Collecting Henry James: From Ghost Stories to Ghost Texts

Amândio Reis
Series, Collections and Stories

1 In 2001, Wordsworth Editions published an anthology of ten ghost stories by Henry James in their Classics series of “inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students.” Seven years later, the same collection of chilling narratives was reissued in the series of “Tales of Mystery & the Supernatural,” keeping its genre-oriented title, *Ghost Stories of Henry James (GSHJ)*. The nature of such a collection inevitably raises questions of context with respect to generic labelling, marketing strategies, expected readership, and inclusion in a wider index of literary works. Furthermore, it invites us to also interrogate the phenomenon of co-textuality, by which I mean the way different texts may coalesce in a single volume that seeks to reframe them as discrete parts of a larger whole.

2 What I present here as a problem of co(n)text becomes all the more evident if we take into consideration that during their author’s lifetime these ghost stories were published in a dispersed fashion. In fact, all collections of James’s ghost stories have been put together posthumously by editors looking to present them to the reading public in a unified package, thus shedding new light on a portion of James’s oeuvre that tends to remain in the shadow of his great novels as well as of his so-called “long short
stories” or novellas. In this brief study, I focus on the ghost story collections edited by Leon Edel, James’s biographer, along the twentieth century (in 1948, 1963, and 1970), and on one collection published more recently by Wordsworth. My aim is not to use the volumes in question so much as case studies per se, but to take them as starting points in my reflection on the stories themselves and as a platform on which the status of genre in short fiction is inherently problematized in a concentrated form. Analysing connections and divergences between the stories and weighing their possible relations with the collection in its entirety, I suggest that the presence of a ghost text—by which I mean a symbolic textual object that is irretrievably lost, destroyed, or simply unintelligible as an integral part of the ghost story—is one of the crucial manifestations of the Jamesian ghostly as a binding agent and a narrative mould.

In what concerns the 2008 **GSHJ**, it is worth noting that to include James’s works in a larger series devoted to “mystery and the supernatural” seems to go against the grain of studies devoted to James’s stories, which are traditionally more occupied with identifying their specificities than with tracing their possible correlations with the works of other writers and literary currents. In fact, James’s inventiveness and his own refurbishment of the supernatural narrative are usually referred to as the basis for a wholly new and unique kind of “psychological ghost story.” In his introduction to May Sinclair’s *Uncanny Stories* (another volume in the “Mystery & the Supernatural” series), Paul March-Russel refers to “The Turn of the Screw” (1898) precisely as “the most influential psychological ghost story” (11) of all time, citing Virginia Woolf’s firm assertion of James’s originality and Freudian uncanniness (12).

However, in the passage quoted by March-Russel, Woolf is not exactly referring to every single one of James’s ghostly narratives. What the English writer is arguing for is her own definition of a *perfect* ghost story, critically dismissing “Owen Wingrave,” for example, as one that “misses its mark” (323), and opposing it to those other stories “in which Henry James uses the supernatural effectively” (324, my emphasis). Woolf’s notion of an effective use of the supernatural is fundamental for a deeper understanding of the Jamesian ghost story. But the anthologies I consider here do not dismiss “Owen Wingrave”; they include it in the “arranged sequence” (Luscher 161) of apparitional ghost stories, first conceived in 1963 by Leon Edel. More recently, the same sequence was slightly re-arranged by a publishing house (Wordsworth), which aimed to provide its readers with fright and entertainment in the context of contemporary literary consumerism.¹

My comments on matters of context and editorial presentation serve to underline the fact that the circumstances surrounding the creation and publication of these collections seem to make it especially adequate to take into consideration René Audet’s advice to deflect from “the author’s creative strategies” and focus instead on “the effects produced by the practice of the collection” (36). However, sustaining the view that the effects produced by the practice of the collection may in fact provide us precious clues into the author’s creative strategies, I try not to separate those two dimensions in the following pages, but to focus on them in equal measure.

