

THE GHOSTLY TALES OF HENRY JAMES

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THE GHOSTLY TALES OF HENRY JAMES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

That Henry James, a novelist whose works have stimulated as much interest as those of any other American author, had a predilection for the ghost story comes as a surprise to those who connect his name with a more highly regarded type of fiction. He is known variously as the student of genteel manners, the psychological realist, and the first international novelist. Many readers recall that he wrote a famous ghost story, "The Turn of the Screw"; a few are familiar with "The Jolly Corner" also. But only literary historians are aware that James picked up the supernatural tale from Poe and Hawthorne, and carried a much improved version of the type into the twentieth century.

Henry James published ninety-six tales. Eighteen of these definitely contain elements of the supernatural. His first published ghost story was "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," which appeared in the Atlantic in 1868. Another of his ghostly tales, "De Grey: A Romance," also appeared in 1868. In 1874, he wrote "The Last of the Valerii"; in 1876, he published "The Ghostly Rental." James then abandoned the ghost story for fifteen years; but in 1891 with the publication

of "Sir Edmund Orme," he began an intense concentration on the type. Then followed "Nona Vincent" (1892), "The Private Life" (1892), "Sir Dominick Ferrand" (1892), "Owen Wingrave" (1892), "The Altar of the Dead" (1895), "The Friends of the Friends" (1896), "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), "The Real Right Thing" (1899), "The Great Good Place" (1900), "Maud-Evelyn" (1900), and "The Third Person" (1900). In 1903, he wrote "The Beast in the Jungle." His last ghost story, "The Jolly Corner," was published in 1908.

James collected nine of these eighteen ghostly tales for his famous New York Edition. He placed his longest supernatural tale, "The Turn of the Screw," in Volume XII, immediately following "The Aspern Papers," and apart from the other eight. These eight were included in Volume XVII, which contains "The Altar of the Dead," "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Birthplace," "The Private Life," "Owen Wingrave," "The Friends of the Friends," "Sir Edmund Orme," "The Real Right Thing," "The Jolly Corner," and "Julia Bride." In his preface to Volume XVII, James explained that he had included "Julia Bride" at the end of the collection "for material reasons . . . quite out of her congruous company."¹ No critic has connected "The Birthplace" with the supernatural. Yet James, who always attempted to avoid the term "ghost story," indicated

¹ Henry James, Novels and Tales, XVII (New York, 1922), xv.

that "The Birthplace" belonged in the realm of fantasies or mystical stories and implied that it might be construed as a supernatural tale akin to "The Altar of the Dead," "The Beast in the Jungle," and "The Private Life," among which stories it is placed. These tales he called elaborated fantasies, the dramatizations of the inverted minds of "poor sensitive gentlemen."² They were not ghost stories in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, because of their eeriness, they have invited a discussion as a particular kind of psychological ghost story. James made a sharp distinction between this group of fantasies and the remaining four supernatural tales of Volume XVII--"The Friends of the Friends," "Owen Wingrave," "Sir Edmund Orme," and "The Real Right Thing." These, he said, "would never have existed but for that love of 'a story as a story.'"³

Leon Edel collected eighteen of James's supernatural tales in one volume, The Ghostly Tales of Henry James, published by the Rutgers University Press in 1948. Edel did not include "The Birthplace" in his volume. He did, however, collect those tales which James had not been willing to refer to directly as supernatural. To these he added in temporal order those stories which James had to call ghost stories, for the want of a better term. Edel divided these eighteen

²Ibid., p. ix.

³Ibid., p. xvi.

stories into two groups: apparitional tales (those stories in which ghosts are seen or thought to be seen by people) and non-apparitional tales (those of a quasi-supernatural nature in which ghosts are felt to be present, but are never actually seen by anyone). Ten of the eighteen tales were described by Edel as "apparitional" stories. In his 1963 volume entitled Ghostly Tales of Henry James, published in paperback by the Universal Library, Edel placed only the "apparitional" tales: "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," "De Grey: A Romance," "The Ghostly Rental," "Sir Edmund Orme," "Owen Wingrave," "The Friends of the Friends," "The Turn of the Screw," "The Real Right Thing," "The Third Person," and "The Jolly Corner."

Edel's introduction to his 1948 volume is characterized by its pointed investigation into the biographical aspects of the ghostly tales. He concludes that the tales may "offer us the record of James's own haunted state."⁴ Thus, as James's chief biographer, Edel has sought to reveal the author's personality by relating the themes and fancies of these ghost stories to James's life. To approach James by such semi-scientific inquiry is to neglect his art. But the question arises, was he a haunted writer who escaped from life in his tales, or was he the artist who created his destiny and immortality through them?

⁴Leon Edel, The Ghostly Tales of Henry James (New Brunswick, 1948), p. xxxi.

In his introduction to his 1963 volume of Ghostly Tales of Henry James, Edel has not been so analytical in the psychological sense, and has chosen to treat the apparitional tales more as stories of an author who had a view of the complexity of the mind and the ability to dramatize its imagined fears. Edel's later views display an understanding of James's mature powers of thought and give more credit to the artist who had used the fairy tale as a model for the ghostly. Even so, Edel seems not to have rendered a full and satisfying treatment of the ghostly tales. James added, as Edel has recently stated, a new dimension to the tale of terror by dramatizing the contagion of fear. In so doing, James did, admittedly, reveal his own inner fears. But what is more important about the tales of the supernatural of Henry James is that he mastered his fear through his devotion to his art.

More accurate perhaps than Edel's two-way division of the ghostly tales would be a three-way division. Such a division shows not only the progress of James's art, but also the fulfillment of the man who surmounted his own insecurities. James's first four ghost stories, written between 1868 and 1876, belong to an experimental stage of his writing when he was emulating other writers of supernatural tales. The eight tales beginning in 1891 with "Sir Edmund Orme" and concluding in 1898 with "The Turn of the Screw" represent James's attempts to externalize the inner ghosts, the imagined fears,

that people carry around with them in their ordinary day-to-day lives. Finally, in the last six tales published between 1898 and 1908, he seems to have pictured his own particular ghosts, exploring his own introversions and illusions.

James wrote fourteen of the eighteen stories with supernatural elements following his greatest popular success. Before 1891, he had brought out six volumes of essays, ten volumes of short tales and novelettes, the most popular of which were "Daisy Miller" (1879), "Washington Square" (1881), and "The Aspern Papers" (1888). He had also written six novels, among them Roderick Hudson (1876), The American (1877), The Portrait of a Lady (1881) and The Bostonians (1886).

The ghostly tales of James's later creative career, which begins nine years before the turn of the century and ends in 1908, prove him a master of the form--indeed one of the last great writers to exploit its charm. His stories of this period have done much to sustain the respectability of the supernatural to the scientifically oriented modern reader, moviegoer, and television viewer. James's last ghost story, "The Jolly Corner," lay embedded in his mind for half a century before it took form near the end of his life. In one sense "The Jolly Corner" belongs in a category by itself, for it is the triumph of art in the ghost story itself, arrived at through prolonged maturation that made his art supreme.

Henry James had long hoped to write a novel in which all characters would be haunted by each other. The fragment of The Sense of the Past suggests James's conception of such a tragedy. The tragedy of life lay in the memories of the past which bring anxiety to the present. From those ghosts, these imagined fears, there is no escape, for fear begets fear and affects the materially comfortable present. The real demons are those of the mind which destroy its peace and produce mutual suspicion, undermining the whole structure of human relationships.

This study proposes first, to investigate the biographical and literary influences that led James to attempt the ghost story; second, to examine the stories themselves in light of James's theory of fiction, and to compare them with the tales of other writers; last, to consider James's ghosts as dramatized unseen realities which strongly affect human experience. Additionally, the purpose is to trace James's development through the whole series of ghost stories, showing how he remained inventive and perceptive until the end and how he was one of the few real artists of the supernatural in fiction.

CHAPTER II

GHOSTS IN THE JAMES FAMILY

William James, grandfather of the novelist and the philosopher, was the only businessman and the only fundamentalist in his large family. His ventures into banking and manufacturing and his land holdings in upper New York State and Manhattan brought him vast wealth. The great sums of money which he left to his sons provided them with means for the dissipation that characterized their lives. But to one of his sons, Henry James, Sr., he left a comparatively small patrimony, plus a distaste for practicality and fundamental religion.

Henry James, Sr., the father of Henry the novelist and William the philosopher, seldom concerned himself with the practical side of life. He spent most of his time with literary people and philosophers, and with his own theological writings. Considered a religious eccentric, he finally became the chief spokesman in America for the mystical Swedenborgian concepts. This son of a practical tycoon of Albany may have revolted against the onerous religious demands of his father and his father's Calvinistic God; but some shade of the Almighty--whether it was the remembrance

of his father or his father's angry God--remained with him. For Henry James, Sr., "was a man who all his life felt himself spied upon."¹

When Henry, Jr., was only six months old, the elder Henry James had a mystical experience which convinced him of the reality of the unseen. One day in late May, 1844, after a pleasant meal, he was looking at the embers in a fireplace. Suddenly he became conscious of an invisible shape "raying out from his fetid personality influences fatal to life."² There was, of course, no ghost in his room; there was simply the fear rising from the depths of his subconscious mind. The experience destroyed his sense of security, and he chose to rationalize his dread in terms of a haunting shape that he felt existed. For at least two years after the vastation, as the elder James later called the terrifying moment, he existed in "an ever-growing tempest of doubt, anxiety, and despair . . ."³ First, he turned to medical science for help, but it afforded him neither an explanation of nor relief from his fears. Then, by accident, he discovered Swedenborg, who enabled him to lift himself from the infantile passivity caused by his vastation. He found special comfort in the

¹Leon Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years (New York, 1962), p. 58.

²William James, Literary Remains of the Late Henry James (Boston, 1897), p. 59.

³Ibid., p. 60.

Swedish philosopher's words about rebirth, a new beginning for his intellectual and speculative thinking. To inject his own thoughts into Swedenborgianism was to close the division in his own personality. He became an integrated man with his own real God, freed at last from the towering God of his father.

Daytime nightmares were, nevertheless, traditional experiences in the James family. The insecurity they brought on led not only the elder Henry but also his daughter Alice and sons Henry and William to take an abiding interest in the invisible world. William was once so impressed by an apparition that he could never understand why other people were not so aware as he was of the strangeness beneath everyday sensuous experiences. William, as his father had done, turned first to religion, hoping it would exorcise the negative forces of his being. Later, he guided American psychical research in attempting to uncover the workings of the mind. Finally, he framed a systematic philosophy, pragmatism, a doctrine whose thought emphasizes both external and psychical reality.

Of all the Jameses, Alice, the only girl in the family of five children, suffered most from fantasies. Early in life she had a nervous breakdown, and thereafter remained the victim of suicidal tendencies. Finding no outlets as her father and brothers had done, she eventually became pathologically hysterical.

Henry, the second son, left no written account of an individual ghost, but Graham Greene, Rebecca West, and Saul

Rosenzweig (a psychiatrist) ascribe his peculiar sensitivity to evil as personal maladjustment. Rosenzweig claims that James never solved the Oedipal situation of infancy, and was throughout life constantly trying to adjust for feelings of inferiority. The chief evidence for this view is fragmentary and comes from James's own memoirs, Notes of a Son and Brother, and the tales "The Story of a Year," "Owen Wingrave," and "The Jolly Corner." In his sketchy recollection of the past, James recalls that at the outbreak of the Civil War he suffered a "horrid even if obscure hurt."⁴ The accident happened during "twenty odious minutes" and was attended with "the question of what might still happen, to everyone about me, to the country at large: it was made of the disparities a single last visitation."⁵ Continuing the description in the ambiguous style of his later years, he adds:

. . . there were hours at which one could scarce have told whether it came from one's own poor organism, still so young and meant for better things, but which had suffered particular wrong, or from the enclosing social body, a body rent with a thousand wounds and that thus treated me to the honour of a sort of tragic fellowship.⁶

James's story of the accident is clouded with ambiguities, even though it is apparent that he is being thoroughly honest. The twenty-minute duration of the "visitation" was "at once

⁴Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (New York, 1914), p. 298.

⁵Ibid., p. 297.

⁶Ibid.

extraordinarily intimate and quite awkwardly irrelevant."⁷ It happened while he was helping others work on an old engine to be used to extinguish a fire, euphemistically and characteristically described by James as a "shabby conflagration."⁸ The hurt he received was "horrid"; yet it was also "obscure." In one sentence he calls it both a "catastrophe" and simply a "difficulty."⁹

According to the psychoanalytic theory, James's accident could have had neurotic origins in his failure to solve the Oedipal situation. But if writers are agreed on James's mother-centeredness, they diverge rather widely on the results of the accident. Briefly stated, the conflicting theories are that the accident made him (1) suffer permanently from a backache;¹⁰ (2) live life with feelings of guilt for not having gone to war;¹¹ (3) suffer from hallucinatory self-castration which left him impotent sexually;¹² and (4) become

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 298.

⁹Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁰Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years (New York, 1953), p. 183.

¹¹Saul Rosenzweig, "The Ghost of Henry James," Partisan Review (Fall, 1944), pp. 438-439.

