

Ambiguity and Suspense Across Time: The Influence of Henry James 'The Turn of the Screw' on Ruth Ware's 'The Turn of the Key'

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Abstract

This research paper looks at how Ruth Ware's "The Turn of the Key" (2019) is affected by Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), therefore examining Ware's adaptation and transformation of James's timeless gothic tale for modern audiences. Through a comparative study of narrative structure, characterization, location, and thematic components, this paper shows how both works use ambiguity and suspense to generate psychological tension to reflect the societal concerns of their particular time. The study shows that Ware's novel preserves the psychological core of James's work while updating its outside components to reflect current worries about technology, surveillance, and family relations, hence representing a deliberate modernization. This paper adds to our knowledge of literary adaptation and the development of gothic fiction over time by investigating the intertextual link between these works.

Keywords: The Turn of the Screw, The Turn of the Key, Henry James, Ruth Ware, Gothic fiction, Intertextuality, Ambiguity in literature, Suspense techniques, Psychological horror, Adaptation and transformation.

الغموض والتشويق عبر الزمن: تأثير هنري جيمس "دورة البرغي" على روث وير "دورة المفتاح"

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المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة القادسية ، وزارة التربية

الخلاصة

تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في كيفية تأثرت روث وير "دورة المفتاح" (2019) بكتاب هنري جيمس "دورة البرغي" (1898)، وبالتالي فحص تكيف وير وتحولها لقصة جيمس القوطية الخالدة للجماهير الحديثة. من خلال دراسة مقارنة للبنية السردية والتوصيف والموقع والمكونات الموضوعية، توضح هذه المقالة كيف يستخدم كلا العملين الغموض والتشويق لتوليد التوتر النفسي ليعكس الاهتمامات المجتمعية لوقتتهما الخاص. تظهر الدراسة أن رواية وير تحافظ على الجوهر النفسي لعمل جيمس مع تحديث مكوناتها الخارجية لتعكس المخاوف الحالية بشأن التكنولوجيا والمراقبة والعلاقات الأسرية، وبالتالي تمثل تحديثاً متعمداً. تضيف هذه الورقة إلى معرفتنا بالتكيف الأدبي وتطور الخيال القوطي بمرور الوقت من خلال التحقيق في الارتباط بين هذه الأعمال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دورة المسمار ، دورة المفتاح ، هنري جيمس ، روث وير ، الخيال القوطي ، التناس ، الغموض في الأدب ، تقنيات التشويق ، الرعب النفسي ، التكيف والتحول

1. Introduction

In 1898, Henry James published "The Turn of the Screw," a novella that would come to be among the most examined and hotly contested works in literary

history. James's ghost tale has affected many authors working in gothic and horror genres with its confusing narrative, psychological depth, and deft building of tension. Over a century later, in 2019, British writer Ruth Ware published 'The Turn of the Key', a novel that overtly indicates its intertextual link with James's work by means of its title and other thematic and structural similarities. Ware's book is a deliberate interaction with James's original work; it turns its Victorian ghost tale components into a modern psychological thriller addressing current concerns (Brewster,2024).

The interaction between these two works is a fascinating case study in literary influence and adaptation. As Williamson (2014) notes, 'The Turn of the Screw' seems a promising place to approach this question, since it was one of the first works of literature to be subjected to, or illuminated by, a psychoanalytic reading at odds with its surface meaning" (p. 322). James's novella is especially fertile ground for adaptation and modification because of its interpretative complexity. Examining how Ware interacts with, adapts, and changes James's work helps us to understand both the ongoing strength of James's storytelling tactics and the development of gothic literature to meet modern issues.

This paper asserts that Ware changes the traditional ghost tale into a modern thriller reflecting current concerns about technology, surveillance, and family relationships while keeping the fundamental psychological components and narrative ambiguity of James's work. This paper shows how both works use ambiguity and suspense to produce psychological tension by means of careful comparative examination of narrative structure, characterization, location, and theme aspects, thereby mirroring the societal fears of their particular age.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does Ruth Ware's 'The Turn of the Key' adapt and transform the narrative techniques, gothic elements, and thematic concerns of Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" to address contemporary anxieties about technology, surveillance, and family dynamics?

This question Focusing on the change of supernatural components into technological ones, Victorian class dynamics into modern professional relationships, and implicit sexual impropriety into more overt investigation of power and exploitation, this question investigates the particular ways in which Ware updates James's classic text. Examining these changes helps us to see how gothic literature develops to stay relevant in shifting cultural settings.