To make the basis of my argument clearer, I should point out that when it came to collecting James’s tales, the editors at Wordsworth were not nearly as strict as Woolf. They were willing to label James’s fictions as plain “ghost stories”—instead of “stories of the supernatural”, the seemingly more appropriate phrase that both Woolf and Edel decided to adopt in different contexts²—as much as they were unafraid to bring the...
author together with ghosts both old and new, psychological and otherwise (such as the ones of Edgar Allan Poe, Edith Wharton, M. R. James, and H. P. Lovecraft). This simultaneously light-handed and powerful mechanism of reader-orientation seems to derive from the ability of the editor to frame our reading of her/his collection. In this respect, and although he does not elaborate on the deeper consequences of the editorial practice as textual framing, Luscher alerts us to the fact that “[b]oth an editor’s and an author’s volumes may engage similar pattern-making faculties, but the editor adds another dimension to the work, interposing yet another layer of critical interpretation between the reader and the stories” (161).

7 In the case of Wordsworth’s “Mystery & the Supernatural” series, the notion of “ghost story” as an easily recognizable genre is reinforced and at the same time put at stake in the (also interpretive) act of including James’s short stories in that same series of rather disparate texts. To illustrate this point, I transcribe the book blurb found on the back cover of GSHJ:

Henry James was arguably the greatest practitioner of what has been called the psychological ghost story. His stories explore the region which lies between the supernatural or straightforwardly marvellous and the darker areas of the human psyche. This edition includes all ten of his “apparitional stories” or ghost stories in the strict sense of the term, and as such is the fullest collection currently available. The stories range widely in tone and type. They include “The Jolly Corner,” a compelling story of psychological doubling; “Owen Wingrave,” which is also a subtle parable of military tradition; “The Friends of the Friends,” a strange story of uncanny love; and “The Private Life,” which finds a shrewd, high comedy in its ghostly theme. The volume also includes James’s great novella The Turn of the Screw, perhaps the most ambiguous and disturbing ghost story ever written. (James, GSHJ)

8 To classify this as a collection of James’s ten “apparitional stories” is a re-appropriation of Leon Edel’s operative distinction between “apparitional” and “non-apparitional” stories in his second collection of Ghostly Tales of Henry James (Universal Library, 1963).

In an unpublished dissertation, Charles R. Greenhaw considers the history of Edel’s collections and his methodology, clarifying that he firstly collected 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 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. (3-4, italics mine)

9 In total, Edel produced three collections of ghost stories by Henry James: a first one in 1948, comprising all eighteen of the author’s “ghostly tales”; a shorter volume, in 1963, containing only the ten stories considered “apparitional”; and a second version of the original collection, in 1970, retitled Stories of the Supernatural. It is the second, intermediate collection—the selection of a selection—that coincides almost entirely with Wordsworth’s GSHJ issued in 2001.

10 Edel’s selection, however, partly picks up on James’s own compilation of his tales in volumes XII and XVII of the 1907-1909 New York Edition of his complete works, in which supernatural tales are conflated with naturalistic ones, destabilizing the ghostly dimension of the whole. This repeated negotiation between the individual texts and their anthologized form shows how the dynamics of collecting seems to surround
James’s fiction from various sides, affecting the context of its publication and reception as much as reshaping its co-textual boundaries.

As a matter of fact, the prefatory excerpts included in GSHJ are taken from James’s own prefaces to those two volumes in the New York edition, abridged, patched-up, and fitted into the collection as self-standing pieces of critical material. However, the image these rearranged prefaces project of GSHJ is at best that of an unstable totality: a self-conscious reassembly of cut up parts in a provisional whole. Hence, we must look into the collections themselves to understand how their similarities and differences can help us formulate a more satisfactory view of what the ghostly, in its tight correlation with the short story as a format especially prone to literary experimentation, represented for James.

