to be plausible and interesting. The point is that this particular Consciousness is merely functional, and that it is not the center of interest in the story.

On the other hand, there is the Consciousness that is functional and also the center of interest. In The Golden Bowl, the Prince and the Princess are the two compositional centers of the story; that is, the story is told in the third person

39Ibid., p. 327.
only as it appears, first, to the Prince's Consciousness, and then, later, only as it appears to the Princess' Consciousness. These two characters, moreover, are the leading characters of the novel. Let James himself speak in full on this significant point:

[T]he whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters. The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us--very nearly (though he doesn't speak in the first person) after the fashion of other reporters and critics of other situations. Having a consciousness highly susceptible of registration, he thus makes us see the things that may most interest us reflected in it as in the clean glass held up to so many of the 'short stories' of our long list; and yet after all never a whit to the prejudice of his being just as consistently a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general imbroglio, actor in the offered play. The function of the Princess, in the remainder, matches exactly with his; the register of her consciousness is as closely kept--as closely, say, not only as his own, but as that (to cite examples) either of the intelligent but quite unindividualised witness of the destruction of 'The Aspern Papers,' or of the all-noting heroine of 'The Spoils of Poynton,' highly individualised though highly intelligent; the Princess, in fine, in addition to feeling everything she has to, and to playing her part just in that proportion, duplicates, as it were, her value and becomes a compositional resource, and of the finest order, as well as a value intrinsic.40

Thus, the Prince's Consciousness is just as functional as the purely compositional-resource Consciousness that James described before; however, this Consciousness is an entangled actor in the present story. The Princess, like the Prince, besides being

40 Ibid., p. 329.
an important actor, a "value intrinsic," "duplicates her value" to the author by providing him with a Consciousness that is functional to his artistic plans. James expresses his disparate uses of the Fine Central Consciousness in his fiction very concisely, and exemplifies:

(1) There is the intelligent, but unindividualized witness of The Aspern Papers--the Fine Central Consciousness as compositional center alone.

(2) There is the intelligent, but highly individualized all-noting heroine of The Spoils of Poynton--the Fine Central Consciousness as both compositional resource and value intrinsic, as compositional center and center of interest in the story.

It is clear, therefore, that the criterion James has in his own mind for distinguishing between these two uses of the Fine Central Consciousness is the degree of its individualization in the story, the degree of manifestation, through entanglement, engagement, activity, of its unique personal attributes.

The characters of the Prince and the Princess in The Golden Bowl, accordingly, exemplify a collective Fine Central Consciousness used as compositional and story center. Fleda Vetch in The Spoils of Poynton, Newman in The American, Strether in The Ambassadors, and Maisie in What Maisie Knew exemplify a single Fine Central Consciousness used as compositional and story center. What Maisie Knew, for example, is the subtly constructed
story of a small girl's moral growth to maturity in the very midst of the most corrupting circumstances. James states the center of interest in his Preface: "She wonders, in other words, to the end, to the death—the death of her childhood, properly speaking. . . ." Furthermore, compositionally speaking, Maisie herself is the "ironic center" of the story. The story will be told "only as it might pass before her and appeal to her, as it might touch her or effect her, for better or worse, for perceptive gain or perceptive loss. . . ."41 A passage from the story itself will illustrate how James presents Maisie as compositional and story center. Maisie is speaking about Mrs. Wix, her governess, to Sir Claude:

Maisie let the question wait; the concrete image it presented was the most vivid side of it. 'If I part with her where will she go?'
'Back to London.'
'But I mean what will she do?'
'Oh as for that I won't pretend I know. I don't. We all have our difficulties.'
That, to Maisie, was at this moment more striking than it had ever been. 'Then who'll teach me?'
Sir Claude laughed out. 'What Mrs. Wix teaches?'
She smiled dimly; she saw what he meant. 'It isn't so very very much.'42

Maisie is the mirror of what is happening; besides, she is most involved in what is happening. The consequences are most important to her plight in the story if Mrs. Wix is taken from her.

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41 Ibid., p. 146, 145.
42 Novels, XI, 336.
On the other hand, James could use a collective Fine Central Consciousness as compositional center, but--unlike The Golden Bowl--not as story center. There is the group of various human registers viewing Milly in The Wings of the Dove. Milly is the Dove of the story, the center of interest. However, "I note how, again and again," James writes in his Preface, "I go but a little way with the direct--that is with the straight exhibition of Milly; it resorts for relief, this process, whenever it can, to some kinder, some merciful indirection: all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with; the pressure all round her kept easy for her, the sounds, the movements regulated, the forms and ambiguities made charming." 43 Here, again, James puts himself on record as consciously striving for "charming" indirection and ambiguities, in his use of Fine Central Consciousnesses.

An excellent example of a single Fine Central Consciousness serving as compositional center, but not story center, is the character of Rowland Mallet in Roderick Hudson. In the Preface, James remarks that the whole story "was to be the sum of what 'happened' to him, or in other words his total adventure; but as what happened to him was above all to feel certain things happening to others, to Roderick, to Christina, to Mary Garland,

43Critical Prefaces, p. 306.
to Mrs. Hudson, to the Cavaliere, to the Prince, so the beauty of the constructional game was to preserve in everything its especial value for him." From Mallet's Consciousness, then, "the subject has been treated, from this centre the interest has spread, and so, whatever else it may do or may not do, the thing has acknowledged a principle of composition and contrives at least to hang together."  

Throughout Roderick Hudson, the reader sees nothing except through Mallet's vision. A few passages chosen at random will demonstrate James's indirect presentation of Roderick through Rowland Mallet's eyes: "All this to Rowland was ancient history, but his perception of it stirred within him afresh at the sight of Roderick's sense of having been betrayed." Or, again: "Roderick had got up and he began to walk about the room; Rowland felt how as never yet there was something reckless in him to count with."  

James, of course, did not confine his use of the Fine Central Consciousness exclusively to third-person narration. A great many of his short stories are told in the first person singular. There is the "I" in The Figure in the Carpet, for example, a literary critic, who is actively engaged with two other characters in solving the problem posed. Certainly, the

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44 Ibid., pp. 16, 15.

45 Novels, I, 430, 422.
Fine Central Consciousness employed here is both compositional and story center, since the narrator characterizes himself highly, and fully participates in the action of the story.