2. How much does the uncertainty between supernatural and psychological explanations in both novels mirror the scientific issues and social fears of their particular historical era?

This question investigates how two works of art employ ambiguity as a narrative tool to interact with more general societal issues regarding knowledge, perception, and reality. James's novella illustrates Victorian concerns about spiritualism, psychology, and the limits of logical knowledge with its uncertainty over the ghosts' actuality. Ware's work echoes modern worries about the dependability of technology, monitoring, and privacy in the uncertainty between human activity and technical failures. Comparing these many forms of ambiguity will help us to understand how literature interacts with epistemological doubt across time.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To find and examine the particular narrative strategies, gothic features, and thematic issues Ruth Ware borrows from Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" in her novel 'The Turn of the Key.'

This objective is to show how Ware deliberately interacts with James's literary legacy by means of the clear linguistic links between the two works. This paper will record the intertextual link between these works using textual evidence by means of certain similarities and changes in narrative structure, characterization, location, and theme components.

2. Examining how Ware updates classic gothic components for modern audiences, especially by replacing otherworldly dread with technical concern.

Focusing particularly on how Ware substitutes current technical for traditional supernatural components while preserving comparable psychological effects, this goal explores the evolution of gothic norms throughout temporal periods. The study will investigate how the "smart home" elements of Heatherbrae House produce a modern version of the unearthly that resembles but alters the ghostly apparitions in James's book.

1.4 Methodology

This paper uses an approach of comparative literary analysis that blends historical contextualization and intertextual research with attentive textual reading. Several related methodological methods shaped the study process:

Textual Analysis: Both original texts—Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898) and Ruth Ware's 'The Turn of the Key' (2019)—were analysed by careful reading and comprehensive textual analysis. Particularly about how

these components produce uncertainty and suspense, this study emphasized story structure, characterization, location, thematic components, and literary approaches. The close reading method allowed readers to identify specific textual techniques that both writers employed to create psychological tension and engage with the gothic legacy.

Historical Contextualization: This paper looked at the social, cultural, and literary settings in which each work was created to help one understand how it reflects and reacts to its historical background. For 'The Turn of the Screw', this included looking at late Victorian views on psychology, spiritualism, infancy, sexuality and class relations. For 'The Turn of the Key', this included investigating at contemporary worries about technology, surveillance, privacy, and shifting family patterns. This historical context clarifies why certain narrative techniques and thematic preoccupations show up in every book and how they reflect more general societal concerns.

Intertextual Analysis: This paper used intertextual analysis to investigate how Ware's text interacts with adapts and modifies James's work. Given that 'The Turn of the Key' plainly indicates its connection to 'The Turn of the Screw' by its title and other structural and thematic similarities. This method included finding certain references, analogies, and changes showing Ware's deliberate interaction with the literary legacy created by James. Examining how Ware keeps certain fundamental aspects of James's work while changing others for modern relevance, the intertextual study emphasized both continuities and alterations.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses two theoretical lenses to analyze the interaction between the two writings:

2.1 Adaptation theory: With specific regard to Linda Hutcheon's conception of adaptation as a kind of creative interpretation, using ideas from adaptation studies to grasp how literary works are changed across time and media.

2.2 Gothic studies: Drawing on analysis of gothic literature to examine how both works use and change gothic norms, with reference to studies by Fred Botting, Jerrold Hogle, and Catherine Spooner on the development of gothic fiction.

3. Historical and Literary Context: This section elaborates on the following items:

3.1 Henry James and the Victorian Literary Landscape

Henry James (1843-1916), who has spent much of his life in England but maintained his American identity, has a unique position in American and British literature. James is regarded as a writer for his psychological realism, rich characters and careful investigation of societal processes. Written in 1897, 'The Turn of the Screw' came amid what academics define as James's middle phase after a professional letdown when his play 'Guy Domville' was badly appreciated (Chen, 2021).

Before being published in a book form, the novella initially appeared serially in Collier's Weekly between January and April 1898. Collier's Weekly, a popular magazine of the time, provided a significant platform for the novella, allowing it to reach a broad audience and generate interest before its eventual release as a complete work. This serialisation enhanced its visibility and contributed to the discussions surrounding its themes and characters in contemporary literary circles. James wrote in the late Victorian period, which was marked by notable social, technical and intellectual upheaval. With the Society for Psychical Research (of whom James's brother William was a member) aggressively looking into paranormal events, the time witnessed increasing interest in psychology, spiritualism, and the supernatural (Sparknotes, 2025).