Ghosts and Ghosts: Difference and Repetition

The anthologies put together by James’s biographer and Wordsworth differ in one single story. Edel included “De Grey: A Romance” (1868) in second place in the author’s apparitional stories, whereas the more recent edition silently obliterates this piece, adding a later one, “The Private Life” (1892), to keep a total of ten stories. Considering this change, I would like to briefly reflect on its implications on the stories as a cohesive or maybe not so cohesive group, as well as on our critical interpretation of them. I am not so interested in the reasons behind the swapping of these two stories, which are in no way referred to or made explicit in the paratext of the collection, and thus remain unknown, as I am in the effects it may have in our reading and understanding of the whole.

Through a close reading of certain passages in the stories as much as a distanced perspective on the macrostructure of the collections, I aim to show that these volumes, which differ significantly in terms of editorial rules, critical framing, intended audience, and marketing, though not so much in content, reiterate the remarkable coherence of James’s poetics of the ghostly, even as they underline important nuances. Given the fact, however, that two radically different stories seem to the able to compete in collections that claim to abide by similar principles, it seems necessary to interrogate their distinctive traits so as to understand the stories themselves, and the continuities and changes in James’s “apparitional” narratives.

Before elaborating further on this topic, I return to Wordsworth’s back-of-book description and to its claim to include all ten of James’s “ghost stories in the strict sense of the term.” The unintended irony of such a statement lies precisely in the fact that these “psychological” stories—as they are called in the same passage—cannot be, by definition, ghost stories in the strict sense of the term. This suggests the publishers are concentrating on the “apparitional” dimension of these narratives as a common factor, alluding to the everyday meaning of “ghost” as the image or presence of a deceased person or entity.

Such an understanding brushes over the variety and complexity of the many ghostly manifestations that pervade the different stories and even contrasts with the decision to add “The Private Life” to the collection. The bizarre tale revolves around the figures of Lord Mellifont, a man without an essence who exists in the presence of others but disappears in private, and Clare Vawdrey, a writer struggling with his work, along with his doppelgänger, who is not only his private persona but also the real writer. As even a
cursory plot summary shows, the apparition in this story is of a peculiar type, and there are no real or imaginary ghosts to account for. The editors’ oversimplification is thus a clear sign of the difficulties that arise in wanting to sell these narratives as “ghost stories” at the same time as having to deal with James’s duplicitous take on the supernatural. Scofield synthesizes this problem in his introduction:

Henry James's ghosts are liable to arise as much from within as from without: whatever their vivid perceptibility, they are often as much emanations from the psyche as visitants from “another world”. Indeed, it is precisely the equivocation between the two that gives them their imaginative power. (James, Ghost Stories xi)

16 The sense of equivocation on the part of the reader goes hand in hand with the ambiguity of expression on the part of the writer. In fact, the resistance to full articulation is the basis for Woolf’s definition of James’s ghosts as personages in stories “where some quality in a character or a situation can only be given its fullest meaning by being cut free from facts” (324). According to Woolf, meaning should not be conveyed by literal, deductive language, but it must instead arise from that which “remains unaccounted for” (325), positing a link between literary language, the ghostly, and the unwritten that is in fact crucial to the conclusions I draw from this reflection.

17 Uncertainties and lacunae have indeed been the subject of a great amount of scrutiny in the criticism of James’s novels and stories, particularly in their connection to the supernatural. Scofield equates the Jamesian ghostly with “fantasy, phantasm and desire” (James, Ghost Stories xvi); while Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly Reed proposed more recently to see it “not only in terms of the supernatural but also as a narrative strategy that nuances James’s realistic-protomodernist technique, giving it the profound elusiveness it is celebrated for” (1). But T. J. Lustig had already argued convincingly that the ghostly is a rather “uncategorizable” element that is pervasive in James’s oeuvre, and not exclusive to his works known as supernatural:

The ghostly is necessarily an insubstantial entity, yet this very openness is of the essence. . . . The ghostly is fundamentally and vitally uncertain and Todorov’s argument that this uncertainty is itself a generic hallmark seems to me to categorize the uncategorizable, to classify that which challenges or suspends classification and to ignore the supra-generic features of the ghostly, its ability to slip through conceptual meshes and cross categorical borders. (6-7)

18 Lustig’s broadening view dismisses the specification suggested by Wordsworth Ed, emphasizing instead the same lato sensu of “ghost story” that, paradoxically, makes it possible to swap “De Grey: A Romance” (in Edel’s earlier collection)—the story of a cursed family—for “The Private Life.”