Examples of the Fine Central Consciousness used as compositional center alone are the extremely detached newspaper-reporter narrator in Greville Fane, or the narrator-friend of the sensitive butler, Brooksmith, in the story, Brooksmith. James has experimented considerably with variants of this Fine Central Consciousness as compositional center alone. For example, in Maud-Evelyn, an unnamed, purely compositional Fine Central Consciousness, in a group with others around the fire, introduces Lady Emma, another purely compositional Consciousness. Lady Emma tells a story in her own words about Livinia, the leading character in the story. Again, in The Friends of the Friends, an unnamed Consciousness that is purely compositional introduces the diary of another unnamed Consciousness. The latter writes of herself and her unnamed friends—"She writes sometimes of herself, sometimes of others, sometimes of the combination," the first narrator says in his prologue as he examines her diary.\textsuperscript{46} Although it is difficult to determine with certainty, this unnamed authoress of the diary seems sufficiently characterized and engaged in the story to qualify at least as one of its cen-

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., XVII, 323.
ters of interest. 47

This is a very concise exposition of James's theory and use of the Fine Central Consciousness. He devised it to solve the two problems of intensity and verisimilitude of effect. He uses it sometimes merely as a compositional center, other times as both compositional center and center of interest in the story. He employs single centers and corporate centers. He narrates in both the third person and the first person. In some of his stories narrated in the first person, he has striven for greater plausibility by introducing a number of intermediate narrators between the reader and the chief narrator of the story.

In The Turn of the Screw, his technique in using the first person narrator is remarkably similar to that in Maud-Evelyn and The Friends of the Friends. An unnamed, purely compositional Fine Central Consciousness introduces Douglas, another purely compositional Consciousness, who, in turn, introduces the manuscript of an unnamed governess, the third Fine Central Consciousness. Is this Fine Central Consciousness of the governess, then, merely a third compositional center, or is she both compositional and story center? The answer to this question is: the governess is a third, a purely compositional center.

47See Critical Prefaces, p. 321. Here James discusses his objections to using a first-person Consciousness as the leading character in a story. For an excellent exposition of his use of the first person in narration, see Beach, The Method, pp. 64-68.
James speaks unequivocally on this point in his Preface to The Turn. A reader had reproached him with the complaint that he had not sufficiently characterized his young governess "engaged in her labyrinth; hadn't endowed her with signs and marks, features and humours, hadn't in a word invited her to deal with her own mystery as well as with that of Peter Quint, Miss Jessel and the hapless children." Note that this is a protest against insufficient characterization. The proponents of the hallucination theory, on the contrary, would never protest in this manner. They believe the governess is characterized to such a degree that one must conclude that James's chief intent in the story is no less than a characterization of this governess. Note that James, in his response to this complaint, does not deny it. He acknowledges this insufficient characterization as a real difficulty he himself encountered in the story's composition. However, his excuse is precisely that his chief interest in the story is not the governess' characterization; there were more important matters. He was not writing primarily to characterize the governess; her character traits are a minor concern. "[O]ne has to choose ever so delicately," James responds to the complaint, "among one's difficulties, attaching one's self to the greatest, bearing hard on those and

48 Novels, XII, xviii.
intelligently neglecting the others. If one attempts to tackle them all one is certain to deal completely with none; whereas the effectual dealing with a few casts a blest golden haze under cover of which, like wanton mocking goddesses in clouds, the others find prudent to retire." It was 'déjà très-joli,' in 'The Turn of the Screw,' please believe, the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities—by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter; and I saw no way, I feebly grant (fighting, at the best too, periodically, for every grudged inch of my space) to exhibit her in relations other than those; one of which, precisely, would have been her relation to her own nature. We have surely as much of her own nature as we can swallow in watching it reflect her anxieties and inductions. It constitutes no little of a character indeed, in such conditions, for a young person, as she says, 'privately bred,' that she is able to make her particular credible statement of such strange matters. She has 'authority,' which is a good deal to have given her, and I couldn't have arrived at so much had I clumsily tried for more.

James explicitly says that he was using her as a compositional center to present the story, and that he could not have added to her personal drama, added to her characterization, her "relation to her own nature," without weakening her function. Besides,

\[49\] Ibid., xviii-xix.
\[50\] Ibid., xix.
since his magazine publisher demanded, as usual, that he try to keep his short stories "short," James must ration out his space so that more important story-interests receive more development. The reader must have no more of the governess before his eyes except her qualifications to make statements that will be credible. James wants to present the reader just enough of her character to establish her "authority" in narration. Had he clumsily tried to develop her further, she would not have proved so successful a functional center, James would not have achieved so much technical success with her role as he actually did.

James definitely did not write The Turn as a characterization of the governess. On the contrary, he tried to keep her as impersonal, as uncharacterized, as her function would allow. In a letter to H.G. Wells, he expresses himself unequivocally: "Of course I had, about my young woman, to take a very sharp line. The grotesque business I had to make her picture and the childish psychology I had to make her trace and present, were, for me at least, a very difficult job, in which absolute lucidity and logic, a singleness of effect, were imperative. Therefore I had to rule out subjective complications of her own--play of tone, etc.; and keep her impersonal save for the most obvious and indispensable little note of neatness, firmness and courage--without which she wouldn't have had her data."\(^51\)

\(^{51}\)Letters, I, 298-299.
An even clearer statement of the governess' role occurs in the final sentence of James's initial jottings on The Turn in his Notebooks. As observed before, James, after listing the anecdote about ghosts and corrupted children—but not about a governess—notes: "The story to be told—tolerably obviously—by an outside spectator, observer." Accordingly, James devised a character to serve a subordinate, a merely technical role, to serve as an outside spectator, observer. This character he fitted with certain personal traits that would enhance its role as observer. It must be intelligent, with a sufficiently friendly or professional interest in the main characters to speak naturally and plausibly about their affairs. James decided to make this character a governess, that standard type of intelligent, sympathetic reporting. The Fine Central Consciousness of the governess, then, as described in the Preface to The Turn, James's Notebooks, and his letter to H.G. Wells, is merely compositional, and not the center of interest in the story.