¹²Glenway Wescott, Hound and Horn (Henry James issue, April, 1934), p. 523F.

a writer whose art was a substitute for normal physical activity.¹³

Visitation, called by the elder Henry vastation, a Swedenborgian term, became a part of the household vocabulary at James's Cambridge home. The word was used early in Henry James's life and it grew with importance as the years passed on. The Jameses never once forgot their nightmares of the daytime, and the major aspects of their lives were affected by them. In his memoirs, Henry reflects on a nightmare occurring to him in Paris. As he recalls, in his old age, a dream of his youth, he questions "the sources at which an intense young fancy (when a fancy is intense) capriciously, absurdly drinks-- so that the effect is, in twenty connections, that of a love-philtre or fear-philtre which fixes for the sense their supreme symbol of the fair or the strange."¹⁴ Then he tells that the Galerie d'Apollon, at the Louvre, was the spot of "the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare of my life."¹⁵ The parallels James uses are typical of his lifelong attempt to make words depict some incongruous, paradoxical complexity: love and fear, fair and strange, admirable and appalling. In his supernatural tales, ghosts are inextricably the shades of

¹³Graham Greene, "Henry James," The English Novelists, edited by Derek Verschoyle (New York, 1936), pp. 231-246.

¹⁴Henry James, A Small Boy and Others (New York, 1913), p. 347.

¹⁵Ibid.

love and fear. In "Sir Edmund Orme," for example, a ghost is both a symbol of love and fear; he is also both admirable and appalling.

In his nightmare, Henry recalls that with his shoulder he himself is attempting to bar the door to his room as a visitor attempts to break in. There is a struggle. Suddenly Henry the defender becomes Henry the aggressor. The visitor runs; the terror vanishes. No longer in terror, Henry becomes elated.

. . . Routed, dismayed, the tables turned upon him by my so surpassing him for straight aggression and dire attention, my visitant was already but a diminished spot in the long perspective; the tremendous, glorious hall, as I say, over the far-gleaming floor of which, cleared for the occasion of its great line of priceless vitrines down the middle, he sped for his life, while a great storm of thunder and lightning played through the deep embrasures of high windows at the right. The lightning that revealed the retreat, revealed also that wondrous place and, by the same amazing play, my young imaginative life in it of long before, the sense of which, deep within me, had kept it whole, preserved it to this thrilling use; for what in the world were the deep embrasures and the so polished floor but those of the Galerie d'Apollon of my childhood? The "scene of something" I had vaguely then felt it? Well, I might, since it was to be the scene of that intense hallucination.¹⁶

Portions of this nightmare appear in many of the ghostly tales; it is pictured most fully in "The Jolly Corner," his last supernatural tale.

Yet Leon Edel thinks that Henry's relationship with his brother William supplied the ghost at the Galerie d'Apollon.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 348-349.

Edel points to an early passage in Henry's memoirs suggesting that an unequal rivalry existed between the brothers: "I never for all the time of childhood and youth in the least caught up with him and overtook him."¹⁷ Like the visitant in Henry's nightmare, William was "always round the corner and out of sight."¹⁸

Yet William was also, in later years, a strong, stimulating influence upon his brother. Even though William turned to science, he never viewed the supernatural as an absurdity. In fact, a great part of his psychical research was dedicated to the mystical which, he noted, had been treated with a "contemptuous scientific disregard."¹⁹ Interestingly, he started in 1890 a series of essays treating ethereal obscurities, just before the time that Henry began writing his greatest ghost stories. In one of these essays, William comments that "few species of literature are more truly dull than reports of phantasms. Taken simply by themselves, as separate facts to stare at, they appear so devoid of meaning and sweep, that, even were they certainly true, one would be tempted to leave them out of one's universe for being so idiotic."²⁰ Henry, almost paraphrasing his brother,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹William James, The Will to Believe (New York, 1899), p. 300.

²⁰Ibid., p. 317.

comments on "The Turn of the Screw" in the preface to The Aspern Papers:

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.²¹

The extent to which Henry James's family influenced his ghost stories seems substantial. There is no obvious use of the intimately personal material of family life in his stories, but there are the undercurrents of jealousy, family curse, and the obvious mystical visitations. His individualized phantoms in his stories are quite like his father's vastation. These visitations became the kinds of ghosts that were peculiarly adaptable to James's idea of what should be in supernatural fiction. His father's vastation was a most important event in the life of the family. Mystical and subjective though it was, it could not be lightly dismissed by a reflective son: "It was all a play I hadn't 'been to,' consciously at least--that was the trouble."²² Consciously, he says, he was not present for "the real right thing."²³ But he was there, in impressionable infancy, when his father was troubled. Henry James, in later psychological speculations,

²¹Henry James, Novels and Tales, XII, xv.

²²Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 174.

²³Ibid.

seems to have felt that his father's introversions had been transferred to him. The example of William's neurasthenia was still another proof of psychic abnormality, and Alice's mental illness confirmed the family tendency toward neuroses which could not be eliminated through philosophic doctrines.

The family mental tendencies acted both as a restraining force and a motivation for Henry James. His survival in the material world was assured by the family wealth; a mind at peace with itself was much less certain. As a writer, Henry James, then, could not accept the fashionable realism of the day with its growing emphasis on objects rather than on minds. He probed the consciences of his characters and became the realist who in his tales brought to the surface the life that was less obvious. To accomplish this purpose, he lived much in his imagination. Recalling a dreamy habit of his youth, he says:

I imagined things . . . and as if quite on system . . . wholly other than as they were . . . an existence . . . cutting me off from any degree of direct participation, at all . . . all elbowing and kicking presences within touch or view, so many monsters and horrors, so many wonders and splendours and mysteries, but never, so far as I can recollect, realities of relation . . . They were something better . . . they were so thoroughly figures and characters, divinities and demons, and endowed in this light with a vividness that mere reality of relation, a commoner directness of contact, would have made, I surmise, comparatively poor.²⁴

²⁴Henry James, A Small Boy and Others, pp. 194-195.

He imagined horrors, he saw divinities and demons, and cared nothing for the "realities of relation." The direction of his thought is never to things, or even to ideas; and if he begins with psychology, it is not as a metaphysician losing his way in supernatural obscurities, but as the realist to whom thought is a mirror of consciousness. Consciousness is never an entity to James, but a system of relations. It is a moment of perception when sequence and relationship of thoughts are illuminated by events. At this point consciousness ceases to be a chaos, a disorganization, and becomes in itself an organized, recognizable reality. A material connection is established with a mental state, and he uses ghosts to indicate the delicate conjunction between a world partially material, partially immaterial.

CHAPTER III

EARLY GHOST STORIES

Several writers, both American and European, influenced Henry James to turn his attention to the ghostly tales; for, especially among Americans, the supernatural tale was popular in James's apprenticeship years. Both Poe and Hawthorne had based much of their work on supernaturalism. A "devourer of libraries,"¹ James had read their uncanny stories. Furthermore, he had observed the ghostly elements in the fiction of George Sand and Prosper Mérimée. Evidence shows that the motifs used by these four above-mentioned authors appear in the four ghostly tales of James's early period.

James attempted the supernatural tale after he had published six conventional stories and several reviews and essays. The critical phase of the first years of his literary career set forth the principles by which he was guided. From these writings James's main principle is to be observed; all stories which rise to the level of serious literature can be accepted as truth. But as he reviewed stories by Anthony Trollope, George Sand, George Eliot, and Goethe, he learned that the

¹Leon Edel, Henry James (St. Paul, Minnesota, 1960), p. 10.

truth has two sides: one part in the visible, external world; another in the hidden depths of human nature. James praised Trollope's ability to portray the surface aspects of life, but objected to the novelist's failure to examine the contemplative aspects of human nature. Having been reared in a home where the mind was more important than the body, he admired the analytical story such as Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, a tale so concerned with examination of motive that it almost completely neglects appearances. Yet in his first published tale, "The Story of a Year," James attempted to present everything possible through both action and motive; furthermore, he tried to make his story entertaining and moral. In attempting so many effects, he failed in the same way he had accused Trollope and Dickens of failing: he had not examined motive.²

With the publication of his next two stories--"A Landscape Painter" and "A Day of Days"--James neglected action and emphasized character. He later realized, after reading the works of George Eliot, that he had analyzed too extensively; his approach was too rational for fiction. He had not entertained; instead, he had displayed his own psychological acumen. George Eliot, he thought, had achieved a proper blend of the external and the psychological. But,

²Cornelia P. Kelley, The Early Development of Henry James (Urbana, Illinois, 1930), p. 34F.

more important, she had been true to human nature by bringing feeling into her stories.³

James dealt specifically with passion in his next two stories--"My Friend Bringham" and "Poor Richard"--both published in 1867. In the first of the stories he failed to engage the reader's attention sufficiently because he had chosen a dispassionate narrator to tell a love story, thus increasing the reader's distance and diminishing the vitality of the story.⁴ Doubtless James realized that he had placed this restraint on "My Friend Bringham"; for in "Poor Richard," a first-person story, he attempted a correction. However, he over-compensated. His first-person narrator was a confessor, and sentimentality, not human nature, was the result.⁵

The friendship that he began with William Dean Howells in 1867 was important to James's growth as a writer, for Howells made James aware of the missing element in his writing--art. He led James to consider Hawthorne's reliance on the mysterious and occult in the romances. Furthermore, Howells compered the ways in which Hawthorne and George Eliot had dealt with the problem of evil, and convinced James that the American writer had handled it in a more artistic way.⁶ Until this time, James had never thought well of romanticism. Ironically, it was the dean of American realists, Howells, who

³Ibid., p. 55F.

⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 78.

convinced him that artistic achievement, whether attained through realism or romanticism, was the great object. James's experiment with artistry began in 1868 with the publication of "The Story of a Masterpiece." The theme is jealousy--the theme he exploited thoroughly in several stories afterward.

"The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

The first of James's ghostly tales, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," published in February, 1868, grew out of "The Story of a Masterpiece." In this second treatment of jealousy, James did not analyze; he described. The result, even if he did call in a vengeful ghost to suggest figuratively the effects of jealousy, is an artistic success. Kelley refers to the story thus: "'The Romance of Certain Old Clothes' . . . shines forth a vivid jewel, even though an imitation one, among pebbles. Unreal, imagined, it is as yet far better than what he had tried to do by means of his intellect."⁷

"The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" is set in the manner of Hawthorne, who liked to locate his stories vaguely in the distant past. The scene of James's story is the "Province of Massachusetts"; the time is before the American Revolution--"toward the middle of the eighteenth century."⁸ A widowed gentlewoman, Mrs. Wingrave, has devoted her life to rearing

⁷Ibid., p. 84.

⁸Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 4.

her three good-looking children. Bernard Wingrave, the son, is sent away to study at Oxford, where he meets Arthur Lloyd. Sworn friends, the two return to America, and Lloyd is presented at the Wingrave home. There he is soon attracted to both sisters, Rosalind and Perdita, but he does not quickly decide which of the two he prefers as a wife. As he delays in choosing, jealousy arises between the sisters. Eventually, Perdita, the younger sister, gets Lloyd's ring. When Rosalind learns the truth, her jealous outbursts of anger reveal her disappointment. But she temporarily represses all signs of jealousy.

Later, when the wedding trousseau arrives, Perdita says to Rosalind: "It's a pity it's not for you."⁹ Rosalind then takes the shining fabric, turns to a mirror with it, lets it roll down to her feet, and throws it over her shoulder. She imagines herself as the bride. Thus James has managed to present a psychological picture through a character's actions, rather than through analytical intrusion. After the wedding, Rosalind dresses herself in her sister's cast-off veil and turns again to the mirror. Perdita discovers her and is horrified. Again James has dramatized. He has given a pictorial account of tragedy developing out of jealousy.

Perdita and her husband move to Boston, and a year intervenes before Lloyd sees Rosalind again. When he does, he is

⁹Ibid., p. 13.

attracted to her charms. He goes riding with her, but during the course of the excursion remembers that his wife is about to give birth to their baby. Hurrying home, he finds Perdita has been delivered of a baby girl. She is puzzled: "Ah, why weren't you with me?"¹⁰ Lloyd then tells his wife that he had been with Rosalind. The revelation does not seem to affect Perdita immediately, but not long afterward she sinks and dies. The cause of her death is never explained and because her decline and death are too rapid, the naturalness of James's narrative is impaired. Before she dies, Perdita makes her husband promise to save her wedding gown and jewelry for her daughter. She asks Lloyd to guard, even to lock, her precious articles under double key in a great attic chest. Her deathbed request is that he give the key to no one but their child when she is old enough to be married.

After the mourning period Rosalind comes to the Lloyd home, ostensibly to care for the child. Soon, however, she marries him. Her motive in marrying, James writes, is "as the reader will have observed . . . a good deal of a mystery."¹¹ Once more James has deliberately avoided analysis.

Perdita's spirit is still felt in the Lloyd house after the marriage; hence the cause of Rosalind's jealousy remains. Rosalind determines to find what Perdita has left in the chest.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹Ibid., p. 22.

