

The turn of the screw by henry james



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The Turn of The Screw is a horror novella by the American author Henry James, It was published in the year 1898, the view on this novel has been different throughout the course of history especially looking at it through the lens of a feminist, during the time this novella was written in 1898 this was the time of first wave feminism. The first wave of feminism focused on mainly on things like the right for women to vote and legal matters however during this wave women had very little say especially as this novella was written about nine years before the suffragette movement. We do see the strong stereotypes throughout this story one being right at the beginning when the men are speaking of their stories in front of the fire and the women are sat around listening and laughing along, this at the time may have seemed like such an innocent aspect of the novel however looking at it from a modern feminist perspective we can see that this is a subtle example of how female voices were very hidden during the times this novel was written. Women were seen as inferior to men with no power in any situations whether it was working life or social life the men during the 19th century really did hold the shots. Men were privileged in ways for example they were allowed to have an education and working life, this is why the character of the governess challenged these stereotypes in a way as she seemingly had a good education and she did support herself with a job looking after Flora and Miles. Another reason this was very strange was not only because she was a woman but also because she was very young.

In result of the timing this novella was written there was definitely an uprise in feminism as saying earlier the Suffragette movement did actually come alive greatly a few years later but I believe that Henry James subtly catches

the uprise in feminism in different ways throughout the text for example when the governess first arrives at the house and is given her responsibilities James uses the metaphor " great drifting ship." James. 1965. page 17) This is very significant for a feminist reader for a few reasons the first being that ships are often by males referred to in a feminine pronoun for example " she" or " her". The idea of pursuing feminist uproar and views through literature also caught on through time for example authors like Mary Shelley and Emily Bronte having powerful female protagonists to show a change throughout literature. The governess throughout the novel explains certain situations which indicate the lifestyle of women through literature for example when she talks about her younger life with her family and compares it to the life that she is living now in Bly she says " small smothered life." (James 1965, page 25) this is a huge indication to the lack of freedom she experienced when she was younger and as a reader we can assume maybe this was in result of society's views on women for example that they should stay in the house especially younger females and children should be taught on life being a good wife. In comparison to this throughout the novel I believe we see the governess really break out of her shell and this feels even to the reader as a relief as there is a contrast in a way between her old small smothered life and now her wide open country life. There is a few juxtapositions however throughout the novel were James does actually still follow the same patriarchal society for example even though the character of the governess is quite ambiguous he still sets her dreams of marrying a rich man and in some way falling head over heels for him which is a complete juxtaposition to the fact that she has graduated from a college and is highly intelligent with her own job, this sets her back from the ambiguous character

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in which Henry James tries to portray many times. This was a common dream and ultimate goal for many women of the Victorian era as they were very limited in what they could actually achieve overall in life.

The novel gives some sort of impression that women are prone to things such as mental instability and can't deal with their emotions with many scholars actually believing the governess was in fact just hallucinating when seeing the ghosts and they were a fixture of her imagination or even her sexual desire. I believe James wanted to himself question the insanity of the governess as throughout the novel we are unsure to believe if the ghosts are in fact fixtures of her imagination. Mrs Grose however is a true representation of what women would typically be like during the Victorian era for example she was quite illiterate in comparison to the governess, she is seemingly very admiring of the governed treating her with a high amount of respect. I believe this is because Mrs Grose admired the fact that the governess didn't actually stick to the gender norms of the Victorian era and many women of this time were very strung up in relationships where men controlled their life.