Consequently, the "authority" which James says he gives his governess is by no means what Edmund Wilson and Marius Bew-

52 Notebooks, pp. 178-179.

53 Edel argues that James showed his chief interest in the story was in the character of the governess when he substituted "I felt" for "I saw" in his revision of the story. This argument is irrelevant when James's intent of impressionism is remembered in his use of Consciousnesses. He could be improving the governess either as story-center or as compositional center.
ley interpret it to be. Following Wilson's suggestion, Bewley constructs a highly intricate argument. The "authority" given the governess is to be understood as the relentless English "authority," the capacity to dominate over and deceive inferiors. James did not include *The Turn of the Screw* in the volume with his other ghost stories, but placed it beside *The Liar*, the story of a pathological liar. Wilson thinks Colonel Cappadose is the liar indicated in the title of this story. Bewley goes further. In a lengthy analysis of *The Liar*, Bewley attempts to demonstrate that Colonel Cappadose, the apparently chief liar, is not the center of interest in the story; but Oliver Lyon, the successful young portrait painter, through whose Fine Central Consciousness the story is told in third-person narration, is the chief liar of the story, and, consequently, its center of interest. This narrator, then, is a liar, just as the governess-narrator of *The Turn* is a liar. James, again, is playing tricks on the reader, deceiving him with his intricate ambiguities.54

Here again, in Bewley's theories, one has to face the vagaries of an undisciplined rationalism. To begin with, Bewley's interpretation of *The Liar* has the very least bearing on an interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*. His interpretation of *The Liar* happens to be quite implausible, but the scope of this

54Bewley, *Complex Fate*, pp. 84-87, 135-136.
present discussion does not permit space for an adequate refutation of it. Truly, James tried as far as possible, when he placed his shorter tales side by side in a particular volume of his collected works, to place "like with like." However, this customary practice is not to be taken as an absolute criterion in interpreting those works. For one thing, he did not always follow this customary practice. In the Preface to a volume containing more than one work, James frequently explains his reasons for including them together. Unfortunately, however, he did not choose thus to explain himself in the Preface to the volume including The Aspern Papers, The Turn of the Screw, The Liar, and The Two Faces. The Jamesian critic must remember that James does not always let similarity either of theme or of treatment guide him in selecting tales for inclusion in one volume. "I have placed 'Julia Bride,' for material reasons, at the end of this Volume," he writes in his Preface to The Altar of the Dead, etc., "quite out of her congruous company, though not very much out of her temporal order. . . ."55 Nevertheless, in this very Preface to James's volume of ghost stories, Bewley should have observed that The Turn of the Screw is included among a short list of ghost stories, in such "congruous company" as The Jolly Corner, The Friends of the Friends, Sir Edmund

55Critical Prefaces, p. 252.
Orme, and The Real Right Thing.56 Besides, The Turn of the Screw much more resembles The Aspern Papers than it does The Liar. The Aspern Papers is the first tale in the volume that includes The Turn. Its length is almost that of The Turn, twice as long as that of The Liar. The narrator in The Aspern Papers is an unnamed "I"; so is the governess in The Turn. As noted previously, James singled out the "intelligent but quite unindividuated witness" in The Aspern Papers as an example of the Fine Central Consciousness used merely as compositional center but not as the center of the story. And, as has been demonstrated, this is precisely the function of the governess.

Thus, Bewley's intricate analysis of The Liar bears little on interpreting The Turn, if it has any bearing at all. Moreover, when Bewley and Wilson interpret James's use of the word "authority" to mean "deception," they unjustifiably sidestep the word's more common, obvious denotation. James invests the governess with the right of witness, of recorder, reporter, observer. She has "authority" for the reader, who will know that he is to trust her implicitly.57

56 Ibid., p. 257.

57 See F.R. Leavis' remarks on "authority" and Bewley's interpretation of the word, in his "Disagreement," cited in Bewley, Complex Fate, p. 117. See also Oliver Evans, "James's Air of Evil: The Turn of the Screw," Partisan Review, XVI (February, 1949), 180.
If James used the Fine Central Consciousness, then, in The Turn of the Screw, merely as a trustworthy spectator of the ghosts and children, why did he strain the reader's credulity in her report by writing so ambiguously, why did he permit her to act so intuitively on so little objective evidence? The critic must remember, first of all, that the story itself is sufficiently unambiguous about the role of the governess, about the validity of her testimony. James definitely did not make her role ambiguous. Yet, he did make the exact nature of the evils she encounters ambiguous. Certain details of her testimony are admittedly ambiguous, vague. Mr. Bewley, following Miss Kenton, says: "This ambiguity amounts to trickery, of course--trickery of a kind that seems to me to be below the level of an artist of James's stature. And yet it is more than trickery. It is the most tortuous exemplification in James's work of that tension between appearance and reality--or, in this case, a wanton wrenching apart of the two terms." No, this ambiguity is not trickery, by any means. How obviously such a gratuitous attack against James belittles his great artistic standards! Much of this ambiguity can be explained away, as has already been observed, as part of James's characteristic

58 Internal evidence examined in the next chapter will justify these assertions.

59 Bewley, Complex Fate, p. 110.
artistic material to achieve intensity and verisimilitude of effect. He wants his horrors unspecified, adumbrated. However, some of this ambiguity cannot be so conveniently accounted for. James humbly admits that a certain amount of ambiguity will result from his own imperfect artistic execution: "There they are—the fruit, at best, of a very imperfect ingenuity and with all the imperfections thereof on their heads," he writes to F.W.H. Myers in reference, especially, to ambiguities in The Turn. "The one thing and another that are questionable and ambiguous in them I mostly take to be conditions of their having got themselves pushed through at all." ⁶⁰

The remarkable intuitions of the governess, on the other hand, are a different matter. One of the characteristics of James's Fine Central Consciousnesses is, as observed before, their Fineness, their sensibility, their extraordinarily keen perception of impressions and intelligent interpretation of them. "Their being finely aware—as Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware—makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them," James writes in his Preface to The Princess Casamassima. "We care, our curiosity and our sympathy care, comparatively little for what happens to the stupid, the coarse and the blind; care for it, and

⁶⁰Letters, I, 300-301.
for the effects of it, at the most as helping to precipitate what happens to the more deeply wondering, to the really sentient. However, James himself recognizes the possible danger that his vessels of consciousness could carry too much sensibility, could be too fine:

They may carry too much of it for our credence, for our compassion, for our derision. They may be shown as knowing too much and feeling too much—not certainly for their remaining remarkable, but for their remaining 'natural' and typical, for their having the needful communities with our own precious liability to fall into traps and be bewildered. It seems probable that if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us; we should partake of the superior nature of the all-knowing immortals whose annals are dreadfully dull so long as flurried humans are not, for the positive relief of bored Olympians, mixed up with them. Therefore it is that the wary reader for the most part warns the novelist against making his characters too interpretative of the middle of fate, or in other words too divinely, too priggishly clever.

