resulting from “a cold, artistic calculation” on the part of its highly entertained author. As a tiny matter of literal fact, no reader has more to go on than the young governess’s word for this rather momentous and sidetracking allegation. As a rather large matter of literal fact, we may know, with but a medium of attention paid to her recital of these nerve-shattering affairs at Bly, that it is she—always she herself—who sees the lurking shapes and heralds them to her little world. Not to the charming little Flora, but, behind Flora and facing the governess, the apparitional Miss Jessel first appeared. There are traps and lures in plenty, but just a little wariness will suffice to disprove, with a single survey of the ground, the traditional, we might almost call it lazy version of this tale. Not the children, but the little governess was hounded by the ghosts who, as James confides with such suave frankness in his Preface, more than the traditional, we might almost call it lazy version of this tale. Not the children, but the little governess was hounded by the ghosts who, as James confides with such suave frankness in his Preface, mere...
incident of the governess's trying to make her admit she has seen Miss Jelley). No, she says, it is not the woman; "But it's at the window—straight before us. It's there!" ... "It's he?" then. Whom does he mean by "he"? "Peter Quint—you devil!" His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. "Where?" "What does he matter now, my own?" she cries. "What will he ever matter? I have you, but he has lost you forever!" Then she shows him that the figure has vanished: "There, there!" she says, pointing toward the window. He looks and gives a cry; she feels that he is dead in her arms. Frizzle, she says, it is not the woman; "But it's at the window that he is on the point of seeing something. He gives "the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss". She has literally frightened him to death.

When one has once been given this clue to The Turn of the Screw, one wonders how one could ever have missed it. There is a very good reason, however, in the fact that nowhere does James unequivocally give the thing away: everything from beginning to end can be taken equally well in either of two senses. * * * The whole thing has been primarily and completely a characterization of the governess: her visions and the way she behaves about them become as soon as we look at them from the obverse side, a solid and unmistakable picture of the poor country parson's daughter, with her English middle-class class-consciousness, her inability to admit to herself her sexual impulses and the relentless English "authority" which enables her to put over on inferiors even purposes which are totally mistaken and not at all to the other people's best interests.

The Turn of the Screw, then, on this theory, would be a masterpiece—not as a ghost story, there are a great many better ones of the ordinary kind—but as a study in morbid psychology. It is to this psychological value of the ghosts, I believe, that the story owes its fascination: it belongs with Moby Dick and the Alice books to a small group of fairy tales whose symbols exert a peculiar power by reason of the fact that they have behind them, whether or not the authors are aware of it, a profound grasp of subconscious processes.

And when we examine the story in this light, we understand for the first time its significance in connection with Henry James's other fiction—for the first time, because on any other hypothesis The Turn of the Screw would be, so far as I remember, the only story James ever wrote which did not have some more or less serious point. We see now that it is simply a variation on one of James's familiar themes, the frustrated Anglo-Saxon spinster; and we remember that he presents other cases of women who deceive themselves and others about the sources and character of their emotions. * * *

* * * Even after we have made out the case for the hallucinated governess in The Turn of the Screw, the ambiguity still remains. Did James really ever intend us to find the clue? See his curious replies in his letters to people who write him about The Turn of the Screw: to what seem to have been leading questions, he seems to have given evasive answers, dismissing the story as a mere "pot-boiler"; a mere "potboiler"! Is the governess nice or is she horrid? Olive Chancellor in The Bostonians, though tragic perhaps, is horrid, and she is banished by Basil Ransom. There is, however, always the possibility in the case of The Turn of the Screw that James may be deliberately amusing himself at the expense of the mystification of his readers. * * *

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, ALLEN TATE, MARK VAN DOREN

A Radio Symposium

PORTER: When I first read this story, I accepted the governess's visions as real, that is, the ghosts were real in themselves, and not only the governess, perhaps, but others might have seen them; they had a life of their own. But as I went on reading the story and studying it through the years, and I read Henry James's notes on it, I decided that the ghosts were a projection of the governess's imagination and were part of her plot.

TATE: It is evident, Miss Porter, isn't it, that nobody actually sees these people but the governess?

PORTER: Nobody.

TATE: James is very adroit in convincing the readers that perhaps they can be seen by other people, or have been, but if you look closely it is perfectly evident that nobody sees them as physical existences but the governess. I don't say that that destroys their reality.

PORTER: Not at all.

1. Wilson refers to Olive Chancellor, from James's The Bostonians, as the strong-willed spinster who is blind to her own sexual motives (Edison).

2. Wilson's essay was substantially revised and reused in 1948. In this second version, Wilson amends his original reading of the governess's neurosis. In 1959, Wilson added a note in which he once again endorsed his original 1934 position (Edison).