19 In the following pages I offer an analysis of these two and several other stories, looking into their specificities as much as to the various relationships they may establish with the remaining corpus of James’s “apparitional” tales. My aim is to arrive at a clearer understanding of how James’s uncategorizable ghosts are tightly related to questions of unknowability, arising in turn from a recurring gap in the textual-epistemic edifice of these stories: a gap I have referred to before as a ghost text whose qualities and evolution are emphasized and rendered more visible by the disposition of the stories in a collection. As a narrative trope inherently tied to textuality and interpretation, the ghost text is apt to steer our reading away from more common associations with genre strictures and the fantastic, and redirect it to a questioning of literature in its thematic and formal connection to the unknown, which seems to be a point of departure from
which James develops his meta-literary approach to supernatural fiction and, possibly, to fiction in broad terms.

**Texts and Testaments**

Relating James’s ghost stories to his travel writings and personal experience as an expatriate, Julia Briggs persuasively conceives ghosts “as a link with the past from which we are afraid of being disinherited or disconnected” (112). It is this burdening sense of the past—the title of Henry James’s last, unfinished novel—that constitutes the narrative core of “De Grey,” an inaugural story in which Edel located “James’s first use of his ‘vampire’ theme” between the characters of husband and wife (in James, *Stories* 26).

Apart from the marital-vampire theme, “De Grey” provides the model for a topic that is seldom explored by James’s critics: heredity. Heredity not only from a bi-sociological perspective, tied to the characters’ genetics and family history, but also as a literary device that enacts what Lustig calls the “perverse laws of repetition and inversion” dominating James’s fiction (103). Lustig also notes that repetition and inversion are apt names for the forces behind James’s most celebrated novella, a movement which is intimately related to storytelling and the transmission of writing. In a famous passage of the prologue in “The Turn of the Screw,” Douglas seems to warn us of the dangers of trusting small children who claim to be witnesses to ghostly apparitions: “If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children—?”, he asks his audience, who quickly and avidly reply: “We say, of course . . . that two children give two turns!” (*Complete Stories* 635).

The image evoked by Douglas may be related to the complex narrative framing of the core-text of the story. Briefly, the narrative is told from an “exact transcript” (638), made by the first (unnamed) narrator, of the manuscript Douglas had committed to him or her before his death. Douglas, in turn, had received his original twenty years earlier, in “old, faded ink, and in the most beautiful hand” (636), from the author herself—his sister’s governess and the story’s protagonist—before her death. Thus, “The Turn of the Screw” provides a telling example of how, metaphorically performed in the transmission of documents and in the collusion of both concrete and abstract ideas of text and testament, writing is plotted in the narrative itself, and textual inheritance plays a fundamental role in the shaping of James’s supernatural short fiction.

Shoshana Felman gives a detailed account of the reading dispositif embedded in “The Turn of the Screw,” articulating it with the notions of reading as action and actualization, and of the reader as participant (101). Felman’s attention to the “reading effects” implied in narrative framing finds a parallel, with differences in context and subject matter, in René Audet’s insistence on the reading effects produced by the architectural framing we may find in a short story collection. In essence, it is “a specific machine textuelle producing interpretations through the relations that can be established between its composing elements” (qtd. in D’hoker and Van Den Bossche 12), which consequently forces us “to analyse the patterns of interaction which characterize the recueil from a reader-oriented perspective” (12).