James, accordingly, quite concerns himself about keeping the judgments and intuitions of his Fine Central Consciousnesses thoroughly likely and human. The problem offered him a constant challenge. For example, he remarks in the Preface to Roderick Hudson: "It had, naturally, Rowland's consciousness, not to be too acute—which would have disconnected it and made it superhuman: the beautiful little problem was to keep it connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure, and there-

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61 Critical Prefaces, p. 63.
62 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
by bedimmed and befooled and bewildered, anxious, restless, fallible, and yet to endow it with such intelligence that the appearances reflected in it, and constituting together there the situation and the 'story,' should become by that fact intelligible." Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that James feared his readers and critics might possibly find the intuitions and interpretations of his governess in The Turn "too acute," "too divinely, too priggishly clever." There are certainly passages in the story which justify his fears, where the mind of the governess is almost superhuman, "Olympian," too quick, too nimble, too intuitive. James would undoubtedly be the first to acknowledge these passages as artistic imperfections--minor ones though they be. Although at times he does not succeed in carrying out his purpose, he aims at keeping the governess "bedimmed, befooled, bewildered," to make her character plausibly human.

Therefore, in creating his atmosphere of mystification and excitement in The Turn of the Screw, James turns to this Fine Central Consciousness of the governess. "We want it clear, goodness knows, but we also want it thick and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets it," he writes in his Preface to The

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63 Ibid., p. 16.
Altar of the Dead. 64 James intends, he says, in probably the most obscure and controversial passage in the Preface to The Turn, 65 to keep crystalline the governess' record of the sinister happenings at Bly. She is to record, to mirror her sensations with clarity. Then, James adds parenthetically: "by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter." Edmund Wilson states, "These words seem impossible to explain except on the hypothesis of hallucination." 66 On the contrary, what James means by this last remark is this: her record of the sensations should be perfectly clear, but her interpretation of these sensations is not to be perfectly clear. Her job is to keep a clear record of sinister phenomena, but she is not to explain them away, because by so doing she would remove the atmosphere of thick mystification so essential to the tone of horror and evil James is trying to sustain. And to the degree that the governess observes and records, yet is mystified, so is the reader held to the very end in the vise of expectant disclosure, always straining to penetrate the atmospheric haze of mystification. James, again, must keep her "bedimmed, bewil-

64 Ibid., p. 256.
65 Quoted in context on p. 55 above.
66 Wilson, Triple Thinkers, pp. 130-131.
dered, befooled," mystified in her interpretative judgments. 67

In summary, then, a careful analysis of the Preface to The Turn of the Screw demonstrates that it treats in miniature James's habitual technical problems of intensity and verisimilitude of effect, and presents his characteristic solution to these problems in his creation of a particular Fine Central Consciousness, that of the governess. Moreover, the Preface to The Turn of Screw, read in the light of passages from James's other Prefaces, his Notebooks, and his correspondence, reveals sufficient external evidence to refute the hallucination theory, point for point. The hallucination theory maintains:

(1) The story is riddled with ambiguous situations in which the reader has difficulty justifying the governess' interpretation of her sensations in the light of her record of the sensations themselves.

(2) The evils in the story exist only in the governess'

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67 This is the interpretation given in G.A. Reed, "Another Turn on James's The Turn of the Screw," American Literature, XX (January, 1949), 419. See Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel (London, 1947), pp. 138-145. Liddell's refutation of the hallucination theory is convincing, except in his interpretation of the present passage. He attempts to prove that James is somehow qualifying the eschatological status of the apparitions. The governess records accurately her perception of spirits. She thinks they once animated the bodies of Quint and Miss Jessel. But they are actually devils that have assumed the form of the servants to tempt the children. Although a possible interpretation, this is not the most obvious one. Moreover, it introduces additional complications to the already numerous ones.
mind.

(3) The characterization of the governess, the psychological case study of her neurotic sex repressions, is James's main concern in the story.

Against such contentions, however, the present reading of the Preface to *The Turn of the Screw* has demonstrated:

(1) The story is admittedly riddled with ambiguities. Nevertheless, as far as James's expressed intentions are concerned, the ambiguities reside, not in her role, but in the details of the evils she encounters. (Internal story evidence will prove that James fulfilled his intentions.) The ambiguities are a conscious offshoot, as he himself acknowledges, of his method of impressionistic adumbration. James, too, intends her intuitions, her interpretations of her sensations, to be extraordinarily sharp and intelligent, but never super-human and unconvincing. James's method is not a deliberate trick to catch the unwary reader in a trap, but only his means of rendering the reader's imagination fertilely active, attentive.

(2) The evils in the story are real, and are caused by ghosts. The original anecdote from which James developed his story pictures ghosts corrupting children. James, too, expresses his intent to write about ghosts who are "agents of evil" in *The Turn*. He classifies both the anecdote and the story as ghost-stories. He prefers to employ the traditional ghost to
the "psychic" ghost precisely because the traditional ghost is more the agent, the cause of evils. James does not want to write a "psychic case-study." The governess is to serve as an observer, a perceiver of the evils in the story, recording her impressions clearly, but wondering about and questioning them in her interpretation of them. She is given "authority," not in order to deceive the reader, but to bear him credible testimony.

(3) The characterization of the governess is not James's main concern because the corruption of children by ghosts is his main concern. This is proved most indisputably by his remarks that the governess is insufficiently characterized to be the center of interest in the story, that he is employing her Fine Central Consciousness merely as a compositional center, but not as the story-center in The Turn.

Thus, James has left no doubt whatever about his explicit creative intentions. His own interpretation of The Turn is incontestably not the hallucination interpretation. It may be questioned how proponents of the hallucination theory have been able to misrepresent him as contributing external evidence to their position. Although their quotations from James reveal an apparent familiarity with the Preface to The Turn, yet for one reason or another they have significantly neglected to account for the Preface in its entirety, they have not attempted to relate it organically to the context of his other Prefaces,
they have omitted an investigation of his important Notebooks and his correspondence. There may be some excuse for this unfortunate negligence. Some of the critics may be so preoccupied with the resident aesthetic elements in a piece of literature that they approach external documents indifferently, almost carelessly—if they approach them at all—and tend only to select passages seemingly confirmatory of their interpretations pre-established from internal evidence. Again, other critics may approach the external evidence with a much more conscientious sense of scholarship, but may lack the aptitude, the stamina, or the sustaining interest indispensable to delving thoroughly into accessory documents. James's Prefaces, for example, have prompted at least one Jamesian scholar to admit: "Deeply interesting as they are, few but professional students would have the hardihood and pertinacity to make their way through these scattered considerations, to view them in connection with the stories themselves, and, from the whole, to put together some connected account of the aims and method of our author."

68Beach, The Method, p. 2.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

James, therefore, intended to portray Miles and Flora as actually haunted and corrupted by the ghosts of *The Turn of the Screw*. Consequently, he wanted to convince the reader that the governess' account of their exposure is *authentic*. It is no surprise then that he wrote certain passages into the story itself which admit of one interpretation alone: ghosts haunted and corrupted the children. However, as noted before, there are numerous passages in *The Turn* which may be read ambiguously. They do not prove conclusively that the governess' story is authentic—nor, for that matter, do they prove that she is a liar.

