



Analysis: Henry James' The Turn of the Screw

Raoul Festante

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Seminar paper from the year 2003 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,5, University of Hannover (Englisches Seminar Universität Hannover), course: Literature and Photography in the 19th Century America: Spectacles of the Body, 7 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The "Turn of the Screw" was originally published as a serialized novel in a magazine called Colliers Weekly. Henry James finished the work on the story in 1897 and published the text which consisted of twelve chapters plus a prologue between January and April of 1898. James agreement to publish his story in Colliers Weekly was connected to the precondition that he would publish it also as a book.

In 1908, James published his complete works under the title "The Turn of the Screw: The New York Edition."

The Turn of the Screw was published at a time during which the interest in Psychical Research and supernatural phenomena was very predominant. The Society for Psychical Research had been founded in 1882 of which James' brother and father were both members of. Thus, James was not only familiar with the cases of ghost apparitions but used these informations for his ghost stories among which The Turn of the Screw surely became the most important to date.

In the preface of his 1908 edition he stressed however the fact that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel were not ghosts in the traditional sense as the Society of Psychical Research were observing. He pointed out that

"(...) Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not "ghosts" at all, as we know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials of witchcraft; if not, more pleasingly, fairies of the legendary order, wooing their victims forth to see them dance under the moon." 1 This and other passages in the preface of his New York edition from 1908 caused great controversy over the true meaning of The Turn of the Screw:

The question was and still is: Is The Turn of the Screw a ghost story in the typical sense? Or is it on the other hand, it the story of a young, psychologically deranged and sexually repressed woman who sees the ghosts because of her inner struggles? In my paper, I will examine some of the character traits of the main protagonist, the governess and attempt to shed some light on the conspicuous elements apparent in The Turn of The Screw.

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