Assuming such a perspective, we begin to realize the way James’s preface to “The Turn of the Screw” has been decontextualized and re-contextualized to spearhead the entire
Wordworth collection in chronological terms (following the New York edition and not
the original dates of publication), and in theoretical terms. It not only confirms the
place that novella holds as James’s most reputed ghost story, but it also establishes it as
the model for the stories to follow. And yet it can only be a partial model, for James
himself conceived his tale as a development of ancient forms of folkloristic literature.
“The exhibition involved is”, James claims, “a fairy-tale pure and simple” (Art 171);
later adding: “[The Turn of the Screw] is an excursion into chaos while remaining, like
Blue-Beard and Cinderella, but an anecdote—though an anecdote amplified and highly
emphasized and returning upon itself” (Art 172). In the second preface excerpted in the
Wordsworth collection, the author elaborates further on this subject:

> The ideal, obviously, on these lines, is the straight fairy-tale, the case that has
> purged in the crucible all its bêtises while keeping all its grace. . . . and I am
> prepared with the confession that the “ghost-story,” as we for convenience call it,
> has ever been for me the most possible form of the fairy-tale. (Art 254)

25 A sequential reading of prefatory remarks that were originally separate certainly gives
the idea a new and amplified strength, while it consolidates the privileged position,
already suggested in the paragraph dedicated to it on the cover blurb, that “The Turn
of the Screw” holds as a publicity bait and an “anchor story” (Lundén 60). However,
James’s indebtedness to fairy-tales and the notion of a text that returns upon itself
were already, perhaps in rather more explicit terms, fundamental features of the
author’s initial incursions into the supernatural, bringing me back to “De Grey: A
Romance,” and James’s second take at an apparitional story (included in the Edel, but
not in the Wordsworth collection).

26 The fairy-tale-like resonance of this narrative finds its tone in Father Herbert’s account
of a curse that “goes back to the night of time” (Complete Stories 345), sentencing to
death every young maiden subjected to the love of a De Grey. The transference of the
curse along the family line is materialized in a written register, “inscribed in a great
variety of hands” (344), that combines the dates of marriages and marriage proposals
with the dates of death of every woman who has fallen victim to the curse. This makes
“De Grey”—like “The Turn of the Screw,” but in a comparatively incipient version—a
text haunted by cumulative and cooperative writing: a narrative of love and death
successively written down and handed down, until it presents itself before the reader,
its final legatee.

27 Family sins and ancient curses are equally important in “The Romance of Certain Old
Clothes” (1868), James’s first supernatural tale, and “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891), a frame
story built around a strikingly Maupassantian found-manuscript motif. In both cases,
the spectres of a relative and a rejected lover, respectively, come to haunt and interfere
in newly-formed love affairs. Nevertheless, it is “Owen Wingrave,” which Virginia
Woolf ruled out, that seems the closest case to “De Grey” of a “story of ancestral
repression” (Cook 85), with a protagonist overpowered and ultimately brought to death
under the influence of his family tradition and his ancestors, offended by his revolt
against military life. The De Grey’s written memorandum, as a parade of ghosts that
cyclically return to haunt and hunt on the present—sacrificing the young wives—, is
replaced in “Owen Wingrave” with the gallery of family portraits that “glower at
[Owen] on the walls” (Complete Stories 275), eager to make a sacrifice of their own
descendant.
Notwithstanding these instances of cross-linking with other stories, mainly in the form of recurrent narrative topoi, “De Grey” proves an eccentric piece in the collection and a particularly interesting angle from which to look at it. The supernatural trait in this story is purely conveyed in the suggestive account of the family curse. However, apart from Father Herbert’s superstitious obsession, fuelled by the selfish motive of his own attraction to Margaret Aldis, Paul De Grey’s intended wife, there is no mystical vision to deal with, no actual “apparition” to account for. The more portentous “ghost” in this ghost story is fear in its purest form, emanating from an inherited traumatic and violent memory. It is an objectified abstraction, put into written form in the family’s morbid chronicle.