Since the purpose of the present chapter is but to uncover passages that verify—alone and without ambiguity—the interpretation already established from external evidence, it may seem poor critical strategy to study any of the ambiguous passages at all. However, proponents of the hallucination theory have insisted on treating some ambiguous passages as if they were very unambiguous. In fact, the strongest positive argu-
ments supporting their Freudian interpretation rest upon three groups of ambiguous textual passages. If these passages can be proved sufficiently ambiguous, the Freudians will require further determining evidence to establish a conclusive position.

First, there is the question of the Freudian sexual imagery in the story. The reader might be interested in a representative list of these symbols. Artist Demuth originally selected four scenes for his illustrations, with the following legends:

(1) "I can see . . . the way . . . his hand . . . passed from one crenelation to the next." (2) "They moved slowly, in unison, below us, over the lawn, the boy, as they went, reading aloud from a story-book, and passing his arm round his sister to keep her quite in touch." (3) "She had picked up a small flat piece of wood, which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat." (Flora at the lake.) (4) "Did I steal?" (Miles, in the final interview with the governess.)

Edmund Wilson mentions, besides these four details, "the fact that the male apparition first appears on a tower and the female apparition on

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1Wolff, pp. 1-2. Wolff describes Demuth's pictures. No exact references to the text of The Turn are given in his listing of the legends. The first is a description of Quint's movements in his initial apparition on the tower.
a lake, the governess' complex loves, first for her employer and then for the little boy, and her unwillingness to trouble her employer over the matter of the apparitions for fear that he would think she had attempted to attract his attention to her own slighted charms. R.L. Wolff, although an opponent of the hallucination theory, cites other passages he believes susceptible of a Freudian interpretation: "Flora whom... I had established in the schoolroom with a sheet of white paper, a pencil and a copy of nice 'round 0's,' now presented herself to view at the open door." When Miles and the governess are left alone at dinner, they are "silent while the maid was with us--as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as some young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter."3

What is to be said of these Freudian symbols and hidden sexual meanings? First of all, the symbols themselves--round 0's, a tower, a lake, two pieces of wood, certain suggestive metaphors, etc.--are the decoration of the story and not the story itself. They come from the subconscious mind of Henry James, who may or may not have been conscious of their sexual significance. Are the Freudians suggesting that James actually anticipated Freud? Or, if unaware of these symbols' Freudian

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2Wilson, Triple Thinkers, p. 125.

3Novels, XII, 167, 296. Quoted in Wolff, p. 2.
meaning, is he unconsciously revealing experiences in his own sex life or in that of the governess? Furthermore, if the governor's testimony is trustworthy, even its adumbrated record seems to hint that Quint and Miss Jessel committed fornication, and that Quint very likely had established some sort of homosexual relationship with Miles. James's conscious intelligence may well have been making a great work of art out of an exceptionally sordid story; some unresolved elements lingering in the unconscious might consequently have found their resolution in the imagery, and have added to the total atmosphere of evil. Here, then, is ambiguity. The Turn's sexual imagery gives no conclusive proof of the hallucination theory. What, however, of the apparent love affair between the governess and the master?

This is the second ambiguity which the Freudians interpret unambiguously to support their position. The governess is certainly admitted to have been in love with her master. Douglas speaks of this fact even before he begins reading her manuscript. However, it is significant that the governess speaks outright about her love from the very beginning. She says to Mrs. Grose after first meeting her, "I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!" Mrs. Grose takes this in, and asks,

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4See Liddell, Treatise, pp. 144-145. After discussing the Freudian imagery, he concludes: "[T]t is only another illustration of the way everything sometimes works together for good when a novelist is producing a great novel."
"In Harley Street?" "In Harley Street," says the governess. "Well, Miss," says Mrs. Grose, "you're not the first--and you won't be the last." Again, the governess acknowledge this love as one of the chief motives that inspire her courage. "I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen--oh in the right quarter!--that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed." The "right quarter," is, of course, Harley Street. When the panic-stricken Mrs. Grose suggests that the governess write the master for help, the governess will have none of it. "You see me asking him for a visit?" she says. Mrs. Grose, surely, could not imagine "his derision, his amusement, his contempt for the breakdown of my resignation at being left alone and for the fine machinery I had set in motion to attract his attention to my slighted charms. She didn't know--no one knew--how proud I had been to serve him and to stick to our terms. . . ." Wilson and the other Freudians would have the governess suffering psychopathically of a repressed passion for her master. But the story, on the contrary, does not portray this passion as repressed; her feelings are ever in the open, and she speaks even

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5 Novels, XII, 162.
6 Ibid., 199.
7 Ibid., 239-240.
gaily about them. The reader is actually never led to believe this relationship developed into anything further than a schoolgirlish crush. Nevertheless, why should James have emphasized the governess' fascinated devotion to the master? It is not necessary to conclude that he wanted her to have some excuse for hallucinations. More probably, as some critics have suggested, he wanted somehow to motivate her acceptance of a peculiarly difficult governess' position, and, especially, to explain her stubborn refusal to call in the master, to over-ride his irresponsible wish not to be bothered. This young woman was to experience the most dreadful horrors; accordingly, she must have some very plausible motive to continue facing them alone with the reader until the very end of the story. Her love for the master, then, may be ambiguously interpreted—although it more readily admits of a compositional explanation than a pathological one.

The third principal argument the Freudians allege to discredit the governess' testimony and to prove hallucinations is the fact of her extreme youth, inexperience, and impressionability. Yet, in the Prologue to The Turn, Douglas, a middle-aged gentleman, seems to give her the proper credentials to speak authoritatively: "She was a most charming person... She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she'd

8 Reed, pp. 417-418; Heilman, pp. 436-437.
have been worthy of any whatever. . . . [S]he struck me as awfully clever and nice. . . . I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too. . . ." He later pictures her hesitation about accepting the job at Bly: "She was young, untried, nervous: it was a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness." Mr. Edel, however, carefully examines the time-scheme implicit in Douglas' remarks, and decides:

This means that Douglas must have been eighteen or perhaps twenty when he had completed his second year at the university; and the governess, ten years older, would be about thirty when Douglas met her and found her 'nice.' And the meeting was ten years after the events described in her manuscript.