Demanding the key from her husband, she hurries to the attic, opens the chest, only to meet her death. When Arthur Lloyd finds his wife, there are "on her blanched brow and cheeks . . . the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands."¹² Perdita's supernatural revenge creates a questionable, even confusing, effect out of keeping with the rest of the story. James makes no attempt to explain this sudden intrusion of the unreal. Cornelia Kelley argues that "James resorted to the impossible, the ghostly, to suggest figuratively and emphatically the way in which jealousy, if uncurbed, resulted in the destruction. . . . This made the meaning vivid without seeming too obviously to point to a moral."¹³ The fact nevertheless remains that the revenging ghost should have strangled her husband who betrayed her. Perdita, a charming creature in real life, makes a very childish and unconvincing ghost.

Critics have pointed to Hawthorne as the chief influence in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes." The term "romance" is taken to be the method of Hawthorne, who mingled the real with the imaginary, a sort of neutral territory where the actual and the fanciful meet, each imbuing itself with the other. Having conceived his story in such a manner, James is then able to make his characters and their deeds express his idea. Hawthorne gives details an allegorical significance in

¹²Ibid., p. 25.

¹³Kelley, p. 82.

such a way as to emphasize further a dominant idea or moral. His symbols, however, are not always operative in the plot; they are often detached, decorative, and redundant.

Several parallels and contrasts may be drawn between Hawthorne's technique and that of James in his first ghostly tale. First, James used a setting remote in time, but more definite than the usual Hawthorne locale. Secondly, the trousseau may be interpreted as a symbol of jealousy, but it is not so obvious a symbol as those employed by Hawthorne. It is, rather, more intrinsic; it has direct relation to other elements of the story. James, although he admired Hawthorne, could not respect his "superficial symbolism." In 1879, he wrote:

Hawthorne, in his metaphysical moods, is nothing if not allegorical, and allegory, to my sense, is quite one of the lighter exercises of the imagination . . . I frankly confess that I have, as a general thing, but little enjoyment of it, and that it never seemed to me to be, as it were, a first-rate literary form . . . it is apt to spoil two good things--a story and a moral, a meaning and a form; and the taste for it is responsible for a large part of the forcible-feeble writing that has been inflicted upon the world.¹⁴

Yet James did resort to "one of the lighter exercises of the imagination" in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes." He produced a ghost to prove a special point. The outcome is neither logical nor plausible. Nevertheless, a problem is solved: jealousy receives its punishment. The prolonged,

¹⁴Henry James, Hawthorne (New York, 1880), pp. 57-58.

exaggerated nature of Rosalind's jealousy generates a stronger reaction in the reader's mind than does the quick, unexpected work of Perdita's ghost. The demon who solves the problem is the only one in James's stories to inflict bodily wounds. The unseen ghost leaves its marks; it is the most demonstrably physical of Henry James's literary ghosts, and certainly can be classified with the meteoric letter A in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter--a touch that James deplored in his criticism of Hawthorne.

James reworked the story twice, the last time in 1885, and placed it in Stories Revised. He did not offer the tale in his New York Edition, and, in 1914, was almost apologetic when he requested that the tale not be included in an anthology. In a letter to J. A. Hammerton, the would-be-collector, he objected because "this small tale of nearly fifty years ago, and one of the very first short stories I ever wrote, is not a thing that I have the least wish to see disinterred . . . I would be willing to be represented by something representative."¹⁵

Leon Edel suggests that the tales James published in 1868 reveal an inner struggle based upon a rivalry with his older brother William and consequently make frequent use of the emotion of jealousy. Edel notes that Henry was at the time still living under his father's roof in Cambridge,

¹⁵Raymond D. Havens, "Henry James on One of His Early Stories," American Literature, XXIII (March, 1951), 131-132.

Massachusetts. At an age when most young men would have been out in the world on their own, he seemed hesitant to leave his comfortable surroundings, although he made it known that he was bored. Why had he chosen to remain at home when he wanted to go to Europe? The ostensible reason was that William at that time was touring the continent and probably the elder James could not afford to keep two sons abroad. As an actual fact, with William away Henry was enjoying an unaccustomed attention at home.¹⁶

When William returned, Henry's writing ceased and his recurring backache (apparently the result of his famous "obscure" injury) flared up again. On the surface the brothers displayed understanding and love for each other. The same relationship seems to exist between the sisters in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes": "the sisters are good friends enough, and accommodating bedfellows . . . betwixt whom it would take more than a day for the seeds of jealousy to sprout and bear fruit."¹⁷ But jealousy does rise between the sisters as it existed between William and Henry. Henry's literary career seemed to be taking shape at a time when William's future was uncertain; the younger brother was usurping the elder brother's place of leadership. In each of the stories of 1868 there is a usurper. Edel points out

¹⁶ Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, p. 248.

¹⁷ Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 8.

that Henry James seems to "identify himself not with the younger or weaker individual, but with the older and stronger, the usurping individual."¹⁸ If this theory is correct, then James has presented, in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," an account of his own unconscious attitude toward his brother.

"DeGrey: A Romance"

James used the supernatural again in "DeGrey: A Romance," published in The Atlantic in July, 1868. Leon Edel ascribes the form and content of the second of the ghostly tales to the romantic tradition of Hawthorne, but Cornelia Kelley and Robert LeClair trace the story's source to another romancer, George Sand. Miss Kelley says, "George Sand was to influence not only the treatment of passion, but the entire story--conception, material, atmosphere, and execution."¹⁹ She notes that the story "does the very things for which James praised George Sand."²⁰

The influence of George Sand is suggested by James's review of her story "Mademoiselle Merquem" shortly before the appearance of "De Grey." James noted that she was a specialist in her power to deal with the passion of love:

Madame Sand is said to have celebrated but a single passion--the passion of love. This is in great measure true; but in depicting it she has incidentally

¹⁸Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, p. 251.

¹⁹Kelley, p. 87.

²⁰Ibid.

portrayed so many others that she may be said to have pretty thoroughly explored the human soul.²¹

The setting is in America, in the year 1820. Although James called his characters Americans, the atmosphere is French. The story deals with the effects of a supernatural curse upon the De Grey family. The curse originated with a remote ancestor, who forbidden to marry because he had the plague, defied it and took a wife. Successive generations of De Greys suffer because no woman loved by a member of the family can escape death. James does not explain how the family has endured under this impossible handicap. Father Herbert, a Catholic priest living in the De Grey home, tells Margaret Aldis of the curse when he learns that Paul De Grey loves her.

The story is powerful because of its picture of overwhelming passion; romance, not reality, holds the reader. Furthermore, the resignation of the priest to the impending tragedy strengthens the force of the unusual events. Margaret, the bride-to-be, bravely fights the fatal curse until she reverses it. Strong willed, she gains strength in her struggle as Paul deteriorates. Eventually De Grey is beaten and destroyed. His death comes after he has been thrown from a horse. Saying farewell, he feels drawn "by I don't know what fatal, inexorable ties, to darkness and death

²¹Henry James, "George Sand's 'Mademoiselle Merquem,'" The Nation, VII, No. 159 (July 16, 1868), 52.

and nothingness." Margaret realizes that she has brought him to nothingness through love too powerful and too blind: "Ah, senseless clod that I am, I have killed you!" The dying De Grey replies: "I believe it's true. What is it, Margaret? --you're enchanted, baleful, fatal!"²²

"De Grey" is a tale with a subjective ghost. No phantom actually appears; yet De Grey's dying words suggest that his fiancée has taken his life by casting some inexplicable spell. Her determination not to fall victim to the fatal curse is motivated by the priest's devout acceptance of its existence. Believing the priest, she fights against her supposed fate relentlessly. She defeats the curse, but she wins nothing: "The sense had left her mind as completely as his body, and it was likely to come back to one as little as to the other."²³

In a brief quasi-epilogue, the priest says that he still believes in the powerful effects of the supernatural. He is surprised to find that Mrs. De Grey "refused to accept the idea of a supernatural pressure upon her son's life, and that she quietly cherished the belief that he had died of the fall from his horse."²⁴ The fact that the curse is reversed does not alter the priest's conviction. Thus, as in later stories,

²²Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 67.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

the supernatural element is accepted by one character or one set of characters and rejected or questioned by others.

James like Hawthorne maintains a detached if not semi-skeptical attitude toward the supernatural, once noting that it involves "a dispute as ancient as history itself,--the quarrels between the minds which cling to the supernatural and the minds which dismiss it."²⁵ In "De Grey" and "The Ghostly Rental," he creates minor characters who dispute the existence of the supernatural. Their failure to prove or disprove the ghost adds mystery. In the foreground there are characters who must deal with specters evoked by the psychic condition of those who perceive ghosts. Thus a spiritual significance, or fascination, is obtained without moral meaning.

In his summary of "De Grey," Robert Le Clair writes: "It is clearly an improvisation emanating from a mood . . . it is not the sort of tale James was really interested in . . . and quite different from the realistic story in which he really found himself."²⁶ The implication of both Le Clair and Cornelia Kelley is that James had been led too far into romancing because of his admiration for George Sand. But to take no account of biographical influences and to ascribe the

²⁵Henry James, "Taine's English Literature," Atlantic Monthly (April, 1872), p. 470.

²⁶Robert Le Clair, Young Henry James (New York, 1955), p. 405.

whole story to literary imitation seems too narrow. Leon Edel's treatment of the same story traces its theme to frustrations in James's own life: "The family curse in 'De Grey' is the first record of a Jamesian fantasy of deep biographical significance."²⁷ Edel emphasizes the "characteristic American spirit" with which Margaret fights the "Old World" curse and finds it reversing itself: "she blindly, senselessly, remorselessly drained the life from his [Paul De Grey's] being. While Margaret summoned strength, Paul withered away."²⁸ Edel calls this the "vampire theme" and feels that James took it from his own life and that of his cousin Minnie Temple. In a letter to his brother William, James told how he was recovering from an illness while she lost her health and died: "I slowly crawling from weakness and inaction and suffering into strength and health and hope: she sinking out of brightness and youth into decline and death."²⁹ According to Edel, interest in the theme was rooted deep in James's personality, and the same idea appeared in the later stories such as "Longstaff's Marriage" and The Sacred Fount, a mystifying fantasy which Edmund Wilson describes as "maddening."³⁰ The "vampire

²⁷Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 27.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1948), p. 120.

theme" may have sprung from James's idea that marriage for the artist was suicide, a draining of creative power. Edel says, "For a De Grey bride to be led to the marriage bed was to invite death; and if the bride resisted this fate then she doomed her husband-to-be. One or the other had to die."³¹

"The Last of the Valerii"

Henry James's third story containing supernatural elements, "The Last of the Valerii," appeared in the Atlantic in January, 1874. He did not place the tale in the New York Edition. Although inspired chiefly by Prosper Merimée's Vénus d'Ille, the story contains elements essentially original with James. As a schoolboy of seventeen, James translated the French tale and submitted it to a publisher who neither printed it nor acknowledge receipt of it. The extent of Merimée's influence may be judged from James's review "Merimée's Last Tales," perhaps written before James published his own story.

Some of the best stories are those in which a fantastic or supernatural element is thrown into startling relief against a background of hard, smooth realism. An admirable success in this line is the 'Venus d'Ille' [sic]--a version of the old legend of a love pledge between a mortal and a goddess.³²

In addition to Greek myth, James mentions another author's story on the same subject: "Mr. Morris [William Morris] has

³¹Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 28.

³²Henry James, "Merimée's Last Tales," The Nation (February 12, 1874), p. 111.

treated the theme with his usual somewhat prolix imagery in his 'Earthly Paradise.'"³³ Thirteen years before James published "The Last of the Valerii," Hawthorne had written The Marble Faun, still another literary mingling of statues and life. The sources, then, were abundant for James to draw from and use to his own account. To his sources he applied the technique he called the "picturesquely unnatural."³⁴

The story has a Roman setting. The artist-narrator tells how a disinterred statue of Juno leads an Italian count from reality to fantasy. The Juno, although thousands of years old, radiates life, and, to Count Valerio, is profoundly enchanting, so alluring that, as far as he is concerned, she cannot be inanimate. He worships the Juno and neglects his wife; he finds a spiritual love in a lifeless object at the expense of a woman who is warm in body but cold in soul, perhaps shallow in tradition and a sense of the past.

The count's American wife, realizing that the relic has become an obstacle in their marriage, believes that for her husband "the Juno is a reality--she, herself, a fiction!"³⁵ The narrator elaborates on the count's predicament:

He [the count] gave me a glance occasionally, as he passed me, in which a kind of dumb desire for help appeared to struggle with the conviction that such

³³Ibid., pp. 111-112.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 97.

a one as I would never even understand him. I was willing enough to help him, but the case was exceedingly delicate, and I wished to master the symptoms . . . The count took the form of a precious psychological study. . . . But for the most part my host seemed to me simply an unhappy young man, with a morbid mental twist which ought to be smoothed away as quickly as possible. If the remedy was to match the disease, however, it would have to be an extraordinary dose!³⁶

In the end the count comes back to a more normal condition, back to the warmth of his wife, but he "never became . . . a thoroughly modern man."³⁷

Although there were many sources available to James for his story about the excavated statue, his reading was not wholly responsible for "The Last of the Valerii." He toured Rome in 1873 and witnessed the excavations going on at the time. He inspected the disinterred tomb of the Valerii and was fascinated by the survival of "this perfect shape coming up . . . from the sea of time."³⁸ Still other Roman relics became part of his story. Among them was the head of the Juno, a piece of sculpture now displayed in a Roman museum.