The late Victorian period during which James wrote was marked by substantial social, technical, and intellectual transformations. The era saw an increasing fascination in psychology, spiritualism, and the supernatural, as the Society for Psychical Research, of which James's brother William was a member, carefully examined supernatural occurrences. (Noakes, 2004). During this period, ghost stories gained significant popularity, notably in England, where the habit of gathering to share such tales around Christmas was prevalent—a background expressly referenced by James in the setting narrative of 'The Turn of the Screw.' The novella was published concurrently with the rise of psychoanalytic thought but before Freud's seminal writings. However, as Williamson (2014) notes, the text seems to anticipate several Freudian themes, increasing its lasting appeal for psychological analysis. The ambiguity in James's story—particularly regarding the reality of the ghosts compared to the governess's hallucinations—has established it as a foundational text for discussions on narrative reliability and psychological depth in literature.

Wilson (1948) says in his famous article 'The Ambiguity of Henry James' that the strength of the novella is in its failure to answer the main issue of the ghosts' actuality, therefore enabling many valid interpretations that have driven critical discussion for more than a century. Lustig (2010) claims this uncertainty represents James's larger concern with the borders between the psychological and the supernatural, a topic that runs recurrently throughout his writings.

3.2 Ruth Ware and Contemporary Psychological Thrillers

Born in 1977, Ruth Ware is a British psychological thriller writer whose books have been translated into over 40 languages and sold more than 10 million copies worldwide (Ware, 2025). Ware worked in the book business becoming a full-time writer, which gave her knowledge of publishing but also created what she calls "stage fright" about her own work (Ware, 2025).

'The Turn of the Key,' Ware's fifth novel released in 2019, continues on her investigation of psychological suspense and gothic components in modern environments. Ware's novel appears in a literary scene that has seen a resurgence of interest in gothic literature and psychological thrillers, especially those with female characters. Often updating conventional themes to fit current concerns, contemporary gothic literature reflects Ware's book. As one reviewer notes, "Ware presents a modernized version of the old Haunted House story. Instead of creaky doors and candlelight blowing out, there's technology that malfunctions and user setting that are messed up so that lights don't turn on" (The Bibliofile, 2019, Book review section, para. 2).

'The Turn of the Key' has been described as a gripping modern-day haunted house thriller and Ware herself has been called the Agatha Christie of our time by some reviewers (Ruth Ware Background, 2025). The novel's clear interaction with James's work shows its ongoing relevance and adaptability to modern issues, so putting it in a path of literary adaptation and development.

As Parkinson (2019) notes in her study of Ware's novel, "The Turn of the Key is a Victorian Gothic brought roughly into the modern age, Henry James via Black Mirror"(para.1). A main point of Ware's modernization of James's novel, this contrast to the dystopian technology-focused series 'Black Mirror' shows how her adaption changes Victorian supernatural concerns into modern technical ones.

According to Kavka (2018), modern gothic literature is "less a genre than a vestigial type of writing"(Summary section, para.1) that uses an already broken legacy to handle contemporary concerns. Ware's novel illustrates this method by carefully using gothic aspects to produce a story that resonates with modern readers while preserving ties to its literary ancestors.

4. Narrative Structure and Point of View: This section elaborates on the following items:

4.1 Frame Narratives and Epistolary Techniques

'The Turn of the Key' and 'The Turn of the Screw' both use framing stories that separate the reader from the central events but also foster closeness by means

of first-person storytelling. James's short tale opens with a Christmas Eve party where attendees share ghost tales. A visitor called Douglas reads out a composition his sister's old governess wrote. This framing mechanism creates many levels of narration: the nameless narrator of the gathering, Douglas as the presenter of the manuscript, and lastly the governess as the main narrator of the major events.

Ware uses an epistolary method to adapt this strategy to modern standards. 'The Turn of the Key' consists of letters written by Rowan Caine from prison to a barrister named Mr. Wrexham. As SoBrief (2025) notes, "Rowan Caine, imprisoned at HMP Charnworth, writes to barrister Mr. Wrexham, pleading for help. She insists on her innocence in the death of a child she was caring for, feeling abandoned by her lawyer and crushed by the media's portrayal of her guilt"(Plot summary, para.1). Like James's framing story, this epistolary format lets the heroine tell her story straight out, so setting that the events have already happened and ended sadly.