In a Wilsonian reading, Gerard M. Sweeney goes as far as to contend that “De Grey” is not supernatural at all, providing a “non-supernatural, medical explanation” (38) for the events it portrays. What I should like to stress in reference to Sweeney’s debatable idea, however, is the fact that what Edel claims to be the first pre-requisite in the selection of the stories—their “apparitional” quality—could have supplied him with an argument to exclude “De Grey” from his own collection (as ended up happening in Wordsworth’s). We infer from this apparent contradiction that what is requested from the reader and critic with the inclusion of that tale in Edel’s “apparitional” collection is precisely a widened view of “ghost story,” as well as of what the ghost(ly) in a ghost story may be—a development I look further into in the two following sections.

Writing as Haunting

Like “De Grey,” “The Private Life” makes for a unique ghost story, even if it is in many ways a tale of apparitions and disappearances. Written at the beginning of the 1890s, the richest decade in what regards James’s supernatural creations, this story differs greatly from the initial “romance” substratum, to constitute a more recognizably Jamesian account of the meeting and of the delicate relationships of a group of eccentrics assembled in the Swiss Alps.

Devoid of ghosts in any strict sense of the word, this story is perhaps James’s paradigmatic narrative of doubling and ego split. As such, it paves the way for “The Jolly Corner” (1908), a story of doubling that closes the collection and which is, by implication, the conclusive Jamesian ghost story—one in which, along the lines of a Jekyll-and-Hyde drama, the dilettante Spencer Brydon is haunted by and finally comes face to face with his alternate, American capitalist self. But “The Private Life” also relates to stories devoid of such an obvious doubling structure. Tzvetan Todorov saw in it a “perfect symmetry” between Lord Mellifont’s lacking personality and Vawdrey’s superabundant alter ego. However, he also considers such symmetry a general “characteristic of the way James devises the intrigue of a story” (108). This concept of symmetry as a fundamental feature of James’s poetics brings me to the examples of “The Way It Came” (1896, retitled “The Friends of the Friends”) and “The Third Person” (1900).

“The Way It Came” tells of the efforts to bring together two people whose similar supernatural experiences make them the inverted image of each other. An unnamed male character is known to have witnessed the apparition of his mother at the time of her death, while an unnamed female character suffered the same kind of inexplicable phenomenon with regard to her father. The author of the diaries where such
happenings are inscribed and whose fragment we are given to read in the core narrative was also the man’s fiancée and the woman’s friend. Considering their parallel experiences, she tries to make them meet several times with little success, but also, and out of jealousy, prevents the encounter from happening when it is most probable. The two ghost-seers finally meet in secret, but only shortly before the woman died, forcing her accomplice to take their relationship—an “inconceivable communion” (Complete Stories 634), as suggested by the offended wife—beyond the grave.

Another iteration of the inheritance theme, “The Third Person” relies on mimicry and duplication as further expressions of corporeal and/or spiritual doubling. According to Anna Despotopoulou, this story takes its mystery “not so much out of the male ghost but out of the hovering presence of two women whose relationship supplies the story with suspense and uncertainty” (92). Indeed, it is the living who are referred to as ghosts, as it becomes clear in certain lines of dialogue between Miss Frush and Miss Amy, “two good ladies, previously not intimate” who “found themselves,” by the testamentary clause of an aunt, “domiciled together in the small but ancient town of Marr” (Complete Stories 255). In fact, the two spinsters are the ones who tirelessly haunt the spectre, awakened after the finding of “a box of old odds and ends, mainly documentary; partly printed matter, newspapers and pamphlets yellow and grey with time, and, for the rest, epistolary—several packets of letters, faded, scarce decipherable” (260), that furnishes them with indirect knowledge (via Mr. Patten, the vicar at Marr) of the existence of a common ancestor, his misdeeds, and the circumstances of his execution. To appease the ghost of Mr. Cuthbert Frush, hanged in the previous century for smuggling, Miss Amy herself smuggles one of the volumes printed by Tauchnitz from Paris into England, duplicating her ancestor’s ill-deeds and satisfying what she thinks is his wish, and what sceptical readers will more probably interpret as her own secret drive toward the illicit.