The time-scheme is extremely important in this story. It establishes, for one thing, that Douglas's testimony is based on the personality of the governess as it was ten years after the events of the story. By that time we can presume she had learned the ways of the world. We are explicitly told that at twenty she knew little of the world; she had emerged from a cloistered Hampshire vicarage, the youngest of several daughters of a poor and--as she describes him--eccentric country parson. The narrative itself emphasizes her rusticity and unworldliness: she had never seen herself in a full-length mirror; she had never read a novel (and at Bly she reads Fielding's Amelia which has the word 'rape' and the word 'adultery' on its first page). . . . [S]he must make her own decisions and may not communicate with her employer. These are circumstances enough to make for nervousness and anxiety in a young girl taking her first job. In effect she has jumped from a humble parsonage to the role of mistress of a country house and to vicarious motherhood of two beautiful children.

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9Novels, XII, 149-150, 155.

10Edel, The Psychological Novel, pp. 60-61. Edel's own observation about the first page of Amelia is typical Edelian sleuthing.
Nevertheless, the fact that Douglas knew the governess ten years after the events of the story can lead the reader to draw conclusions from the time-scheme exactly contrary to those of Mr. Edel’s. To Douglas, she shows no obvious signs of mental deterioration or instability ten years after the events. On the contrary, as Douglas looks back at her, he acknowledges she charmed him so thoroughly that he in no way repudiates or qualifies his youthful feeling for her. The Freidians would have the governess frighten Miles to death. Such a dangerously neurotic woman would seem to have been close to criminal insanity. In the intervening ten years after this experience, it is quite difficult to imagine any possible cure that could obliterate all traces of such a mental condition. Yet, James, on the other hand, makes sure her character is sufficiently sane and accredited by presenting her as a charming person of good breeding after her experience (in Douglas’ capable estimate), and before her experience (the fact of her youth, innocence, respectable family background, etc.). Most probably, James makes her young, sensitive, inexperienced precisely in order to have her vibrate the more intensely to manifestations of evil around her; in order to have her win the more sympathy of readers. Besides, by having the governess record her story some years after the events had happened, he gives her a chance to weigh her evidence objectively and at the same time removes the likelihood
that her data were the product of emotional hysteria. The fact of the governess' youth and inexperience, and the fact that Douglas knew her ten years after the events of her story, therefore, can be ambiguously interpreted either as discrediting or further accrediting her testimony.

Thus, one can sidestep these ambiguities—the sexual symbols, the governess' love affair with her employer, the possible latent implications in Douglas' remarks—and examine the really conclusive internal evidence in The Turn. Certainly, the most decisively unambiguous passage in the whole story and the one which has most disturbed the proponents of the hallucination theory is the governess' detailed description of Peter Quint to Mrs. Grose.

It will be remembered that up to the moment of her encounter, the governess has never heard of Quint. The first time she sees him at a distance on the tower, she sees him clearly enough to realize he is unknown to her. The next time she sees him at close quarters and takes in every detail of his appearance. After this apparition, she reports her experience for the first time to Mrs. Grose. "What's he like?" asks Mrs. Grose.

'I've been dying to tell you. But he's like nobody.'
'Nobody?' she echoed.
'He has no hat.' Then seeing in her face that she already, in this, with a deeper dismay, found a touch of pic-

11See Reed, p. 419.
ture, I quickly added stroke to stroke. 'He has red hair, very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight good features and little rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are somehow darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange--awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide, and his lips are thin, and except for his little whiskers he's quite clean-shaven. He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor.'

'An actor!' It was impossible to resemble one less, at least, than Mrs. Grose at that moment.

'I've never seen one, but so I suppose them. He's tall, active, ergot,' I continued, 'but never--no, never! --a gentleman.'

Before the governess is half-way through her description, Mrs. Grose has identified the person described as Peter Quint, the dead valet. The governess has given a sufficiently specific description. There is no hesitation in Mrs. Grose's identification: this is a description of Quint. The governess continues giving details of the apparition and mentions his clothes:

"They're smart, but they're not his own." Mrs. Grose breaks out into a breathless affirmative groan. "They're the master's!" She then tells how Quint frequently used to make free with the master's clothes when still alive.

Edmund Wilson, of all the proponents of the hallucination theory, struggles most vigorously with this whole passage, and eventually decides that the person wearing the master's clothes must certainly be the master himself. The neurotic governess

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12 Novels, XII, 190-191.
13 Ibid., 191-192.
has conjured up an image of her lover-master. "When we look back we find that the master's appearance has never been described at all: we have merely been told that he was 'handsome.' It is impossible for us to know how much the ghost resembles the master--certainly the governess would never tell us."¹⁴

Wilson's odd supposition would have James spoofing the reader with the most implausible and the most intricately concealed coincidences. Furthermore, if there had been any possibility of confusing the two men, Mrs. Grose would most certainly have thought first of the living master, rather than of Quint, who had to return from the dead! Is the governess describing an hallucination of the master in such detail to Mrs. Grose that Mrs. Grose recognizes him instantly and absolutely as the dead valet? No, in this one decisive passage, it seems safe to conclude that the hallucination theory most unambiguously collapses.¹⁵

It is true, of course, that only the governess ever sees the ghosts. Yet, ghosts have had the customary privilege throughout literature of notoriously appearing to one person without being seen by the others present. Mrs. Grose, for one, never sees the ghosts, and she expresses initial doubts as al-

¹⁴ Wilson, Triple Thinkers, p. 126.
¹⁵ See Waldock, pp. 332-333.
most every new crisis arises. Yet, she always comes to trust in her friend's testimony. The governess herself fears the ghosts are hallucinations and makes Mrs. Grose the testing-ground of her sanity: "She believed me, I was sure, absolutely: if she hadn't I don't know what would have become of me, for I couldn't have borne the strain alone."  

Mrs. Grose, as her allegorical name implies, is "a magnificent monument to the blessing of a want of imagination." If she believes, then surely the governess has no reason to fear hallucinations. She feels assured when Mrs. Grose "went all the way with me as to its being beyond doubt that I had seen exactly what I had seen. I found that to keep her thoroughly in the grip of this I had only to ask her how, if I had 'made it up,' I came to be able to give, of each of the persons appearing to me, a picture disclosing, to the last detail, their special marks—a portrait on the exhibition of which she had instantly recognised and named them." Thus, the governess' detailed description seems to herself irrefutable proof that she is on the right track; it seems sufficient evidence to convince the unimaginative, doubting Mrs. Grose, but not to convince Wilson, Bewley, Edel, and the other Freudians.