To make these elements have meaning, James added his central figure, the count, a strange but not completely improbable character. He is, as James himself was, a personality with strong sense of the past. An Italian with the influence of centuries of pagan history upon him, he cannot

³⁶Ibid., pp. 93-94.

³⁷Ibid., p. 102.

³⁸Ibid., p. 69.

understand the "chants and ceremonies and splendours" of the Catholic Church. For him there is more reality in the "exquisitely romantic, more haunted . . . ghosts of the past" than in the "heavy atmosphere of St. Peters."³⁹ Thus "The Last of the Valerii" has a religious sub-theme which is rather unusual for Henry James. The pagan count's religion amounts to an appreciation of antique beauty; his wife is a Protestant, quite possibly a descendant of the Puritans.

In his famous essay, "The Art of Fiction," James writes:

"Art," in our Protestant communities where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction.⁴⁰

Although the count's wife is a genuine, innocent American girl, the undercurrent of the story shows James's distrust of Puritan ideals regarding art. James as an artist, says Leon Edel, "could be a pagan in spirit . . . a puritan in fact."⁴¹ This ambivalence was beginning to manifest itself when, at twenty-nine, he wrote "The Last of the Valerii." The narrator muses on the count's archeological zeal: "I rather wondered . . . and asked myself whether he had an eye to the past or to the future--to the intrinsic interest of

³⁹Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁴⁰Henry James, The Future of the Novel (New York, 1956), p. 7.

⁴¹Leon Edel, Henry James: The Conquest of London (New York, 1963), p. 105.

possible Minervas and Apollos, or to their market value."⁴²

The count himself answers the question: "If you can't believe in them, don't disturb them."⁴³ The narrator, an intelligent rationalist, asks if the count is superstitious:

Yes, by Bacchus, I am superstitious! Too much so, perhaps! But I'm an old Italian, and you must take me as you find me. There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind! . . . I can't bear to look the statues in the face. I seem to see other strange eyes in the empty sockets, and I hardly know what they say to me. I call the poor old statues ghosts.⁴⁴

He means that they were historic ancestral ghosts.

But the narrator, the realist, sees nothing supernatural in the disinterred Juno which captivates the count. Beginning his "psychological study," he informs Marco that his conduct requires an explanation. The count answers: ". . . you think me crazy."⁴⁵ The narrator replies, "No, not crazy, but unhappy. And if unhappiness runs its course too freely, of course, it's a great strain upon the mind."⁴⁶ Then he muses to himself, "I had denied that I thought he was crazy, but I suddenly began to suspect it."⁴⁷ But it is not the narrator who saves the count; the Italian's American wife brings him back to reality.

On the surface "The Last of the Valerii" contrasts two civilizations: one is old, romantic, rich in tradition; the

⁴²Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 81.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 69.

⁴³Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁷Ibid.

other new, matter-of-fact, and real. But in a deeper sense the tale is an account of a man who literally mutilates himself through an archaic form of religious observance. The count submits willingly and eagerly to the Juno, the holy relic that demands a sacrifice, just as it did in the days when it represented the highest good. The statue (the ghost) forbids the natural instinct of the count, for it resurrects the memory of the ancient religious rites which demanded the sacrifice of the sexual life in order that man might devote himself to what was then considered higher reality. The count has a likeness to the chief priest in Catullus's poem "Attis," who castrates himself because of his complete abhorrence of erotic love. In "The Last of the Valerii" James uses a palpable object to captivate the protagonist, a rather conventional, almost stupid individual whose character also suggests the influence of Hawthorne's Donatello. The religious sub-theme clearly illustrates how James makes the Juno inspire a religious fervor so undoubted and so uncontrolled that it brings anxiety and uneasiness to an otherwise comfortable present.

"The Ghostly Rental"

In Paris in 1875, James suddenly found himself in the midst of financial pressures while writing The American. He received a letter from his mother telling him of his father's financial reverses and warning him that he himself had been

extravagant with family money. The letter, in effect, served two purposes: it undermined his security and sent him to bed with a ten-day headache. But it also made him realize that he could no longer remain an economic dependent--that he had to earn money from his writing. He interrupted work on The American and quickly wrote two short tales, "Crawford's Consistency" and "The Ghostly Rental," receiving three hundred dollars from Scribners for both. The twenty-eighth of James's published tales, "The Ghostly Rental" is the last supernatural tale of his early period. Furthermore, the story marks the end of direct influence by other writers of the ghost story.

Passages in "The Ghostly Rental" reveal the influence of Poe. During the composition of this story James had been reading Baudelaire, whose admiration for Poe is well-known, but it is certain that he had already become familiar with such a famous American author. The extent of Poe's influence upon James may be observed where James deliberately used words to create suspense in the reader's mind, trying for touches of eeriness in the setting. In the opening lines of "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe sets the mood:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country. At length I found myself, as

shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.⁴⁸

In James's "The Ghostly Rental" there is a similar introduction:

One gray December afternoon I had sought it [exercise] in the direction of the adjacent town of Medford, and I was retracing my steps at an even pace, and watching the pale cold tints--the transparent amber and faded rose-color--which curtained, in wintry fashion, the western sky . . . I came, as dusk was falling.⁴⁹

Never before in his short tales had he attempted such mood-evoking description as appears in the first part of "The Ghostly Rental." This deliberate choice of words to create a spooky atmosphere is a departure from his usual rather chatty, matter-of-fact approach to ghostly manifestations. "On one side was a high, natural embankment, on the top of which was perched an apple-orchard, whose tangled boughs made a stretch of coarse black lace-work, hung across the coldly rosy west."⁵⁰

The images in this story may have been partially inspired by the richness of detail in Flaubert's "La Tentation de Saint Antoine." Shortly before he wrote "The Ghostly Rental" he reviewed "La Tentation," saying that the hermit's visions are carried out with

. . . ingenious, audacious, and erudite detail . . . There is generally supposed to be a certain vagueness about visions; they are things of ambiguous

⁴⁸Edgar Allan Poe, The Complete Tales and Poems (New York, 1938), p. 231.

⁴⁹Edel, The Ghostly Tales, p. 107.

⁵⁰Ibid.

shapes and misty edges. But vagueness of portrayal has never been our author's failing, and St. Anthony's hallucinations under his hands become a gallery of photographs.⁵¹

In "The Ghostly Rental" James employs a narrator, a curious young divinity student, whose excursions lead him to a strange old house. He observes its somber atmosphere and decides, "The house is simply haunted!"⁵² This conviction cloaks reality; he begins to interpret subsequent events as ghostly, even though they are simply out of the ordinary. Seeing Captain Diamond enter the house, the narrator suspects him to be "eccentric and grotesque." He describes the captain realistically, then notes with consciously gothic intent that his eyes "were flamboyant . . . his nose terrific . . . his mouth implacable." The narrator talks with the captain about ghosts and believes him when he says he has seen one: "I stick to what I said about people who deny the power of departed spirits to return. They are fools."⁵³

The narrator talks next with a woman who confirms that the captain knows a ghost. She tells the young theologian that the captain's ghost is his daughter, whom he has killed with a curse. According to the woman, the captain's daughter

⁵¹Henry James, "Flaubert's Temptation of St. Anthony," The Nation (June 4, 1874), p. 365.

⁵²Ibid., p. 108.

⁵³Ibid., p. 117.

inhabits his house and haunts him to make him suffer for his guilt: the daughter makes her father suffer because he prevented her marriage. The narrator eventually goes to the house and sees the "apparition." He says, "I had always thought ghosts were white and transparent; this is a thing of thick shadows, densely opaque."⁵⁴ In a later episode, when the captain is ill, the divinity student goes to the house to deliver the rent to the ghost. Then he learns that the captain's daughter is no ghost at all; she is real and alive, has been blackmailing her father. After the captain dies, the daughter actually does see her father's ghost. Once again James has used a supernatural manifestation to punish the guilty, but he leaves room for the reader to wonder whether or not a bad conscience has not produced the spirit.

In the early, experimental stage of his writing career, Henry James's debt to other writers is obvious. Probably Hawthorne's romances were his most profound guides. While it is true that he criticized Hawthorne's "want of reality and . . . abuse of the fanciful,"⁵⁵ the word romance appears in the titles of his first two ghostly tales. Furthermore, James's concern for the effects of repressed guilt upon demonstrations of character suggests Hawthorne's influence.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁵James, Hawthorne, p. 98.

But the ghostly tales of his early career also show James to be writing independently, bringing to his pages the traditions of the genteel society in which he moved. The scrupulous manners, the refined dialect, the leisurely estates wherein no one was involved in physical labor--the customs and abodes of gentility as depicted in these early stories are uniquely James's. And so are the ghosts who come to this genteel world. They, too, are unique, for they are ambiguous ghosts who have no remarkable ancestry in literature. They are fresh, intriguing ghosts, whose ambiguity is more deliberate than accidental. For this reason the reader can never be certain that an actual ghost haunted one of James's characters.

Henry James was, of course, not writing about haunters; he was concerned with haunted persons. If he had written of his father's vastation, James no doubt would have emphasized the probable ghost within the man, not the improbable ghost without; if he had been genuinely interested in ghosts, he would have followed the tradition of Mrs. Radcliffe, whose elaborately concocted haunters satisfy only those who think that the greatest evils are inflicted physically. It was Henry James's great discovery that people could not learn to love wisely. This was greater evil. Rosalind Wingrave, Margaret Aldis, and the Count Valerio were dramatizations of this discovery. Their failure to love normally and rationally

led them toward ruinous marriages. Their tendencies toward self-destruction in ill-fated unions were linked with the supernatural, usually reported by an observer who had an interest in weird phenomena.

Joseph W. Beach has characterized these early tales as showing no particular promise of the later ghostly masterpieces:

Neither these tales of the uncanny ["The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "De Grey: A Romance"] nor for that matter the much better story of "The Ghostly Rental" . . . bears the faintest resemblance to those remarkable tales of the later time, "The Friends of the Friends," "The Real Right Thing," and "The Turn of the Screw."⁵⁶

Only in the artistic sense, however, is Beach's statement true. James's early ventures into supernatural fiction, when compared with his later work, show striking resemblances as has been noted above. Except for "Sir Edmund Orme" and "The Turn of the Screw," his characters in the later tales continue to talk about ghosts more than to see them.

⁵⁶ Joseph W. Beach, The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 185.

CHAPTER IV

THE GHOSTLY DECADE

When James finished The Tragic Muse in 1890, he chose to abandon the novel and write for the stage, with short stories interspersed. "Sir Edmund Orme," appearing in December, 1891, is the first of a dozen supernatural tales he penned in the last years of the century when his powers were at their greatest height.

Why, in so versatile a writer as Henry James, who had hitherto merely toyed with the supernatural, are so many tales of ghosts crowded into a ten-year period? There are several reasons. In spite of the fact that he had grown more accomplished as a novelist, his audience had dwindled after Daisy Miller (1879), one of his most popular tales. The public was buying the more melodramatic stories like Wells's The Time Machine, Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Doyle's The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Public neglect, anxiety, and an adventuresome spirit induced James to attempt playwriting. He approached the stage with ambition, hoping to obtain tangible rewards and to preserve or even enhance his literary reputation. At the end of the London performance of Guy Domville, when he went to the stage for

applause, he was driven away with jeers. Leon Edel writes, "seldom had there been a dramatist so ill-fitted for rebuff and humiliation. Henry James had been pushed over the edge of the abyss."¹

He withdrew from the social life of London into the literary asceticism of Lamb House that characterized his later years; he retreated into the exile of separateness, into contemplation. In "the great good place" of his imagination he disciplined himself to a finer program of action for fiction. The pages of his notebooks reveal "the pattern of escape from the reality of the world to the inner reality of fantasy."² Throughout most of the decade of the 1890's, his supernatural tales dramatize the psychic grotesquerie he observed in others. Finally, in the very last years of the century, he began to look inward, to investigate and reveal his own psychological difficulties and aberrations.

"Sir Edmund Orme"

James outlined, in 1879, the story of a girl, who "unknown to herself is followed, constantly, by a figure which other persons see."³ The tale became "Sir Edmund Orme," the first of his supernatural stories to be printed in the

¹Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. xvii.

²Ibid., p. xix.

³F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, The Notebooks of Henry James (New York, 1961), pp. 9-10.