Making “The Private Life” co-exist with “The Way It Came” and “The Third Person” in the Wordsworth collection reinforces the doubling element that provides the basis for the ghostly in many of James’s tales, emphasizing a layer of meaning and a recurrent compositional structure that could otherwise remain almost invisible. Thus, regarding “The Private Life” as a “fringe story” (Lundén 60) that resists integration, one comes to realize to what extent doubles and ghosts are intricately connected in James’s vision of the literary supernatural, to the point of becoming equivalent. However, there is another instance of doubling that I should like to tackle. It is a fundamental feature of the Jamesian ghost story and a necessary step to understand it, having no longer to do with characters but instead with the text itself.

**Ghost Texts**

“De Grey” (in Edel’s collection) is a dramatization as much as the closing chapter of the eponymous family chronicle. It turns the screw of that haunting document by reversing the family curse and shutting the current of writing, as it puts an end to the family line by killing off its last remaining representative. One could say that the narrative opposes the chronic by going against the tide of that fatally incessant river of writing. Speaking of the twists and turns of writing and of how they evolved in James’s later style, we see that “The Turn of the Screw” does not interrupt, but fully obliterates the most important document it refers to: the governess’s manuscript.
Copied and transcribed, the original text is supposedly replicated in the first-person narrative that comes after the prologue, but it is in fact forever lost to us, its ghostly presence and material absence being ironically summoned by the narrator's memory of the governess's “beautiful” handwriting (Complete Stories 636).

Making way for my conclusion, I go back to “The Private Life” (added to the Wordsworth collection) and to the issue of co-textuality that emerges from the appearance of two slightly divergent editions of James's ten “apparitional” stories. In this respect, we can say that, even if it would be difficult to find a tight interdependence between the elements in the collections at stake—all the more so because they are not conceived as macrotexts, but rather as compilations based on theme and genre—it is clear that from a “centrifugal” perspective (Lundén) the maturity and sophistication of the latter story helps to accentuate disjunctions as much as to create stronger links between the texts than those “De Grey,” a “romance” from James's early years, may have originated in Edel's original collection. In fact, this story seems to activate with particular force the mechanism whose description I lastly arrive at: the parade of spectral texts that, from a distanced and wider angle, may conjoin the greater part of James's ghost stories.

In terms of style, “The Private Life” may pair with “The Ghostly Rental” (1876) to constitute the only other case in James's apparitional tales of a linear, unframed narrative in the first person, deriving from the supposed lived experience and recollection of the narrator, and not from any written source or from the enactment of a storytelling situation. However, as the self-reflexive story of a character in search of missing authors and texts, inspired by Robert Browning (fictionalized as Clare Vawdrey) and the painter Frederic Leighton (fictionalized as Lord Mellifont), “The Private Life” anticipates the inherited-manuscript and the co-authorship framing device of both “The Friends of the Friends” (through the diaries of the deceased woman) and “The Turn of the Screw” (through the governess's memoirs).

Speaking of the narrative itself, however, the centrality of Vawdrey's authorial drama and of his and Mellifont's appearing and disappearing acts may distract us from the fact that there is another author in it. The unnamed intradiegetic narrator also nurtures the aspiration to write a play in which Blanche Adney, the actress in the group, could star. Hence, the narrator duplicates the real Vawdrey in his frustrated endeavour, duplicating also Vincent Adney, the actress's husband, whose “one discomfort was that he couldn't write a play for his wife . . . , asking impossible people if they couldn't” (Complete Stories 62). The figure of the inept dramatist in the story is thus multiplied by three.