16 Novels, XII, 230.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 209. See pp. 203-208, where the governess describes Miss Jessel to Mrs. Grose for the first time. The details are too vague and general to prove that here, as in describing Quint, she could describe "to the last detail."
At last, Mrs. Grose discovers more tangible proofs of the governess' intuitions, and reveals them to her without any suggestive badgering from her. Flora, after the final incident at the lake, has refused to see the governess and raves about her to Mrs. Grose. The latter runs to the governess: "I'll go--I'll go. I'll go this morning... I've heard--! From that child--horrors... About you, Miss--since you must have it. It's beyond everything, for a young lady; and I can't think wherever she must have picked up--" The governess gasps with relief, "It so justifies me!" And Mrs. Grose says, "It does that, Miss!" Where has Flora picked up the appalling language? Marius Bewley, for one, thinks it is the governess who has taught Flora this language, who has finally succeeded in corrupting her, thoroughly immersing her in her own guilty version of life. Yet nowhere in the story has James given evidence for this assertion, while, on the other hand, he is very explicit about definite sources of evil outside the governess' mind.

It is not the governess but Mrs. Grose who reveals the former activities of the Quint-Jessel regime at Bly. At first, she attempts to hide all irregularities of the former servants

19Ibid., 289-290.
20Bewley, Complex Fate, pp. 136-137.
for fear of frightening the governess away, but under pressure she admits that there was a liaison between the two of them, and that they had both died under mysterious circumstances. The man and Miles, the woman and Flora had been "too close." Miles had frequently told lies. There is the objective fact of Miles's dismissal from school, and the mysterious reasons he himself later alleges to the governess. He admits to her, too, that he has stolen. All these facts are real evils--and some of them serious sins--existing outside the mind of the governess.

Nevertheless, the Freudians would have no evils and horrors in the story except those the governess herself has caused. Mr. Edel, for example, observes: "The life she describes at Bly is serene enough outwardly: the servants are obedient and devoted to their master and the children. The children are on the whole well behaved at Bly--and sufficiently normal to indulge in a measure of mischief. It is the governess who sees ghosts and reads sinister meanings into everything around her. It is she who subjects the children to a psychological harassment that in the end leads to Flora's hysteria and Miles's death." Whom is the reader to believe, Mr. Edel or Mrs. Grose?

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21See Novels, XII, 213-215.
Mrs. Grose says clearly that much evil has occurred long before
the governess so much as arrives at Bly. The former life at
Bly was not "serene," nor were the servants "obedient and de-
voted to their master" unless the reader is supposed to suspect
the master of conniving at their cruel perversion of his niece
and nephew.

This "measure of mischief" in which the children indulge
is large indeed! A convincing proof of their lack of innocence
is their stubborn secrecy even about the existence of their for-
mer friends. The children will not name them. Certainly, the
governess might reasonably be suspicious that the children are
trying to throw her off the scent. Mrs. Grose has a vivid record
of past evil in her memory, at her first hearing of Flora's
filthy language. The mask of surface innocence has fallen from
the little girl's face. Here is even more visible proof for
Mrs. Grose that the children have been corrupted by Quint and
Miss Jessel. She concludes that the governess' story is thor-
roughly "justified." Neither readers nor Mrs. Grose have ever
seen the ghosts, but they both have sufficient evidence to jus-
tify the "authority" of the governess.

Of course, it is possible to undermine the veracity of the
governess' testimony from beginning to end of the story. In
fact, it would be much more consistent of some of the Freudians
to have done so, rather than impugn merely one or two items in
her testimony. The reader must either accept her "authority"
entirely or reject it entirely. For example, when she narrates the candle incident that occurs in Miles's room, she says there came suddenly "an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in. . . . I jumped to my feet again and was conscious of darkness. So for a moment we remained, while I stared about me and saw the drawn curtains unstirred and the window still tight."23

Of this passage, Wilson says, "Here, however, occurs the only detail which is not readily susceptible of double explanation: the governess has felt a 'gust of frozen air' and yet sees that the window is 'tight.' Are we to suppose she merely fancied that she felt it?"24 Wilson, of course, because he has decided to cling to his hallucination theory, would choose to deny that she felt what she says she felt. This is to deny in one passage—as Wilson is aware—the validity, not only of her interpretations of phenomena, but of her very record of the phenomena. Furthermore, her record must be impugned even once again.

The governess has used the name of Miss Jessel for the first time before Flora by the lake. Immediately after this final episode by the lake, she insists that the two children be kept a-

23Novels, XII, 267.
24Wilson, Triple Thinkers, pp. 127-128.
part, and that Flora be confined. The governess records that she questioned Mrs. Grose if she has at all allowed the children to meet. "Ah, Miss," Mrs. Grose assures her, "I'm not such a fool as that! If I've been obliged to leave her three or four times, it has been each time with one of the maids, and at present, though she's alone, she's locked in safe." Yet, in the final scene between the governess and Miles, the governess shrieks at the apparition in the window, and Miles cries, "Is she here?" Finally, she leads him on to utter Quint's name. Evidently, Miles realizes the governess has Miss Jessel on her mind. Nevertheless, the reader has both Mrs. Grose's word and that of the governess that Flora could not have told Miles about the governess' use of Miss Jessel's name by the lake.

Consequently, Miles must have known the identity of the apparitions all through the story. Wilson tries to explain this bothersome passage as follows: "He has, in spite of the governess's efforts, succeeded in seeing his sister and has heard from her of the incident at the lake." Here, Wilson attacks the governess' very record of her sensations a second time.

If the reader is to reject the governess' testimony in

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25Novels, XII, 238, 308-309.

26Wilson, Triple Thinkers, p. 129. Wilson, however, has omitted to mention how the reader is to account for Miles's spontaneous use of Quint's name and his apparent belief that he, too, may be present. The governess has never used this name before either of the children.
these two passages, he is seriously undermining her "authority," and, consequently, opening the way for a complete dissolution of the story that leaves no dependable facts whatever for investigation. If the governess is a pathological liar, as Bewley would have her be, and she is the reader's only witness, then who is to decide when she is telling lies and when she is not? Perhaps her entire experience at Bly is a lie; perhaps she never even left home; perhaps she is not a governess at all, but the wolf in *Little Red Riding-Hood* wearing a new disguise. Thus, there is nothing left of *The Turn of the Screw*, once the Freudians begin discrediting the governess' testimony.