New York Edition. James considered Sir Edmund one of his most successful ghosts and called the tale the "finest . . . of the gruesome."⁴ Sir Edmund is the first of James's ghosts to come out into the open. Without apology, he appears everywhere, sitting on a sofa by Charlotte Marden, or in a pew in church. Constantly he follows the young girl. She does not know of his presence, but her mother is quite aware of him. Mrs. Marden, who suffers when the ghost appears, jilted Sir Edmund when they were youthful lovers. The ghost who follows Charlotte Marden is the embodiment of her mother's anxiety and guilt. Mrs. Marden, a widow, does everything in her power to promote her daughter's marriage to the suitor, who is the narrator of the story. This personage has no fear of the ghost. When first told about Sir Edmund, the narrator exclaims, "The place is haunted, haunted!"⁵ and finds "ghosts much less alarming and much more amusing than was commonly supposed."⁶ Soon, however, he is compelled to believe in Sir Edmund's presence and accepts his role as the protector of Charlotte: "The way to save her was to love her."⁷

Sir Edmund is a triple symbol of Mrs. Marden's guilt, of the suitor's hope and duty, and of Charlotte's guardian. The

⁴James, Novels and Tales, XVII, xxiii.

⁵Ibid., pp. 387-388.

⁶Ibid., p. 390.

⁷Ibid., p. 393.

specter will not allow Mrs. Marden's daughter to be jilted as her mother had jilted him. An agent of retributive justice and hope, the returned spirit accomplishes his purpose, for he is pacified when Charlotte and the narrator clasp each other in love as Mrs. Marden dies.

This first of James's more vividly realized ghosts foreshadows their appearance in other tales--"The Turn of the Screw," "The Third Person," and "The Jolly Corner." This type of ghost is the kind that, though he may be subjective to a person primarily concerned with him, becomes visible or credible to other persons also. Sir Edmund is Mrs. Marden's personal ghost, but the narrator sees him and is completely rational about him. Mrs. Marden is mentally prepared to see him; but the suitor-narrator is, at first, skeptical of the possibility of his seeing the same apparition.

Sir Edmund is definitely visible; hence he is more real than the ghosts of James's earlier supernatural tales. These later ghosts are, too, more impressive haunters. Ghosts that dress and act like human beings, that go about their business in a life-like way, are more terrifying than the earlier, subliminal ghosts whose work is too sudden, too contrived to be real. Sir Edmund--quiet, so serene, so lifelike in his manner--has a formidable advantage over Mrs. Marden; he brings to the surface her repressed guilt.

Once again James has used the supernatural as related to guilt in a marital situation--a marriage planned but not

carried out. The ghost, however, intends to promote, not prevent, marriage. Sir Edmund is not the revenge ghost of Elizabethan drama; he is, instead, the guilty conscience of the troubled mother. His efforts are, however, only partially successful, for he cannot insure a happy marriage. According to the narrator of the prologue, Charlotte Marden died in childbirth a year after the marriage, just as Perdita had expired in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes."

In his early supernatural stories, James used a narrator on two occasions. The artist-narrator of "The Last of the Valerii" sympathizes with the troubled Count Valerio, but James made him an observer-reporter who does not get involved in the action. The divinity student, the narrator of "The Ghostly Rental," is primarily a reporter, and he becomes committed in only a limited way. "Sir Edmund Orme" is the first of James's supernatural tales to employ two narrators. The first narrator, in a short prologue, explains that he has obtained "the strange story" from personal papers of the person who wrote it. The narrator of the prologue says that "you" (apparently there are listeners like the fireside guests in "The Turn of the Screw") may think the story incredible:

I can't, I allow, vouch for his having intended it as a report of real occurrence--I can only vouch for his general veracity. In any case it was written for himself, not for others--having full option--precisely because of its oddity. Let them, in respect for the form of the thing, bear in mind that it was written quite for himself. I've altered nothing but the name.⁸

⁸Ibid., p. 367.

In effect, James tries to remove himself from the story and prepares the way for the second narrator's extended participation in the events. The first narrator will not claim that the story was true; but, at the same time, indicates a faith in its veracity because an honest gentleman wrote it for himself only. The reader is thereby pulled in; he wants to share in this odd but questionable secret. This trick, which James used successfully in "The Friends of the Friends" and "The Turn of the Screw," is further commented upon by Leon Edel in his "Introductory Essay" to The Sacred Fount: "And James's attitude is one of complete neutrality. So neutral is he that he leaves a wide margin for the reader, who, if he is not careful, will be adding material of his own to the story."⁹

"Nona Vincent"

James returned to more limited ghosts in 1892 with three tales of the "quasi-supernatural order." The term is his own. Eighteen years earlier he had written "The Last of the Valerii," his first story in this vein. The ghosts of these stories of 1892 are not conventional haunters. They do not come out into the open as much as Sir Edmund Orme, and are realistic only to the person whose imagination may have conjured them up. James managed this type of ghost admirably. He seems, in his own words, "more interested in situations

⁹Henry James, The Sacred Fount, introduction by Leon Edel (London, 1959), p. iii.

obscure and subject to interpretation than the rattle of the foreground."¹⁰

"Nona Vincent" grows out of James's experience with the theater. The story proceeds naturally without a hint of the ghostly until the last. A playwright falls in love with the heroine he creates and eventually with the actress who takes the part; he neglects his truest love, the woman who gave him inspiration and financed the production. The lucky woman is Nona Vincent, heroine of dramatist Allan Wayworth's play of the same name:

Nona Vincent, in face and form, the living heroine of his play, rose before him [Wayworth] in his little silent room, sat down with him at his dingy fireside . . . she was more familiar to him than the women he had known best . . . Nothing more real had ever befallen him, and, nothing, somehow more reassuring.¹¹

There is the suggestion of supernaturalism in the denouement as Wayworth learns that Violet Gray, who plays the role of Nona, has had a vision at the same time. But the person appearing to her was not Nona. Her ghost is Mrs. Alsager, a close friend of both the playwright and the actress. In the story's final moments Violet Gray tells Wayworth:

"I've had a revelation."
Wayward, [sic]¹² stared. "At what hour?"

¹⁰James, Novels and Tales, XVII, xvi.

¹¹Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 205.

¹²Probably a typographical error in Edel's volume.

"The right hour--this afternoon. Just in time to save me--and to save you."

"Nona Vincent?"

"Mrs. Alsager," Violet Gray smiled more deeply.

"It's the same thing."¹³

The truth is that the character in the play, the actress who played the role, and the woman who inspired the production are all confused in Wayworth's mind. The women sense this, but Wayworth never does.

"Nona Vincent" is a happy tale. James broke with the ghostly tradition in allowing Wayworth and Violet Gray to be married. Furthermore, the play in the story, unlike James's own production of The American, was a success. For the first time in James's tales, the supernatural proves beneficent.

"Nona Vincent" is another example of the way James frequently connects the supernatural with love. Before Wayworth presents his play, Mrs. Alsager comments on his condition: "You must indeed be in a dreadful state. Anxiety for another is still worse than anxiety for one's self."¹⁴ She understands that Wayworth's nervousness is caused not over the possible success or failure of Nona Vincent the play, but over his love for Nona Vincent, the image he has created in his mind. This aspect of the story is similar to "The Last of the Valerif," in which the hero falls in love with a statue. In "Nona" the hero has abandoned the reality of the

¹³Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 208.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 197.

woman who loves him (Mrs. Alsager) to fall in love with the fictional heroine of his play. He cannot distinguish clearly fantasy from fact, a dilemma common to practically all leading characters in his ghostly tales. A real woman in this happier story leads the hero back to the real world. Only poor Mrs. Alsager loses, but the reader has not been very much involved in the trials of this rather colorless female whose infatuation seems uncalled for.

"The Private Life"

The two other quasi-supernatural tales of 1892, "The Private Life" and "Sir Dominick Ferrand," reveal James's interest in psychical research as material for dramatic treatment. Like many nineteenth century writers, James had long been interested in seances and mesmerism. He had witnessed the use of hypnotism on his sister Alice when doctors attempted to make her oblivious to the pain from the tumor in her breast. That Henry was familiar with his brother's psychological research is a matter of record. In 1890, just before he commenced his best-known ghost stories, he was called upon to read one of William's papers before the Psychical Research Society in London. But he made only limited use of the type of ghost examined by this Society and labeled "certified."

"The Private Life," a fantasy based upon the quizzical nature of James's friend Robert Browning, achieves its

supernaturalism by dramatization of the poet's alter ego. James, aware of the idea of double personality as discussed by psychologists, recognized the duality of Browning's nature. Earlier, in the 1870's, James had been preoccupied with the question of contrasting qualities of character. For example, one of the characters of "Benvolio," his only categorical allegory, possessed two different souls, both molded in the same personage. James, in 1892, was more concerned with the complexity of personality than with the strength or weakness of character. The term alter ego appears frequently in his commentaries and occasionally in his ghostly fiction of the later period. "The Private Life" is not a case study of double personality, nor does it go to the melodramatic lengths of Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It is, perhaps, the least ghostly and one of the most psychological of James's supernatural stories. The private life of novelist Clare Vawdrey (Robert Browning) is completely hidden behind his public performances. The narrator notes that "even his embarrassments were rehearsed."¹⁵ Desperately endeavoring to fathom the writer's private life, he is foiled by Vawdrey, who will not, even to his wife, come from behind his facade:

I had secretly pitied him for the perfection of his performance, had wondered what blank face such a mask had to cover, what was left to him for the

¹⁵James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 226.

unmitigable hours in which a man sits down with himself . . .¹⁶

Afterward, the narrator discovers that there are two Clare Vawdreys. Knowing that the great novelist has left his room, the narrator enters to find a personage still there, seated at his writing table and apparently composing in the dark.

"Owen Wingrave"

James wrote several ghostly tales for the Christmas market. "Owen Wingrave," first published in the Graphic, in December, 1892, came to James's mind one afternoon as he sat in Kinsington Gardens. He relates in the preface to "The Altar of the Dead" that a slim young man took a chair nearby and began to read. James muses further:

Did the young man then, on the spot, just become Owen Wingrave, establishing by mere magic of type the situation, creating at a stroke all the implications and filling out all the pictures? . . . my poor point is only that at the beginning of my session in the penny chair the seedless fable hadn't a claim to make or an excuse to give, and that, the very next thing, the pennyworth still partly unconsumed, it was fairly bristling with pretexts. "Dramatise it, dramatise it!" would seem to have rung with sudden intensity in my ears.¹⁷

His metaphor of the creative artist taking from this little pebble of matter the substance for a story is posed as a question. How James activated this small observation into a story is described in his notebooks. In early 1892, after

¹⁶Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁷Ibid., p. xxii.

Alice James's death, he had been reading memoirs of a general who served under Napoleon. In March, 1892, he made the following entry:

The idea of the soldier--produced a little by the fascinated perusal of Marbot's magnificent memoirs. The image, the type, the vision, the character, as transmitted heredity, mystical, almost haunting, apparitional presence, in the life of a descendant of totally different temperament and range of qualities.¹⁸

The descendant mentioned here became Owen Wingrave. The central intelligence for the story is Spencer Coyle, a professional coach for making young men into soldiers. One of his pupils, Owen Wingrave, is laboring under family pressure and attacks of conscience. He is the sole heir of a military family, but is temperamentally not the soldierly type. Expected by the family, and domineering women, to live up to a tradition of blood and honor, he refuses to go to war because he feels it stupid. The family and his fiancée, Kate Julian, collaborate in an attempt to force him into a military career. He is threatened with disinheritance; still he refuses. The family calls in the military coach, hoping that this man will exert pressure upon Owen. Coyle, however, understands Owen's sentiments: he sees Owen's refusal to obey the family as a matter of courage, whereas the family interprets it as cowardice. The Wingrave estate, Paramore, has a haunted room. Supposedly it is inhabited by the spirit

¹⁸Mathiessen and Murdock, p. 218.

of a Wingrave who had, in a moment of rage, killed his own son and then had himself died in the room. Kate Julian, the fiancée, testing Owen's courage (or her conception of what courage ought to be), dares him to sleep in the room. This he claims to have already done, but she does not believe him. Owen then compels her to lock him in the room. During the night she decides to investigate, and entering the room, finds him dead on the spot where his ancestors had died.

Originally, the last sentence of "Owen Wingrave" read "He looked like a young soldier on a battlefield."¹⁹ In revising the story for the New York Edition, James changed the last line to read: "He was all the young soldier on the gained field."²⁰ He had achieved a dubious victory over influences on his life.

James's notes speak of "transmitted heredity, mystical, almost supernatural force."²¹ From such a force, represented by a subjective ghost, there was no escape. If Owen could not die on the real battlefield, he must die under the crushing power of family tradition and spirit. Kate Julian, the hero's fiancée, causes Owen's death. She seems masculine and unyielding, and further intensifies the hero's pacifism.

¹⁹Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 315.

²⁰James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 319.

²¹Mathiessen and Murdock, p. 118.

It is, nevertheless, her scorn which prompts him to lock himself in the fatal room.

The ghost in "Owen Wingrave" never shows himself. The reader only learns that Owen is found stretched out dead in the haunted room. In his first supernatural tale, James had used a ghost to effect a moral. But the handling of the ghost in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" is not so subtle as the treatment of this later demon. A quarter of a century had passed between the two stories. In 1893, psychical research was beginning to connect supernatural phenomena with heredity and environment. A revision in his original story shows that the nature of literary ghosts had begun to change. As he first wrote the story, Mrs. Coyle asks, "Do you mean to say the house has a ghost?"²² In the revised text, she asks, "Do you mean to say the house has a proved ghost?"²³ James, of course, never intended that this ghost be seen. When the story was staged in 1908, the producer brought in a ghostly figure, draped in white, for the climactic scene. James, in America at the time, heard of this and was shocked. In the strongest of terms, he disapproved of the ghost on stage. He knew that scientific supernaturalism might be represented in fiction; on the stage the relation between psychological phenomena and the weird is restricted, if not impossible.