Both works benefit greatly from these framing tools in many ways. First, they provide dramatic irony as readers understand from the beginning that something horrible has happened. Second, they raise issues about narrative dependability that become crucial for both pieces. Third, using the frame, they let both writers preserve critical distance even as first-person narrative allows them to build psychological closeness.

According to Hogle (2002) 'The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction' Since the beginning of gothic literature, frame stories have been a mainstay, helping to remove the reader from perhaps unsettling material and while pulling the reader into the story by curiosity about how events would develop. Though changing it to fit the standards and expectations of their particular time, both James and Ware use this approach well.

4.2 Unreliable Narration and Ambiguity

Perhaps the most important narrative device common to both stories is the untrustworthy narrator. Throughout 'The Turn of the Screw' the governess's dependability is in doubt. As Williamson (2014) explains, "The Freudian interpretation, that the governess is a sexually repressed hysteric and the ghosts' mere figments of her overly excitable imagination, echoed what other critics like Henry Beers, Harold Goddard, and Edna Kenton had previously suggested in the 1920s" (p. 323). James maintains uncertainty that has led to more than a century of critical discussion, never clearly deciding whether the ghosts are real or hallucinations.

By looking at Miss Jessel as a mirror image of the governess, Siegel (1968) develops this reading to imply that the ghost reflects the governess's suppressed wants and anxieties. Though it is just one of many viable readings, this psychoanalytic approach has gained popularity in interpreting the ambiguity of the novella.

Ware uses a similar method but with a modern spin. Rowan Caine is shown to be an unreliable narrator not due to probable hallucinations but rather because she has hidden her own identity and drives. The story reveals that Rowan's real name is Rachel Gerhardt and that she applied for the nanny job because Bill Elincourt is her biological father (SoBrief, 2025). This dishonesty calls into question her whole story, so producing a new kind of unreliability that mirrors current issues with identity and authenticity.

Throughout their stories, both narrators feel rising psychological stress; their views get perhaps more questionable as events unfold. While Rowan whose real name is Rachel becomes more worried about the odd events at Heatherbrae House, the governess grows more obsessive about safeguarding the children from otherworldly influence. In both instances, the first-person restricted viewpoint denies readers access to objective reality and compels them to perceive events via the perhaps warped prism of the narrator's experience.

4.3 Temporal Structure and Retrospection

With the protagonists telling stories from the past, both pieces use retrospective storytelling. Tension results from this between the experiencing self (the governess/Rowan during the events) and the narrating self (the governess writing her account/Rowan writing from jail). Reflection, rationalization, and maybe revisionist reading of events are all made possible by this temporal distance.

The retrospective framework also adds to the tension in both stories. Though readers know from the start that something terrible has happened—Miles's death in James, Maddie's death in Ware—the precise situation stays unknown until the end. This produces what literary theorists term "hermeneutic suspense"—the need to know what has previously occurred instead of just expecting what will occur next.

According to Botting (2014), this retroactive narrative technique is typical in gothic literature, so fostering a feeling of inevitability while preserving tension over the particular aspects of how events transpired. Though changing it to fit the standards and expectations of their particular time, both James and Ware use this method well.

5. Setting and Atmosphere: This section goes into further detail on the following items:

5.1 The Isolated Country House as Gothic Setting

'The Turn of the Key' and 'The Turn of the Screw' both use the remote rural mansion, a traditional feature of gothic literature, as its main background. James's book describes Bly as a "big, ugly, antique, but convenient house" located in Essex, England, far enough away to feel solitude yet pleasant enough to not cause instant concern. The estate's seclusion is both geographical and social; the children's uncle clearly tells the governess not to reach out to him about any issues.

While keeping its fundamental gothic traits, Ware's Heatherbrae House modernizes this setting for current readers. Described as "a remote, high-tech mansion," the estate in the Scottish Highlands impresses Rowan with its beauty and isolation, as well as the generous salary linked with the job (SoBrief, 2025). Heatherbrae House, like Bly, has charming but disturbing traits that cause ambivalence in the main character and the reader.

In both works, the remote location fulfils multiple story purposes. First, it physically separates the protagonists from social support networks, hence forcing them to confront difficulties alone. Second, it creates a closed system where psychological strain may rise without outside relief. Third, whether supernatural (in James) or technical (in Ware), it defines a barrier between the "normal" world and a region where other rules could apply.

