Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism

HENRY JAMES

The Turn of the Screw

Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism

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SERIES EDITOR: Ross C Murfin, *University of Miami*

HENRY JAMES *The Turn of the Screw*

Complete, Authoritative Text with
Biographical and Historical Contexts,
Critical History, and Essays from
Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives

EDITED BY
Peter G. Beidler
Lehigh University

Macmillan Education

Dedicated to James R. Frakes

For Bedford Books

President and Publisher: Charles H. Christensen

Associate Publisher/General Manager: Joan E. Feinberg

Managing Editor: Elizabeth M. Schaaf

Developmental Editor: Stephen A. Scipione

Production Editor: Jonathan R. Burns

Copyeditor: Cynthia Benn

Text Design: Sandra Rigney, The Book Department

Cover Design: Richard Emery Design, Inc.

Cover Photograph: Detail from a photograph of Crossways Farm by Andrew Butler. Copyright © 1992.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 94-65160

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

9 8 7 6 5
f e d c b a

For information, write: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Editorial Offices: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press

29 Winchester Street, Boston, MA 02116

ISBN 978-0-312-08083-9 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-312-12260-7 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-333-63437-0 ISBN 978-1-349-13713-8 (eBook) DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-13713-8

Acknowledgments

“The grasp with which I recovered him”: A Child Is Killed in *The Turn of the Screw*” by Shoshana Felman was originally published as “The Death of a Child,” part VII of her “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977) and her *Writing and Madness*, Cornell University Press, 1985. Reprinted, with certain small changes, with the permission of Yale French Studies.

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About the Series

Volumes in the *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* series provide college students with an entrée into the current critical and theoretical ferment in literary studies. Each volume reprints the complete text of a classic literary work and presents critical essays that approach the work from different theoretical perspectives, together with the editors' introductions to both the literary work and the critics' theoretical perspectives.

The volume editor of each *Case Study* has selected and prepared an authoritative text of the classic work, written an introduction to the work's biographical and historical contexts, and surveyed the critical responses to the work since its initial publication. Thus situated biographically, historically, and critically, the work is examined in five critical essays, each representing a theoretical perspective of importance to contemporary literary studies. These essays, prepared especially for undergraduates, show theory in praxis; whether written by established scholars or exceptional young critics, they demonstrate how current theoretical approaches can generate compelling readings of great literature.

As series editor, I have prepared introductions, with bibliographies, to the theoretical perspectives represented in the five critical essays. Each introduction presents the principal concepts of a particular theory in their historical context and discusses the major figures and key works that have influenced their formulation. It is my hope that these intro-

ductions will reveal to students that good criticism is informed by a set of coherent assumptions, and will encourage them to recognize and examine their own assumptions about literature. Finally, I have compiled a glossary of key terms that recur in these volumes and in the discourse of contemporary theory and criticism. We hope that the *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* series will reaffirm the richness of its literary works, even as it introduces invigorating new ways to mine their apparently inexhaustible wealth.

Ross C Murfin
Series Editor
University of Miami

About This Volume

In Part One of this volume we present the complete text of the New York Edition of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* as well as relevant portions of James's Preface to that edition.

Henry James wrote *The Turn of the Screw* at the invitation of Robert J. Collier. Collier had just taken over his father's magazine and hoped to improve the quality and sales of *Collier's Weekly* by publishing a serial story by Henry James, who was already making a name for himself as a writer of serious fiction. James worked on the story in the fall of 1897, finishing it by the end of November. The serialized version was published in twelve weekly installments in *Collier's Weekly* between January 27 and April 16, 1898.

From the start Henry James intended to bring out *The Turn of the Screw* in book form, and by October of 1898 it was printed in two separate editions, one by Heinemann in England and one by Macmillan in the United States. The title of both the English and the American books was *The Two Magics*; it contained both *The Turn of the Screw* and another long story by James, *Covering End*.

Ten years later Henry James supervised the publication of what has come to be called "The New York Edition" of his works. In volume 12 of that edition, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1908, were included four of James's tales: two long stories or "novellas," *The Aspern Papers* and *The Turn of the Screw*, and two short stories, "The Liar" and "The Two Faces."

James made some changes for the New York Edition, but that edition is not really much different from the earlier versions. To give just one example, at the end of chapter V the governess discovers that the man she has just described to Mrs. Grose was named Peter Quint and that Peter Quint had died. In an intense moment the puzzled and frightened governess asks, “‘Died?’” James wrote for the *Collier’s* version that Mrs. Grose planted her feet firmly to “articulate” her answer to the governess, “‘Yes. Yes. Quint is dead.’” In the book version that year he changed “articulate” to “utter” and changed Mrs. Grose’s speech to “‘Yes. Mr. Quint is dead.’” In the New York Edition ten years later he changed “utter” to “express” and changed Mrs. Grose’s speech to “‘Yes. Mr. Quint’s dead.’” The changes, in other words, were minor.