²²Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 314.

²³James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 300.

But more important, he was quite convinced, in the 1890's that the reality of life was not altogether in the appearance on the surface. Underneath were ideas, illusions, fantasies, dreams as powerful in motivating behavior as any demonstrable, material fact. His purpose was not to uncover this situation; for, accepting life as it was, he sought to dramatize it, to be the artist rather than the scientist. The ghost in "Owen Wingrave" is the manifestation of a burden of guilt and frustration on the part of the protagonist. When ghosts cannot be laid, they become, for the people James wrote about, their other selves.

"The Friends of the Friends"

On May 1, 1896, James published "The Way It Came." He included the tale in his New York Edition under the title "The Friends of the Friends." Called "a perfect example of the Jamesian ghostly tale,"²⁴ it combines features of his earlier stories with the somewhat complicated, ambiguous style of his maturity. The jealous woman, the prevented marriage, and the suggested ghost all figure in this weird, delicately planned tale. "The Friends of the Friends" has no characters with names. Four characters, all referred to with pronouns, appear in the story; another is mentioned, but he remains in the background.

²⁴Edel, Ghostly Tales, p. 395.

As in "Sir Edmund Orme," James uses a prologue narrator who offers a document, or diary, the truth of which he elaborately disavows responsibility for:

These pages evidently date from years ago. I've read with the liveliest wonder the statement they so circumstantially make and done my best to swallow the prodigy they leave to be inferred. These things would be striking, wouldn't they? to any reader; but can you imagine for a moment my placing such a document before the world, even though, as if she herself had desired the world should have the benefit of it, she has given her friends neither name nor initials? Have you any sort of clue to their identity? I leave her the floor.²⁵

"She" is the first-person narrator of the story involving a man and a woman (not the narrator) who have had similar experiences with ghosts. Both have seen the apparitions of their fathers at the times of the death of the fathers. Neither one of these persons is known to the other, but the narrator knows them both and thinks that they should become acquainted, not only because they have had identical supernatural experiences but also because they have almost identical tastes. The narrator, trying for years to bring them together, sees her efforts apparently ending in failure, for some accident always prevents the meeting. The frustration arising out of this failure creates an obsession in the narrator. As a last resort, she herself becomes engaged to the man partially because she feels that she can then arrange the long sought meeting. Finally, a definite meeting time is set.

²⁵James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 323-324.

But a sudden jealousy overcomes the narrator, and she hastily writes a letter asking that her friend postpone the meeting. Thus the meeting does not happen. Then a startling occurrence is revealed to the narrator the very next day when she learns that her lady friend has met her fiancé and subsequently died. Actually both events happen almost simultaneously. The narrator cannot decide whether it was the woman in body or the woman as a ghost who came to her fiance's house. The man tells her that the woman was alive, but the narrator, having seen her dead, thinks her friend has come as a ghost. She becomes jealous of the dead woman; so great is her jealousy that she breaks off her engagement with her fiance, who later dies, apparently a suicide.

James struggled long with the idea for this odd story. It is partially outlined in a notebook entry of February 5, 1895. He asked first, "What is there in the idea of Too late--of some friendship or passion or bond--some affection long desired and waited for, that is formed too late?"²⁶ He discussed the theme with himself and then concluded: "There may be the germ of a situation in this; but it obviously requires digging out."²⁷

On December 21, 1895, he picked up the suggestion again: "The idea, for a scrap of a tale, or a scrap of a fantasy, of

²⁶Mathiessen and Murdock, pp. 182-183.

²⁷Ibid.

two persons who have constantly heard of each other, constantly been near each other, constantly missed each other."²⁸ The story had formed in his imagination, but there was a problem: who was to tell it? At first he thought it could be told by a third person.

By January 10, 1896, he had outlined the story. In the first pages of the story James's "I" narrator is an observer-reporter. But this changes, and the narrator suddenly is more than a narrator; she begins to affect the action of the story, plotting her strategy through jealousy, never realizing it, never letting the reader know straightforwardly that she is jealous. The reader must determine it for himself; he must figure from the little slips, the unconscious admissions, that she is an unreliable narrator.

Up to this point in his ghost stories, James's story-tellers have appeared objective and reliable. Through their eyes the reader has witnessed a morbid element in other characters. In "The Friends of the Friends" the reader sees not only the delusions of others but the fantasies of the narrator. She admits her trouble in the beginning of the story: "I know perfectly of course that I brought it upon myself; but that doesn't make it any better. I was the first to speak of her to him--he had never even heard her mentioned."²⁹ Then she

²⁸Ibid., p. 231.

²⁹James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 325.

unfolds her "odious deceit." Her maneuvers to bring about a "friendship" result in a brief feeling of guilt when she learns of her friend's death. As the ghost remains, unalaid, the narrator in a bitter outburst of jealousy charges her fiance with loving the ghost:

You love her as you've never loved, and, passion for passion, she gives it straight back! She rules you, she holds you, she has you all! A woman, in such a case as mine, divines and feels and sees; she's not a dull dunce who has to be "credibly informed." You come to me mechanically, compunctiously, with the dregs of your tenderness and the remnant of your life. I can renounce you, but I can't share you; the best of you is hers. I know what it is and freely give you up to her forever!³⁰

On the surface the story is a rehandling of old elements, combined in one story told by a neurotic personality. The narrator's jealousy suggests that of Rosalind of "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes." The fiancé, who admits his love for the ghost, is similar to the Count Valerio of "The Last of the Valerii." Later James uses a similar situation in "Maud-Evelyn," in which a living person falls in love with a dead person whom he has never seen.

"The Turn of the Screw"

"The Turn of the Screw," by far the longest of the ghostly tales and the most popular, was first published in Collier's in weekly installments from January 27 through April 16, 1898. Three years before its appearance, James entered the source

³⁰Ibid., p. 363.

of the tale in his notebooks. The source here quoted is unique because it is, at least for the ghostly tales, the first to come directly from a storyteller, quite apart from James's reading and imagination:

Note here the ghost-story told me at Addington . . . 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 young children (indefinite number and age) left to the care of servants in an old countryhouse, 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 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.³¹

Critics over the last forty years have made this story one of the most controversial pieces of American literature. Very few short tales, and probably no ghost stories, have been the subject of so much critical attention, little of which has considered the story as a work of art. James

³¹ Mathiessen and Murdock, pp. 178-179.

himself considered that this fanciful piece would not likely be the object of expert criticism.

The critical history of James's little firm fancy has been a verbal battle between those who define "The Turn of the Screw" as a fictional presentation of Freudian psychology and those who read the tale as a mere ghost story. Edna Kenton opened the way for later investigations of Freudian symbols when she wrote, in 1924, that superficial readers were not horrified by the real horror.³² The astute reader, she claimed, should find an evil different from the ostensible one of ghosts returning to their terrestrial address to haunt two lonely little children, Miles and Flora. It is the young governess who experiences the horrors of hallucinations in the persons of Bly's ex-valet and ex-housekeeper, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, both deceased. As Miss Kenton read the story, the children see no ghosts; thus the hidden horror (and Miss Kenton suggested that it was intentionally hidden by James to foil the cunning reader) resides in the mind of the young woman who has the responsibility of caring for Miles and Flora. The governess's job becomes one of protection without the hope of outside help; she feels bound by her moral obligation, a duty exaggerated by her twisted mind; she endures especially severe terror by making herself believe

³²Edna Kenton, "Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: 'The Turn of the Screw,'" The Arts, VI (November, 1924), 245f.

that Quint and Jessel have returned with sinister designs upon the orphaned children.

In 1934, Edmund Wilson enlarged Miss Kenton's theory by calling the governess a "neurotic case of sex repression."³³ Wilson claimed that the governess develops an attachment to her employer on the occasion of her single interview with him before she goes to Bly. Never to see her employer again, she is plagued by her failure to fulfill her erotic instincts. The apparitions she encounters at Bly are the hallucinations of a frustrated subconscious drive. She alone sees Quint and Jessel: the diabolical pair never rear themselves before the children or Mrs. Grose. This motherly old soul, according to Wilson, unwittingly engenders the governess's future actions by telling of an affair that existed between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. The governess is led to believe that the children, formerly under the care of the unprincipled servants, have been corrupted. Her compulsive eroticism leads her to turn her affections away from her absent employer to little Miles, a ten-year-old. In her zeal to save the boy the governess, in the final scene, "literally frightens him to death."³⁴

Wilson's interpretation established a body of criticism based entirely upon psychological interpretation. Other

³³Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1948), p. 122.

³⁴Ibid., p. 130.

commentators such as John Silver and Oscar Cargill have also attempted to explain the story in Freudian terms. In 1948, Wilson, oddly enough, qualified his Freudian interpretation to say that "James's conscious intention . . . was to write a bona fide ghost story."³⁵

Most of the recent criticism of James's spectral story has defended the theory that the ghosts are real--not hallucinations. In hoping to "settle once and for all the question of the reality of the apparitions in the story,"³⁶ Oliver Evans investigated a number of the writer's letters which comment on "The Turn of the Screw." He found no suggestions in these letters, nor in James's definitive edition published eleven years after the story first appeared, that James had intended to write a Freudian story. In replying to H. G. Wells, who had complained that the governess's character had not been carefully delineated, James defined his intentions regarding the governess's controversial character. His words, "I had to rule out subjective complications of her own,"³⁷ indicate that he had not intentionally created a person subject to hallucinations.

Evans summarized the major argument for interpreting "The Turn of the Screw" as a mere ghost story: (1) the author

³⁵Wilson, 1948 edition, p. 123.

³⁶Oliver Evans, "James's Air of Evil: 'The Turn of the Screw,'" Partisan Review, XVI (February, 1949), 176.

³⁷Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray (eds.), James and Wells (London, 1958), p. 56.

leads the reader to believe that the children are mentally disturbed; (2) that their abnormality is sexual perversity brought on by Miles's attachment to Quint, and Flora's relations with Miss Jessel; (3) that the children are allies of the ghosts, and (4) that the combined force of evil is the disease which the governess finds herself struggling against.

The possible interpretations of "The Turn of the Screw" have not been exhausted, but those who attempt to explain it apart from James's other ghostly tales appear to be embarking upon a futile enterprise. From the overall view of James's literary dealings with ghosts, the tale is only one of eighteen stories in which James uses the supernatural. "The Turn of the Screw" is an integral part, a chapter, in his long affair with disembodied spirits.

There are several echoes from the past in "The Turn of the Screw." James has enlarged the technique of the prologue or framework he originated with "Sir Edmund Orme" and used more effectively in "The Friends of the Friends." Douglas, the narrator of the prologue, convinces the fireside guests that he possesses a singularly unusual document. Their emotions over the prospects of such a tale draw the reader in. And he, too, must wait in suspense along with the guests as Douglas goes to London to obtain the story. Considerable suspense is thus created in the prologue itself. Then finally the main narrator, the governess herself, takes over and finishes the story.

Like other Jamesian narrators the governess introduces the reader to a realistic situation, this time the quiet and charming but somehow ominous world of Bly. Soon the ghosts appear in this beautiful setting to lend force to the growing impression of evil. The narrator becomes more than an observer-reporter. She cannot explain the apparitions, nor can they be fully explained to her. She, as almost anyone would in such a situation, begins to exhibit neurotic tendencies. Unable to be entirely rational about the ghosts, she pledges herself to save the children. The burden is too big; the ghosts loom too large, appear too often. She becomes derelict in her duty by failing to take certain obvious measures--for example, bundling the children up and taking them away.

Important innovations appear in James's handling of the ghostly theme. For the first time, two ghosts instead of one are haunters. Also for the first time, the narrator seems directly haunted, unlike the narrator of "The Friends of the Friends" who never sees her ghosts or even thinks she sees them. Usually, James's ghosts have remained attached to some guilty character (not the narrator) and the narrator has been fairly objective about them. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not instruments of justice but of evil. Furthermore, they direct their evil at children; hence adults must reckon with them. Such a situation gave James the opportunity to picture

the psychology not only of the adult, but of the child, not only of the human being but of the ghost.

The ghosts in "The Turn of the Screw" are more convincing than James's earlier apparitions. He had made Sir Edmund Orme a visible ghost, but Sir Edmund has nothing of the predatory strength and vitality of Peter Quint. Quint and Jessel are stronger ghosts; they are more vigorous, more versatile, more alive. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel have returned with the personalities which they exhibited before death. As villainous apparitions, they are indeed terrifying to the unprepared governess, who like most readers has been trained to regard primarily the angelic nature of immortality and to find only beneficent meaning in spiritual concepts. The only meaning of the ghosts in "The Turn of the Screw" is evil. With Quint and Jessel, James has advanced beyond specters with "ambiguous shapes and misty edges."³⁸ The peculiarities of their appearance are presented in great detail. Note the governess's description of Quint:

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 somewhat darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange. His mouth is wide, his lips thin.³⁹

This is an unusual Jamesian description, first seeming more

³⁸James "Flaubert's Temptation of St. Anthony," p. 365.