Wolfreys (2002) argues in 'Victorian Hauntings' that the country home in Victorian gothic literature frequently acts as a metaphor for the human mind, with its secret chambers and corridors reflecting suppressed wants and anxieties. Though the latter changes the metaphor to incorporate electronic monitoring as a reflection of contemporary concerns about privacy and control, this psychoanalytic reading is relevant to both James's Bly and Ware's Heatherbrae House.

5.2 Modernization of Gothic Elements

Updating conventional gothic components for modern readers is one of Ware's most important changes. As The Bibliofile (2019) observes, "In the book, the house in question was once the typical haunted house with a storied and mysterious history, but has since been gutted and updated to cutting edge technological standards by the current family, the Elincourts"(Book review, para.3). This updating is a metaphor for Ware's interpretation of James's text—

keeping the structural basis but modernizing the surface features for current relevance.

James uses ambiguous supernatural happenings, strange noises, and enigmatic ghosts among other conventional gothic themes. Creating traditional gothic imagery, the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel appear at windows and over lakes. Ware combines these components into what may be labelled 'techno-gothic,' where technology instead of the supernatural becomes the cause of anxiety. Heatherbrae House's, the house described as 'smart home' features—especially its all-encompassing monitoring system—create a contemporary version of the fear, in which familiar technology becomes menacing.

This change shows evolving cultural concerns. Victorian readers may have dreaded supernatural incursion, but modern readers are more likely to worry about loss of privacy and technology monitoring. As SoBrief (2025) notes, "Rowan becomes increasingly aware of the house's surveillance system, which allows Sandra to monitor the children and communicate with Rowan remotely. The high-tech features make Rowan feel constantly watched and judged." (Summary section, para.6). This modern day anxiety replaces but matches the governess's dread of being observed by spirits in James's novel.

Spooner (2017) identifies this change of gothic components 'post-millennial gothic,' which usually uses technology as a source of terror but still relates to conventional gothic ideas. Ware's novel shows this method by use of surveillance technology, so generating the same feeling of being watched those supernatural beings gave in conventional gothic literature.

5.3 Environmental Factors and Psychological Tension

Both writers increase psychological strain by use of environmental components. Weather and environmental surroundings in James's novella often mirror or affect the governess's mental condition. Misty mornings, quiet lakes, and towering structures evoke a sense of mystery and perhaps danger. The tower where the governess first meets Quint and the lake where she encounters Miss Jessel become symbolically loaded locations recurring all over the story.

Ware generates comparable natural stress using natural and architectural components. While the architectural aspects of the house—especially the attic—produce areas of mystery and revelation, the rural Scottish environment offers natural seclusion. Ware adds a distinctive element with "a locked garden filled with toxic plants, known as the poison garden, with the children, Maddie and Ellie. The garden's statue of Achlys, the Greek goddess of death and poison, unsettles her" (SoBrief, 2025, Summary section, para.3). Demonstrating how Ware modifies mediaeval iconography for modern

psychiatric understanding, this poison garden is an actual example of the poisonous familial relationships within the home.

Watkiss (2012) says in 'Gothic Contemporaries,' that contemporary gothic literature often uses environmental factors to externalize psychological processes, hence creating a link between inner conflict and outside context. Though changing it to fit the norms and expectations of their particular times, both James and Ware use this approach well.

6. Character Parallels and Transformations: This part goes into further detail on the following items:

6.1 Female Protagonists as Outsiders

Young female heroines in both "The Turn of the Screw" and "The Turn of the Key" enter strange homes as outsiders tasked with looking after youngsters. James's unidentified governess, the daughter of a poor rural clergyman starting her first job, is described as "young, untried, nervous." From the start, her youth, inexperience, and potential attraction to her boss put her in a precarious situation. As Williamson (2014) notes, critics have often focused on "the Governess's sexual 'repression'" (p. 324), Although he contends that this focus oversimplifies her personality.

Ware's Rowan Caine/Rachel Gerhardt is a more complex formation of this character. Like the governess, she comes into Heatherbrae House as an outsider but with a hidden purpose: to find her biological father, Bill Elincourt. This concealed drive causes a distinct kind of vulnerability and instability. Although James's governess could misinterpret events for psychological reasons, Rowan/Rachel purposefully hides facts from the reader and her employers, therefore producing a more ethically ambiguous hero that fits modern fascination in complicated, imperfect characters.