The hallucination interpretation, moreover, not only distorts the materials of the story. It reduces James's magnificent art to the level of a sophisticated toy. Six months after the first publication of *The Turn*, James himself could refer to it slightly as "a very mechanical matter, I honestly think—an inferior, a merely pictorial, subject and rather a shameless pot-boiler."27 It must be remembered, of course, that James was rather piqued that his reading public should acclaim so enthusiastically a tiny endeavor like *The Turn*, and yet spurn his larger, more significant masterpieces. Nevertheless, James radically changed his estimate of *The Turn* when he came to write

27 *Letters*, I, 300-301. (Letter to F.W.H. Myers, December 19, 1898.)
its Preface ten years later. There, he eulogizes his accomplishment with great enthusiasm. However, the Freudians approach The Turn in agreement with James's less mature judgment. In their hands, it becomes indeed "a very mechanical matter," an elegantly wrought little cross-word puzzle, a commonplace clinical record punctuated with sly sexual undertones. Ironically, the Freudians believe they are giving stature to an otherwise superficial ghost-story. The governess, for example, becomes to Marius Bewley a type of the pathological liar—an excellent illustration of what James often depicted in his fiction: "the very substance of society as so perverted and warped that an apparent lie, in such a context, is often the shortest way to truth, and what looks like truth is often the most egregious lie." The significant title of the chapter in which Bewley discusses The Turn is "Appearance and Reality in Henry James."

Nevertheless, there is the fact of the children's moral corruption at the hands of their ghost-friends, a fact which has now been sufficiently established by an examination of evidence both external and internal to the story. Is not James

28 See Wilson, Triple Thinkers, p. 131. Unless his own interpretation is accepted, Wilson thinks "the story, on any other hypothesis, would be, so far as I remember, the only thing James ever wrote which did not have some more or less serious point."

29 Bewley, Complex Fate, p. 136.
depicting here the moral conflict between "appearance and reality" in much more profound terms than Bewley believes? There is no conflict between what the governess saw and what she reports she saw. The conflict between appearance and reality in the governess' testimony is purely an imaginary one, as has been indisputably demonstrated. Yet, there is still the much more appalling conflict between appearance and reality in *Miles and Flora*, between their outward innocence and their inward corruption. The more apparent innocence James could portray in them, the more ghastly and the more tragic would seem the reality of their moral corruption when it was discovered by the governess.30 For example, the governess sees nothing but purity and innocence in her first meeting with little Miles:

> I was a little late on the scene of his arrival, and I felt, as he stood wistfully looking out for me before the door of the inn at which the coach had put him down, that I had seen him on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had from the first moment seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it: everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child--his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love.31

The irony of the final words is dreadful when the reader later realizes what love, the "love" between Miles and Peter

30 See Evans, pp. 186-187, for a development of this interpretation.

31 Novels, XII, 171.
Quint must have wrought in the boy's soul. This is the moving theme of *The Turn of the Screw*: the corruption of innocence. The beauty and innocence of Miles and Flora, when their characters are interpreted in the story as James intended them to be interpreted, is nothing but a lie, one that is distressing, horrifying.

Thus, much more than a mere technical "pot-boiler" or a clinical case-history, more than a mere study of the consummately successful use of compositional intensity and impressionism, *The Turn of the Screw* need not feel dwarfed beside such noble shelf-companions as *What Maisie Knew*, *The Spoils of Poynton*, *Daisy Miller*, and many of the shorter tales—all of which so triumphantly fulfill the desire Henry James once expressed "that the literary heritage, such as it is, poor thing, that I may leave, shall consist of a large number of perfect short things, nouvelles and tales, illustrative of ever so many things in life—in the life I see and know and feel—and of all the deep and the delicate—and of London, and of art, and of everything: and that they shall be fine, rare, strong, wise—eventually perhaps even recognized."\(^{32}\)

\(^{32}\)Notebooks, p. 101.
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APPENDIX

A TOPICAL ABSTRACT OF THE PREFACE TO

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

(1) The Turn, a full-blown flower of high fancy, has perfect homogeneity throughout.

(2) The original anecdote itself and the conditions under which James first heard it. Occasion: the telling of ghost-stories. Objections to the mere modern "psychical" case-history type of ghost-story. The effect of the host's story was wrapped up in its remoteness, thinness. What James retained of the anecdote.

(3) Decision of James to use this anecdote. The merit of using it: writing would be a perfect exercise of the free, unassisted imagination. No trite patterns would hamper the imagination of the author.

(4) What is The Turn? A fairy-tale, pure and simple. Yet, the credulity is conscious and cultivated, not artless.

(5) Two types of the fairy-tale are the short anecdote type, and the long and loose type. Examples.

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Novels, XII, xiv-xxii.

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(6) Why is the shorter type more successful? The longer type will succeed as well if it is compositionally unified, round.

(7) Paradox met in composing The Turn: permit the imagination to work freely, yet with control. Aim at singleness and clearness of effect, yet permit free improvisation.

(8) The Turn's merit: it struggled successfully with its dangers. It has the length of the long and loose type of fairy-tale, yet has the anecdotal compactness of Blue-Beard and Cinderella.

(9) It is a piece of ingenuity to enchant a sophisticated audience.

(10) Its tone: one of suspected and felt trouble.

(11) A problem: make the narrator's record clear, fine, beautiful, yet make her telling of it mystifying, tense.

(12) A reproach from an inattentive reader: James did not sufficiently characterize the governess.

(13) James's answer: be selective of difficulties. One must solve the important ones, and intelligently neglect the others.

(14) A problem: make her record crystalline, but not her interpretation. James wants to keep her own character in the background, yet invest her with "authority."

(15) Why does this piece of fiction most appeal to consideration? Its choice of its way of meeting its gravest difficulty.
Less grave difficulties. For example, James had to reject the "psychical" ghost. Reasons for his rejection. His ghosts must be agents. The central idea in his story: the ghosts' desire and ability to cause evil, and their described success.

James wants pure romance, and, consequently, will employ ghosts of the legendary, traditional type, not "psychical" ghosts.

The ghosts helped James to express his subject directly and intensely. Most of his art went into his handling of the ghosts.

The essence of the matter: give the ghosts a villainy of motive, make them capable of portentous evil. However, keep the evil unspecified.

Dangers of specifying the evil.

Make the haunting pair capable of everything. Everything? In such a case, there is no absolute of wrong. It is a matter of relative appreciation, speculation, imagination.

Make the reader's vision of evil intense, and do not specify the evil: this solves the problem. Make the reader think the evil and there is no need of weak specifications of this evil.

From beginning to end of The Turn, the values of this evil are all blanks. Each reader supplies his own specification from his imagination.
(24) Some readers have filled in the blanks, and have discovered indecency in The Turn. They point an accusing finger at the author, who is innocent of their charges.
The thesis submitted by Vernon J. Ruland, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

January 8, 1957

Frederick P. Manning, S.J.
Signature of Adviser