³⁹James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 190-191.

human than ghostly; for red hair is not specter-like and a red-headed ghost who could unnaturally manipulate his eyebrows is strange. The governess continues: "He was absolutely . . . a living dangerous detestable presence."⁴⁰

James called the evil pair "hovering prowling blighting presences."⁴¹ They are ghosts, unlike the revenging ghosts of the past, to whom is given the duty of making the air reek with evil. James never liked the term ghost-story, and he says, "I recognize . . . elves, imps, demons. . . . The essence of the matter was the villainy of motive in the evoked predatory creatures."⁴² What James wishes to do in "The Turn of the Screw" is to make the reader feel the general spiritual infamy of the ghosts instead of the one particular psychical abnormality or obsession of the duty-bound ghosts of his earlier stories. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are conceived so as to be capable of the worst possible deeds: "Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough . . . Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself."⁴³ In "The Turn of the Screw" evil is its own excuse for being--a somewhat Calvinistic concept rather unusual in James.

To create a general but intense sense of evil, James maneuvers the reader into the story, into the vulnerable

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 222.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. xx.

⁴³Ibid., p. xxi.

position of taking part, into having to fear Quint and deal with him. After the first apparition, the reader anticipates the ghost and can project and externalize Quint when he does appear. To project and externalize are not, in this instance, outward exhibitions of hidden impulses. The red-headed demon, a sort of Frankenstein of the mind, hovers over the grounds at Bly where only the twitter of birds at dawn and the far-off cries of children leave the silence unbroken and brings an unutterable obscenity to both character and reader. Both are afraid of something unspecified, but given a name--Peter Quint, who treads a razor-thin line between reality and fantasy.

"The Turn of the Screw," then, is no more than a psychological ghost story carried perhaps to somewhat greater lengths of realism than had been James's practice heretofore. This interpretation would counter the case for Freudian psychology and tremendous symbolical subtlety and subterfuge which fit neatly and temptingly into much of James's mature work but which are not always demonstrably there. The ambiguity in this story is necessary, but it is not necessarily Freudian. Ambiguity in "The Turn of the Screw" is directed at generalizing the emotion of fear and intensifying it by putting it beneath the outer surface, which to James is never so real as the underneath.

In summary, several observations may be made about the supernatural tales of 1891-1898. Though the concentration of eight of these stories in the period indicates James's strong interest in the ghost story, this form was not his primary concern. During the theatrical run of The American (1891-1892) James wrote four supernatural tales. In the same thirteen-month period he composed nine non-ghostly tales. Furthermore, he spent much of the first half of this period writing his five dramas. Thus, the supernatural story occupied a secondary role in his total literary endeavor.

Even so, James's ghostly tales, when compared with those of his early experimental period, are impressive works of art. He continued to use and to improve the quasi-supernatural type of story in which ghosts never show themselves. But it is the apparitional tales of this period which are more striking, for the ghosts of these stories make frequent appearances. More audacious than James's former ghosts, they are also more complex and more psychologically real. They are complex because they cannot be called independent, dissociated entities; they are psychological because they are fused with a real person's guilt and obsession.

James's more artistic use of first-person narrators makes his psychological ghosts realistic. His narrator of the prologue, who testifies to the truth of the second narrator's document, creates an air of reality. Then the second narrator tells a story about a person's unnatural attachment

or perversion of reality. Suspense is heightened when the perversion becomes an obsession. James generates even more suspense, when, in the last tales of the period, he makes the second narrator the reporter of her own fantasy. He uses ghosts to objectify the obsession. Blackmur writes, "It is conscience that is the haunting principle of all the ghost stories . . . and the alter ego that each of them struggles to create or to recognize is but the projected image of conscience."⁴⁴ Improbable though James's ghosts may at first appear to be, they become realistic by virtue of the narrator's distortion of reality; for example in "The Turn of the Screw" and "The Friend of the Friends" the second narrator, who claims to be haunted, seems to emerge as the haunter. This feature, intensified by the intrusion of James's personal problems into the stories, is one source of the often-discussed ambiguity of Henry James. Despite the conclusion of Edmund Wilson, who regards James as being deluded about his narrators,⁴⁵ James's ambiguity in his ghost stories is both deliberate and necessary. What has been called ambiguity in these tales is little more than James's attempt to capitalize on the irrational in both his protagonist and his reader. Such a practice, as James noted, is very old indeed: "The 'ghost story' . . . has ever been for me the most

⁴⁴R. P. Blackmur, "The Sacred Fount," The Kenyon Review, IV (Winter, 1942), 352.

⁴⁵Wilson, 1948 edition, p. 125.

possible form of the fairy tale."⁴⁶ The fairy tale celebrated the victory of a protagonist over witches and kindred external demons; the supernatural tale reported the struggle with the ogres of the mind.

Some of Henry James's personal problems did, however, enter the stories of this period. "Nona Vincent" makes use of his experience in the theater, a venture which he hoped would offset the failure of his fiction to hold a wide reading public. His concern with the duality of the artist can be found in "The Private Life." James's personal debate over the determinism of heredity and environment is quite apparent in "Owen Wingrave." Overall, these stories show the pattern of James's personal questions: at times, he wondered if he had not been destined by forces beyond his control to remain unmarried and celibate; at other times, he seems to have decided that the artist must in fact separate himself from the main stream or normal side of life. His continuing personal debate with its questions regarding the unlived life is reflected in his last ghostly tales.

⁴⁶ Henry James, The Future of the Novel, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956), p. 64.

CHAPTER V

ALTER EGOS

In a letter to William Dean Howells in 1900, James told of his difficulty in writing A Sense of the Past, a ghostly novel on which he was still working when he died. James explained that "when one has done the thing, already, as I have rather repeatedly, it is not easy to concoct a 'ghost' story of any freshness."¹ He did, nevertheless, write six more ghostly tales. "The Real Right Thing" appeared in 1899. Three others--"The Great Good Place," "Maud-Evelyn," and "The Third Person"--were published in 1900. Then followed "The Beast in the Jungle" in 1903. Five years later, James wrote his last supernatural tale, "The Jolly Corner." Except for "The Third Person," these tales seem to bear directly upon James's own ghosts--that is, his missed opportunities, his accusing but sometimes comforting alter ego.

"The Real Right Thing"

The shortest of Henry James's ghostly tales is "The Real Right Thing," published in 1899 just after the appearance of "The Turn of the Screw." The title is obviously

¹Henry James, The Letters of Henry James, I, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), 355.

suggested by "The Real Thing" a story James wrote ten years earlier. The two tales are, on the surface, largely dissimilar, but they both deal with the question of reality. "The Real Thing" is a non-ghostly tale about an artist who needs models--aristocrats--to paint as illustrations for a magazine story. Two real but penniless aristocrats present themselves as models for pay. After the artist fails to capture on canvas the spirit of aristocracy, he rejects his aristocratic models in favor of two commoners who are servants. He has to discharge the aristocrats on the paradoxical ground that they are too real; they make his drawing look like a photograph. An artist, to do his best work, must use his imagination. He must abandon the actual, the real, and live in the second consciousness that all true artists possess. James was always concerned about the role of fiction as a category of art. It is "impossible to think he did not have in mind the fiction writer's problems as well as the problems of the illustrative artist when he composed 'The Real Thing.'"²

"The Real Right Thing" is a ghost story. The hero, biographer George Withermore, is commissioned to write the life story of Aston Doyne, a famous author recently taken by death. Mrs. Doyne, the widow, gives the biographer the freedom of the home and the use of her late husband's papers, documents, and diaries. Ostensibly, as in "The Real Thing,"

²Graham Munson, "'The Real Thing': A Parable for Writers of Fiction," Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies, ed. Edward Stone (New York, 1961), p. 135.

the material situation is perfect for the biographer: a great subject, a co-operative relation, and valuable papers from which to draw a narrative. But an unreal presence, the ghost of Ashton Doyne, stops the biographer short:

The extraordinary thing thus became that it made him [the biographer] not only sad but in a high degree uneasy not to feel Doyne's presence. It was somehow stranger he shouldn't be there than it had ever been he was--so strange indeed that Withermore's nerves found themselves quite illogically touched.³

The word "nerves" now appears often in James's stories. The artist in "The Real Thing" dismisses his subjects for an artistic reason: "They bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in nature of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal."⁴ The biographer of "The Real Right Thing" abandons his task for an equally paradoxical reason: he cannot get at the life of Ashton Doyne the artist because the artist lives most truly in his own imagination. Public papers and facts often have only an oblique relationship to the artist's life. When the biographer first encounters difficulty in rendering Doyne's true personality, he blames his own nerves for creating a ghost, an unreal phantasm having no place in his proposed study of the author. He deliberately attempts to suppress this subjective element, calling it false. The false element--the ghost of the story--is never suppressed; instead, it grows and

³James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 423-424.

⁴Ibid., p. 345.

interferes with George Withermore's attempts to complete his literary task. Withermore sees Doyme's apparition: "Immense. But dim. Dark. Dreadful."⁵ The biography never gets written. Withermore learns the real right thing: "The artist was what he did--he was nothing else."⁶ The biographer explains the ghost of the artist to Mrs. Doyme, telling her that the apparition has intruded to prevent their enterprise. "He hasn't been 'with' us--he has been against us,"⁷ says Withermore. Then Withermore explains his mistaken assumption that he could do the real right thing--that is, be true to the artist in his biography:

What I did think at first--that what he wishes to make us feel is his sympathy? Because I was in my original simplicity mistaken. I was--I don't know what to call it--so excited and charmed that I didn't understand. But I understand at last. He only wanted to communicate. He strains forward out of his darkness, he reaches toward us out of his mystery, he makes us dim signs out of his horror.⁸

The biographer proclaims finally that Doyme's apparition was there to protest: "He's there to save his Life. He's there to be let alone."⁹

The fictional Ashton Doyme is the perfect example of Henry James. Two sides of the man are evident: the public as represented by his diaries, his letters, his business and social transactions; the private life as represented by the

⁵Ibid., p. 430.

⁸Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 415.

⁹Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 428.

imagination and the world that it creates in the artist's mind. Only one of these, however, is important, and that part--the artist's imagination--cannot be recorded. And it should not be recorded. The life of an artist is important only for what the artist produces in the way of created life. What the artist does in this area best explains his life. A true artist is most alive in the art that creates.

"The Great Good Place"

A few months after the appearance of "The Real Right Thing," James published "The Great Good Place" in Scribner's for January, 1900. The protagonist, George Dane, has an admiring visitor who envies his renown and who agrees to take his place for a day. Dane then lapses into a trance, a celestial refuge brought on by the pressures and responsibilities of the real world which he gladly renounces to his naive visitor, definitely an alter ego. Dane finds himself in a dreamy establishment where there are love and peace and tenderness. The great good place of the mind has the happy presence of friends. The beauty of this world is that it has none of the miseries that Henry James had recently encountered in life: the death of Alice James, the death of Robert Louis Stevenson, the unmasking of Oscar Wilde, the collapse of his own attempts at playwriting. In the great good place, Dane and the other inmates are almost angels in a setting quite in contrast with the real world of

shocks and buffetings. The story becomes a soliloquy. George Dane explains that his "substitute in the world" led him away from the labyrinth of frustration to the great good place:

He turned up that morning when everything had somehow got on my nerves, when the whole great globe indeed, nerves or no nerves, seemed to have appallingly squeezed itself into my study and to be bent on simply swelling there. It wasn't a question of nerves, it was a mere question of the dislodgement and derangement of everything--of a general submersion by our eternal too much . . . I couldn't have gone a step further.¹⁰

In the end, George Dane comes back to reality. He claims to have been happy in his trance, but he decides that the real world is "all right." George Dane the artist (the alter ego of Henry James) can also face the real world.

"The Great Good Place" is the dream-like revelation of James's own discontent with the world during his later life. Dreams, however pleasant, did not sublimate James's accusing conscience for having stood too aloof from life. The non-artistic side of Henry James must have seemed to him a waste. That part of him had been an allegory with few physical symbols. He had had no passionate loves or friendships; he had been separated from his family by the Atlantic Ocean; he had no creeds to give him inner security; he felt no close personal ties with a nation. In fact, he had remained aloof from everything except art. His last ghostly tales are commentaries on that side of himself which had rejected life in its completeness.

¹⁰Edel, The Ghostly Tales, p. 580.

"Maud-Evelyn"

"Maud-Evelyn" appeared in April, 1900, in the Atlantic. James struggled with the idea for three years, finally outlining it thus in his notebooks:

Imagine old couple, liking young man: "You must have married our daughter.

"Your daughter?"

"The one we lost. You were her fiance or her marri."