Throughout their stories, both characters undergo growing isolation and mental stress. While Rowan becomes more worried about the odd events in the home, the governess becomes confident of her exceptional capacity to shield the children from ghostly influence. In both situations, their outsider position enhances their sensitivity and their will to prove themselves in their responsibilities.

Zlosnik and Horner (2014) say that female characters in gothic literature often negotiate areas both freeing and dangerous. Reflecting women's conflicted connection to home environments. This study is relevant to both James's governess and Ware's Rowan/Rachel, though the latter's experience is more complex due to her false name and concealed goal.

6.2 Children as Sites of Ambiguity

The kids in both stories are places of ambiguity and drivers of the characters' psychological travels. Miles and Flora are portrayed in "The Turn of the Screw" as quite lovely and attractive, yet their actions start to worry the governess more and more. Miles's enigmatic school dismissal and Flora's subsequent collapse raise doubts about their purity or corruption. As Williamson (2014) observes, "If a boy of means was irrevocably expelled from a boarding school for purely verbal offenses, they cannot have been 'some vague little offense against Victorian morality'" (p. 324).

Ware uses the Elincourt children—Maddie, Ellie, Petra, and the young Rhiannon—to change this uncertainty for modern readers. Like Miles and Flora, these kids cause the protagonist's tension with their behavioural issues. Ware, nevertheless, changes the kind of these difficulties for modern relevance. The behaviour of the Elincourt children reflects contemporary family dynamics—especially the effect of parental absence and technology distraction—rather than the implication of supernatural corruption.

The most important resemblance is the sad loss of a kid in both stories—Miles in James and Maddie in Ware. However, Ware transforms the circumstances and implications of this death. While Miles dies in the governess's arms under ambiguous circumstances that may implicate her, Maddie ultimately dies from a fall revealed to be caused by her sister Ellie. This shift reflects contemporary concerns about accidents, responsibility, and the vulnerability of children in modern households.

Beidler (2010) notes in his critical edition of "The Turn of the Screw" that the psychological stress of the novella is mostly derived from the uncertainty surrounding the children's knowledge and conduct. Ware's version keeps this uncertainty but changes it to fit modern ideas of family relationships and children.

6.3 Authority Figures and Their Absence

Both plots have missing authority figures whose choices and actions drive the story despite their physical absence. James's novella has the children's uncle specifically telling the governess not to reach out to him about any issues, so leaving her to deal with any circumstances that come up. Though she lacks the power to make major choices, Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, offers some help. Lacking power, the governess must depend on her own judgement, hence adding to her mental solitude.

Ware changes this aspect by means of the Elincourt parents' regular absence, especially Sandra, who watches the home remotely via technology instead of being physically there. As SoBrief (2025) notes, "The house's technology allows Sandra to monitor everything remotely. Rowan discovers the children have been using the system to their advantage." (Summary section, para. 6). This technology monitoring is a contemporary kind of absent authority—present via observation but physically away.

Through these power ties, both stories also investigate class dynamics. James's governess creates social isolation by occupying a liminal class position—above the servants but below the household. Ware adapts this dynamic for current relevance, emphasizing the professional link between employer and employee in modern homes. Bill Elincourt's relationships with former nannies reflect a contemporary version of the power imbalance and possible exploitation seen in Victorian home employment.

Rusk (1980) says that in gothic literature, authoritative figures usually reflect society's expectations and conventions, limiting the protagonist's views and behaviour. This study is relevant to both James's uncle role and Ware's Elincourt parents, though the latter's authority is mediated by technology instead of social tradition.

7. Thematic Connections: This section elaborates on the following items:

7.1 Ambiguity Between Supernatural and Psychological Explanations

The most important theme link between both of them may be their investigation of uncertainty between supernatural and psychological explanations for unsettling occurrences. James's novella has sparked more than a century of critical discussion just because it declines to categorically settle whether the ghosts are real or hallucinations of the governess. As Williamson (2014) explains, "The Turn of the Screw seems, therefore, a good place to begin to think about the ambiguous locus of psychoanalytic meaning in a work of literature" (p. 322).