At no point did James undertake a rewriting of any portion of the story, and the few changes he did make were generally “tinkering” ones of punctuation, diction, and style. The only change that might be considered major was that after the *Collier’s* edition James raised the age of Flora from six to eight years. Even though most of James’s changes were minor, we follow here his final wishes — even his now obsolete practice of separating the elements of two-syllable contractions of negatives: “did n’t,” “has n’t,” and “is n’t” rather than the more modern “didn’t,” “hasn’t,” and “isn’t.”

The most important feature of the New York Edition is Henry James’s Preface to it — his retrospective account of the writing of and the reaction to *The Turn of the Screw*. We are pleased to reprint the relevant parts of the Preface after the text of the story itself.

The Turn of the Screw has been to critics a chameleon text, taking on a coloring that lets it blend in with almost any way of reading it. Depending on who is reading it, the story can be a gothic tale in the tradition of Poe, a romantic tale in the tradition of Hawthorne, or a realistic tale in the tradition of Howells. It can be a Freudian tale of sexual repression, an allegory of good and evil, a detective story about murder and deception, a call for better treatment of children, or a reflection of hidden truths about its author. It can demonstrate its author’s knowledge of scientific research on ghosts, his rejection of that knowledge, his accord with the social structures of his time or his rejection of those structures. It can be read as a Marxist statement, a feminist statement, or a homosexual statement. So frequent and wide-ranging have been the published interpretations of *The Turn of the Screw* that critics do not even feel the need to identify either the author or the name of the story in the title of essays. A title like “The Mysteries at Bly” is sufficient to

reveal to most readers that that article is about Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.

In Part Two of this volume we present, in addition to my essay summarizing the critical history of *The Turn of the Screw* and Ross Murfin's five introductory essays laying the groundwork for contemporary critical approaches, five essays by eminent critics. Wayne Booth has written an essay discussing "reader-response" criticism and how something he calls "ethical criticism" works in this story. Shoshana Felman shows us how a deconstructionist critic, one influenced by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, approaches the all-important death scene in the final chapter of the story. Stanley Renner has written a paper with a psychoanalytic slant, defending and extending the work of earlier Freudian critics. Priscilla Walton gives us a feminist reading of the story and particularly of the governess whose narration is all we *really* know about the strange happenings at Bly. Finally, Bruce Robbins shows us what a Marxist reading makes of the story by having us pay attention to the various classes represented at Bly. All five of these fine scholars resist being labeled as a certain type of critic, but they have agreed for purposes of this volume to emphasize a certain aspect of their complex critical demeanor. Taken together, these five essays, following my summary of the critical history of *The Turn of the Screw*, show the richness and the complexity of one of the most widely discussed pieces of fiction ever written.

Readers of these essays will not finish them knowing *the* answer to the questions about the governess, the ghosts, or the children, or *the* answer to the question of what this story means, but they will know something about the amazing variety of questions that a literary work can inspire and about the amazing variety of answers that readers can find to those questions. Armed with such knowledge, they will be better prepared to frame their own questions and answers and to understand what literary criticism is all about.

Acknowledgments

I offer thanks, first of all, to the five critics who agreed to write new essays or let me reprint essays already published. Their patience with editorial promptings and their speed and cooperation in meeting deadlines have been most gratifying. I offer thanks also to several people who were of particular help to me in my part of the project: my son Paul for helping to collect the many essays I read for the critical history essay; my

colleague Jim Frakes, who knows Henry James's fiction better than I ever will; Suzi Naiburg of Harvard University and Cheryl Torsney of West Virginia University for reviewing parts of the manuscript; and two former students, Sandra Guy and Jian "Stan" Shi, for checking quotations for me. At Bedford Books Stephen Scipione has been an encouraging and efficient contact, and Jonathan Burns saw the volume through production with great patience and attention to detail. I also thank Charles Christensen, Joan Feinberg, Elizabeth Schaaf, and Laura Arcari. As for series editor Ross Murfin—well, who can help being grateful for his good humor, his grace, and his toughness in all matters relating to a project like this? Finally, I thank Anne for understanding why at certain times in the past year or so I have had to close the door of my study and crouch low over my desk.

Peter G. Beidler
Lehigh University

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