Imagine situation for young man (as regards some living girl) who has more or less accepted it. He succumbs to suggestion. He has sworn fidelity to a memory. He ends by believing it. He lives with the parents. They leave him their money. I see him later. He is a widower. He dies, to rejoin his wife. He leaves their fortune to the girl he doesn't marry.¹¹

In "Maud-Evelyn," Marmaduke feels mistakenly that Lavinia, his real life fiancée, does not love him. He goes to Switzerland, where he meets an American couple, the Dedricks. They become so attached to him that they take him as their son-in-law and consider him married to their daughter, whose death some years ago they have refused to accept as fact. He gradually joins their mad obsession and begins to lose contact with the real world. He tells Lavinia of his courtship of and marriage to the dead girl. Eventually he tells her of his widowing. Soon the elderly Dedricks die, leaving their estate to Marmaduke. But soon, he too dies, willing everything to Lavinia.

¹¹Mathiessen and Murdock, p. 265.

"Maud-Evelyn" deals not with the artistic but with the impoverished human self of Henry James. Marmaduke invests his "love" in something that does not exist, in direct contrast to the interests of the human self, the non-artistic Henry James. He rejects the real thing, Levinia, a being who represents the true and living as opposed to Maud-Evelyn, who represents the false and dead. But Maud-Evelyn is not the main ghost. Marmaduke is. He has turned himself into a commodity, for the use of others who pay him by leaving him their estate. He has sold out his life completely.

"The Beast in the Jungle"

Similar in many ways to "Maud-Evelyn" is "The Beast in the Jungle," which has been called the best story ever written about neurosis.¹² Actually, in "The Beast in the Jungle," James shows the stultifying effects of narcissism, the deadly self-love which inhibits real love. This, however, is the latent story.

"The Beast in the Jungle" begins with the affair of a young couple, apparently set to marry. The only obstacle is the attitude of the man, John Marcher, who has the feeling that something greater than the settled married life awaits him. He pursues the "crouching beast in the jungle," a fantasy for him to destroy. For years he fights this beast in his imagination. In reality, he does absolutely nothing

¹²Mary Aswell, "The World Within: Fiction Illuminating Neuroses of Our Time," Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies, ed. Edward Stone (New York, 1961), p. 249.

while his lover, May Bartram, awaits him. But he does not realize until she dies what terrible harm his imagination has done to him and to her. For all his expectancy of the prodigious future, nothing ever happens; he is a person whose life is a nothing, a waiting. He is a kind of humorless Mr. Micawber. At the end of the story John Marcher, the ghost who could have been a man with humanity, flings himself upon May's tomb. He realizes that he has denied real life to encounter something that did not exist. The ultimate evil has been his dream, his turning away from the reality of life to the jungle of his imagination. The beast of this jungle is his own distortion of reality. Marcher learns a maddening lesson too late. "The failure of love," writes F. W. Dupee, "is Marcher's own failure to love."¹³

This story has been praised as a study of neurosis. It is, in fact, a fictional rendition of James's own wasted human identity. The story is perhaps unconsciously a presentation of a psychological concept. It portrays a man who has taken protective isolation from the world in his imagination, only to find that he has defeated what he tried in vain to accomplish. John Marcher, the alter ego of James, is much like the drowning swimmer who prevents all skillful attempts of others to save him. Marcher fights off the love of May Bartram. Her love could have saved him, but his narcissistic

¹³F. W. Dupee, Henry James (New York, 1951), p. 162.

wound is too deep. He takes up a defense against her love as if it were a danger to the great thing he imagined awaiting him in life. His fantasy grows beyond its original function and imprisons him. At last, when May dies, he seeks relief, but he has sought it too late. James's purpose in "The Beast in the Jungle" is "to terrify the reader out of wasting his humanity."¹⁴ It is no coincidence that the hero of The Ambassadors, published also in 1903, issues the same warning. Lambert Strether, in the midst of the sensuous atmosphere of Paris, awakens to life too late. He advises the youngster, Little Bilham, to "Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!"¹⁵

"The Jolly Corner"

Lambert Strether explains that he is a "reaction against the mistake."¹⁶ Spencer Brydon, fifty-six-year-old hero of James's last ghostly tale, returns to his New York home to rectify the past. His stated reasons for returning is to inspect his rent property. He finds there Alice Staverton, an intimate friend of his youth. She reminds him what he might have been had he not become a gentleman of the world, an expatriate. He wonders if he might not have been a rich

¹⁴David Kerner, "A Note on 'The Beast in the Jungle,'" Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies, ed. Edward Stone (New York, 1961), p. 252.

¹⁵Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York, 1960), p.134.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 135.

businessman in New York. Furthermore, he might have joined hands with Alice. As they visit the house on the jolly corner, she informs him that she too has considered the question by creating his possible other self in her mind. By night, Brydon searches the house, stalking his alter ego, wanting to evict it. He fails at first to find the ghost of himself that he has left behind, but he knows that it is in the house of his birth. Finally, he realizes that he himself is being pursued by a ghost, presumably his other self. During one of his nighttime searches, he fails to close a door, and returning, finds it closed. At first he runs. But he stops, refusing to allow his other self to frighten him away. He wishes to become the aggressor, to return and force open the closed door, to defeat the ghost. Making plans to leave at the window if the door is open, he advances. The door, however, is still closed, and Brydon now decides to abandon the house. In his departure he notices the door of the inner foyer open; he is certain that he had left it closed. No choice remains for Brydon; he must go through the door to face his other self. Opening the door, he sees his ghost moving toward him and waving a mutilated hand. Brydon's vision of his alter ego reveals his "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar" presence. The face is not his, but a stranger's. Brydon faints. Later, he awakes in the comfort of Alice's arms. She too has seen the ghost at the moment

of Brydon's own vision. She makes him believe her by describing the ghost's mutilated hand. This revelation satisfies Brydon. It is the terror of the ghost that gives him the answer to life and the power to visualize the possibility of love. He knows also that he has lived life the way he has had to. Lambert Stretcher of The Ambassadors learns the same lesson: "The affair--I mean the affair of life--couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me . . . one lives, in fine, as one can."¹⁷ In "The Jolly Corner," Spencer Brydon, who has wondered if he has lived life abundantly, gains the same knowledge:

It had brought him to knowledge, to knowledge--yes, this was the beauty of his state; which came to resemble more and more that of a man who has gone to sleep on some news of a great inheritance, and then, after dreaming it away, after profaning it with matters strange to it, has waked up again to serenity of certitude and has only to lie and watch it grow. This was the drift of his patience--that he had only to let it shine on him. He must moreover, with intermissions, still have been lifted and borne; since why and how else should he have known himself, later on, with the afternoon glow intenser, no longer at the foot of the stairs--situated as these now seemed at that dark other end of the tunnel . . .¹⁸

The symbols are plain. The history of Henry James the man is nowhere better revealed. Up to the latter part of his life he had been a man who had looked for something greater than he originally thought life on the jolly corner could

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸James, Novels and Tales, XVII, 479.

have been. He had dreamed much of life away, living it in a manner contrary to the natural and human way. But he had awakened in the afternoon of life, no longer on the foot of the stairs. There was, of course, no Alice Staverton in his life. That there should have been was James's own conception of his failure as well as the failure of practically all the protagonists of his ghostly tales. These ghosts are the universal symbols of the greatest problem confronting man--the inability to love. They are excellent examples of the fact that love is the most difficult achievement of man.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

James's ghostly tales may be read on two levels. They may be read for their psychological value, and they may be read simply for entertainment. Primarily, their function is to engage the contemplative reader by making him think about the sinister but often hidden aspects of people's lives. James goes deeply into his characters. He is concerned with the struggles that people must endure alone, with the fears that they do not understand, with the sense of loneliness that they usually cannot banish. His characters move and act infrequently; and whenever physical action is involved, it spurs a character's thoughts and feelings. His characters cannot run from their ghosts, but must confront them. When the confrontation occurs, there is not always a clear-cut resolution. The characters must learn to live with ghosts because ghosts cannot be controlled like physical objects. The ghosts may bring insight and discovery, but the revelation is rarely sweet or comforting. Nor do the ghosts add the kind of emotional upheaval associated with surprise; the specters simply intensify characters' states of mind. James's haunted persons as well as the readers are constantly reminded

that experience cannot easily be compartmentalized into the true or real and the false or unreal. The ghosts represent the grey in-betweens, a link between the normal and the abnormal worlds. Both worlds--the normal, easy surface life and the vaguely sinister underside--are always evident in James's ghostly tales.

He places his people and his ghosts in realistic settings. There is nothing even suggestively evil about a "soft still Sunday noon" in Brighton. Switzerland is not usually considered a ghostly domain. New York City has no connotations of eeriness. These real places are the settings where James's characters are forced to reckon with ghosts. James's ghosts, then, do not belong to places; they belong to people and become significant as expressions of these persons' relationship to others and to themselves. The ghosts are, for the most part, distorted and threatening figments of disordered mental and emotional states into which clever and even brilliant people sometimes fall. The reader and the other characters may see such ghosts as fantasies, but to the haunted persons these fantasies are real. The reader and the normal characters usually understand, without subjective experience, that the fantasy has a peculiar reality of its own, and this understanding creates a rather frightening effect that is highlighted by the commonplace settings.

The situations in which James places his characters restrict their action. Few of them are so unfortunate in

the material sense that they must work, and those who do are involved in labor of the mind. Thus his characters cannot transfer subjective emotional or psychic energy to objective physical labor. No opportunity exists for them to escape the problems of the mind: its needs, motives, fears, and dreams. Nor do they attempt to solve their dilemmas with doctrines or ideas. James's haunted characters have no Utopian visions; they do not seek to change society, perhaps because they are not in communication with it. In a world so limited as theirs, they have no opportunity for happiness; they waste their lives because they do not know how to live. Even so, they do not seem to be personally unhappy, although the reader may feel them sad examples because they are never free of their anxieties. They are not exactly case studies of extreme abnormal psychology, for James's haunted people do attempt to adjust, do realize that something is wrong with them. But shut off from the outer world by their obsessions, they never quite find reality.

As a psychologist in the ghost stories, James is rarely the explicit theorist. There may be a suggestion that beauty and intelligence and other high endowments often lead ironically to obsession. Somehow, as the narrator of "Sir Edmund Urme" learns, there is an attachment between beauty and the supernatural, "the beauty of an old story, of love and pain and death."¹⁹ There is the further suggestion that an

¹⁹Ibid., p. 401.

obsessed person may inflict psychic wounds upon another person, but this is not the rule. Like St. Augustine and Sigmund Freud, James sees viciousness in little children as a possible concomitant of man's innate depravity. But this view in "The Turn of the Screw" is isolated and conjectural. Generally, James feels that the normal and the abnormal are inextricably mixed. He shows that the distinction between the "sick" and the "healthy" is not always so clear as many of his contemporaries and Victorian forerunners seemed to think.

James is clearly a photographer of mental states, describing the hidden thoughts and their symptomatic actions. His surface realism is not impressive, even though his pictorial art grows with each tale. The world of Bly in "The Turn of the Screw" may breathe an uncanny silence; the tranquil old town of Marr of "The Third Person" is there, as James would say, with its cobbled streets and ancient dwellings. A few descriptive phrases usually are enough to convey the reality of places. The reality of the mind matters most to James. Things do occur in life as in his tales. Like the Count Valerio, people do fall in love with objects. Like John Marcher, people do voluntarily inflict narcissistic destruction upon themselves. Many people in life do become involved in unnatural attachments (implying both love and hate) as depicted in the case of James's little governess at

Bly. James is quite psychoanalytical in putting jealous outbursts in the mouth of the crazed narrator of "The Friends of the Friends." And, more important, people do purge themselves of their ghosts as Spencer Brydon and Henry James had done.

As works of art, James's ghost stories have two aspects worth remarking in particular. First, these fictions are not frightening in the sense in which ghost stories are supposed to be frightening. The reader who approaches them for surprises and thrills will be disappointed when he finds that he is being treated to a psychological ghost representing a state of mind of a character whose guilt is of a psychic nature. Secondly, James's ghostly tales are lacking in the clear-cut moral choices so prominent in his other works. Persons suffering from neurotic obsessions are less responsible as moral agents than those who are normal and healthy-minded. Hence their inner struggles have less meaning for the average reader. At the most, James sometimes implies that good intentions are guises for evil impulses and often result in widening conspiracies.

Except for "The Turn of the Screw," which has been widely read for its haunting quality, most of the ghost stories have failed to attract large numbers of readers. This failure may be attributed to the fact that the stories have not moved the reader to self-knowledge as have James's

more realistic works. In such non-ghostly stories as "The Spoils of Poynton" and "The Aspern Papers" there is a sharper line of demarcation drawn between rational and irrational impulses and between gentle and ungentle behavior. In the ghost stories, James's presence as a moral censor is not nearly so strongly felt. He even seems to take pleasure in the weaknesses of his obsessed characters, and he often exhibits a sad tolerance for their frailties. He draws characters who, in spite of their superior intelligence, are unable to engage in healthy purposiveness. James seems not very much concerned that they make wrong choices that result in psychic damage in their personal relationships.

The ghostly tales of Henry James have many excellencies and are of great interest particularly to the student of Henry James for what they reveal about James's mind and art. On the whole, however, they deserve the secondary place to which they have been relegated in the James canon. James's renowned sensibility, the delicate vibrations which he gives his characters, has been carried to almost absurd lengths in some of the ghostly tales and loses its charm when it impinges upon the supernatural.

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