Ware plays with supernatural possibilities and finally offers logical justifications to modern audiences, therefore adapting this uncertainty. Rowan goes through events throughout "The Turn of the Key" that imply supernatural activity—footsteps above her chamber, odd sounds, and ghost warnings from Maddie. While preserving the fundamental conflict between external and internal dangers that defines James's writing, this change from supernatural to psychological explanation suits modern literary tastes. The ambiguity in both writings covers the dependability of perception itself. James's governess might be seeing real ghosts, having hallucinations, or any mix of the two. Rowan, too,

has real odd events but may misread them because of her mental condition and lack of knowledge. Both stories thus investigate the basic ambiguity of human vision and interpretation, a theme that crosses their separate historical settings.

According to Heilmann (2022), modern gothic horror often keeps ambiguity concerning supernatural components even while offering logical justifications, so producing a persistent unease that reflects the clear ambiguity in classic gothic literature. Ware's story, which offers logical explanations for apparently supernatural occurrences while preserving psychological uncertainty about the characters' perceptions and motives, fits our study.

7.2 Sexual Impropriety and Its Consequences

Though adapted to their particular historical backgrounds, both stories investigate issues of sexual misconduct and its consequences. The Turn of the Screw hints about improper interactions between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel as well as maybe between Quint and Miles. As Williamson (2014) notes, "Peter Quint was a loose-living man, and Miles was his constant companion; therefore, it is probable that Miles's precocious sexual information came from Quint" (p. 324). Reflecting Victorian refusal regarding revealing sexual material, these recommendations stay intentionally ambiguous.

Ware develops this topic for modern readers by means of Bill Elincourt's relationships with former nannies, especially Holly. As revealed in the narrative, "the reason that the nannies keep leaving is because Bill Elincourt sexually harasses all of them. The first one (who stayed the longest) was Holly, and Bill had an affair with her" (The Bibliofile, 2019, Plot summary, Para.14). While preserving the fundamental subject of power imbalance and exploitation seen in James's work, this more open approach of sexual impropriety represents modern readiness to explicitly confront such problems.

Both stories look at how adult sexuality affects kids. James's novella raises worries that the youngsters have been exposed to unsuitable information or experiences via their relationship with Quint and Miss Jessel. Likewise, in Ware's book, the Elincourt kids, especially Rhiannon, know about their father's infidelities, which causes family conflict and mistrust of nannies. Though its handling shows evolving views on kid innocence and understanding, this topic of children's exposure to adult sexuality crosses many historical settings.

7.3 Protection and Corruption of Children

Both stories emphasize the safety of kids and worries about their possible corruption or damage. 'The Turn of the Screw' tells the story of a governess who becomes more and more driven to save Miles and Flora from what she sees as demonic deterioration. Her protective drive becomes so strong that it could finally cause Miles's death, hence producing sad irony. The novella thus investigates the possible damage caused by too much protection driven by adult worries.

Ware uses Rowan's connection with the Elincourt children to reinterpret this topic for modern relevance. Rowan, like the governess, struggles to safeguard and control the children, especially Maddie and Ellie. The children's danger, therefore, is not from supernatural corruption but from Bill's adultery and the parents' regular absence producing destructive family relations. Accidentally brought on by her sister Ellie, Maddie's terrible death demonstrates a lack of protection that captures modern concerns about children's safety in complicated family settings.

Both stories examine the conflict between knowledge and innocence in children. James's Miles and Flora may know more about the spirits and previous occurrences at Bly than they disclose, therefore raising uncertainty about their innocence. Likewise, Ware's Elincourt children, especially Maddie, know more about the home and its past than they first tell Rowan. Though its handling shows evolving ideas of infancy, this motif of hidden wisdom in children crosses historical background.

8. Modernization of Gothic Elements: This part goes into further detail on the following items:

8.1 From Victorian to Contemporary Gothic

One of the most important features of Ware's interpretation of James's work is the change from Victorian to modern gothic. Victorian gothic, as seen by 'The Turn of the Screw,' usually includes psychological uncertainty, historical settings, and conventional supernatural components. James's novella makes use of traditional gothic themes such the remote rural home, enigmatic ghosts, and hints of past crimes influencing the present.

Ware modifies these components for modern readers by means of what may be termed "techno-gothic," when technology rather than the supernatural becomes the main cause of anxiety. As The Bibliofile (2019) observes, "Instead of creaky doors and candlelight blowing out, there's technology that malfunctions and user setting that are messed up so that lights don't turn on." (Plot summary, para.4). This evolution maintains the

fundamental psychological stress of gothic literature while reflecting shifting societal fears.

Both of the works use the uncanny—the familiar turned strange—as main aesthetic impact. In James, the strange appears from the concept that the youngsters might be conscious of supernatural presences and the apparition of ghosts in everyday environments. Ware's unusualness comes from technology acting erratically and areas meant to be safe (like Rowan's bedroom) become places of invasion and danger. Its lasting psychological strength is shown by this endurance of the strange over many historical incarnations.

According to Booth (2018), modern gothic literature usually changes conventional gothic themes to reflect current concerns, especially those connected to technology and observation. This analysis applies directly to Ware's adaptation of James's novella, which converts supernatural surveillance into technical monitoring while preserving the psychological effect of being watched.

8.2 Transformation of Supernatural Elements

Although the true nature of their existence is unclear—specifically the spirits of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel—James's novella focuses on otherworldly aspects appearing at windows, castles, and across lakes, these ghosts provide iconic gothic imagery that has inspired many later creations. The ghosts provide the psychological depth for which the novella is famous by means of both exterior dangers and projections of interior worries.

Ware turns these supernatural components into technical and psychological events producing analogous consequences for modern audiences. The monitoring system at Heatherbrae House gives one the impression of being always watched, mirroring the governess's feeling of being watched by ghosts. Reflecting modern preference for psychological rather than supernatural explanations, strange sounds and disturbances finally turn out to have human rather than otherworldly origins.

Ware, on the other hand, keeps supernatural hints all throughout the story, especially in Maddie's warning that "the ghosts wouldn't like it if Rowan remain at Heatherbrae House" (SoBrief, 2025, Summary section, para.7). The way it deals with supernatural possibilities before offering logical justifications acknowledges the ongoing attraction of ghost tales even in a technologically advanced day, therefore creating tension.

8.3 Psychological Horror Across Time Periods

The two works show the permanent power of ambiguity to generate terror by using psychological horror instead of obvious violence or bloodshed. James's novella builds dread by means of doubt about perception, anxiety for the children's safety, and the governess's increasing psychological isolation. The terror comes not from the ghosts themselves but from the governess's interpretation of their relevance and her increasing belief that she alone can save the children.

Focusing on Rowan's growing fear and isolation in the advanced technological but emotionally frigid setting of Heatherbrae House, Ware modifies this psychological method for modern audiences. As SoBrief (2025) notes, "Rowan is disturbed by footsteps on a wooden floor above her room, despite there being no room above. The deliberate pacing unnerves her, compounded by the house's surveillance system, which makes her feel constantly watched." (Summary section, para.4). This mix of technology monitoring and unknown events produces a contemporary kind of psychological fear that reflects James's method.

Both stories investigate the terror of responsibility for children's wellbeing. Rowan's true inability to stop Maddie's death (though she is not directly guilty) reflects the fulfilment of the governess's concern that she would fail to safeguard Miles and Flora, hence generating psychological strain. This common emphasis on the psychological load of raising unstable children reveals how certain worries cross time frame.

9. Conclusion

The connection between Ruth Ware's "The Turn of the Key" and Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" provides a fascinating case study in literary influence and adaptation over time. This comparative study reveals that Ware deliberately interacts with James's original book, preserving its psychological core while changing its outside components to fit modern issues. The title link between the pieces indicates this intertextual relationship and encourages readers to think about how storytelling methods and gothic themes change to be relevant in different cultural settings.

Both works generate psychological anxiety using untrustworthy first-person narration, frame stories, remote locations, and uncertainty between outside and inside dangers. Ware, on the other hand, changes these components for modern relevance, trading supernatural uncertainty for technology monitoring, Victorian class dynamics for current professional ties, and implied sexual impropriety for more overt investigation of power and exploitation.

These changes show how literary adaptation may both respect legacy and react to evolving societal concerns.

The lasting attraction of both pieces is their examination of universal psychological issues: the doubt of perception, the weight of duty for others, the dread of concealed dangers, and the possible unreliability of our own brains. Examining how these issues are articulated variously in Victorian and modern settings helps us to understand both the continuity and development of psychological fiction.

This paper helps to clarify literary adaptation as a dynamic process including both preservation and metamorphosis. Ware's book is a creative interaction with James's ideas and methods that creates something fresh while recognizing its literary legacy, not just a modernized recounting of his narrative. Examining this link helps us to better value the ongoing strength of James's narrative innovations as well as the artistic potential of modern gothic literature.

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