The narrator's literary inclination is sparingly mentioned, with a total of three occurrences in the text. These occurrences, however, always underline the impossibility of such authorial inclination to ever come to fruition, simply because the eager would-be author is never given the avail to proceed in his witty dialogues with Blanche (69-70). The last mention to the speculative play comes at the very end of the story, in the narrator's final considerations on the subject:

Mrs. Adney had vanished when we came down; but [she and Clare Vawdrey] made up their quarrel in London, for he finished his play, which she produced. I must add that she is still, nevertheless, in want of the great part. I have a beautiful one in my head, but she doesn't come to see me to stir me up about it. Lady Mellifont always drops me a kind word when we meet, but that doesn't console me. (91, italics mine)
With Vawdrey’s play ultimately written and performed, though to no great success, the narrator of “The Private Life” finally comes forward as the failed author and ghost-seer of the story, the only one who actually sees Vawdrey’s double. However, he is also a ghost-seer in the sense that he pursues the chimera of his play, a shadow hovering over both his experience and his recollection of the events, which is to say, his own private life. The seemingly supernatural phenomena the narrator and Mrs. Adney witness alone and on different occasions are dealt with excitement and amusement, but with no hint at all of what James held in his prefaces as “the dear old sacred terror” (Art 169). They are, in a way, as two children giving the effect of the story and its game of hide-and-seek two turns of the screw. In sum, if the supernatural experience is not a source of disquiet after all, having been normalized and relegated to the realm of play, what still haunts the first-person narrator after everything is past—the ghost he has not been able to lay—is precisely the play that seems doomed to never be written. Channelled into the subjective stance of the ever-postponed writer, as his act of private narration, “The Private Life” itself is like a telescope pointed at the mirage of that impossible text, or, in other words, it is the manifestation of its absence.

The idea I should like to develop from my reading of these stories, emphasized by a closer attention to the competing pair in the context of different collections formed by “De Grey: A Romance” and “The Private Life,” is that the ghostly seems to have been for James inseparable from writing and from what is, in his vision and treatment of the supernatural, the phantasmagorical nature of literature: an art form haunted by the effects of re-presentation that constitute the very acts of writing and reading. As Lustig proposes at the beginning of his reflection on James’s ghostly settings and characters, whether supernatural or naturalistic: “[i]n a very general way all writing evokes, revives or resurrects what is not present” (1).

Looking into the two collections of James’s “apparitional” stories emphasizes striking orbital differences between them. One was devised by an editor with an academic record as a Jamesian scholar and a renowned biographer who substantiates his choices in his own introduction to the volume, guiding our reading of the stories according to a theory of the Jamesian supernatural and to a typology derived from it (“non-apparitional” and “apparitional” stories). The other collection picks up on this distinction without revealing it as such, to use only the one side of the equation that is supposed to represent James’s true ghost stories, and using as critical framing, apart from a new scholarly introduction of a more general sort, James’s own prefaces originally conceived to open the doors to quite different organizations of these multiple texts.

One single difference in the sequence of ten stories, however, may suggest a more essential divide. In including “De Grey: A Romance,” in which we do not find the visible apparition of a ghost, in his 1963 collection, Edel strengthens the ties between the Jamesian ghostly and medievalesque forms of romance and fairytale to which James remained largely attached, even if giving them a much more abstract and theoretical shape in his later stories. By substituting this story for “The Private Life,” whose “apparitional” nature is, however, Likewise debatable, the collection published by Wordsworth in the 21st century strays partly away from the “fairy way of writing” to offer us a narrative stemming from James’s more mature, self-reflexive years. If facing the two collections puts into relief two inextricably related and yet distinguishable ways of making the ghostly effective, emphasizing the evolution of James’s approach to
it (from the traditional and the horrific to the modern and the bizarre, from the sensational to the psychological), it also sheds a new light on the way the author was able to reconcile those distant spheres with the purpose of advancing his ideas on supernatural fiction, but also on fiction at large, as a field in which to meditate on the nature of literature itself. James’s meta-literary thinking is most visible in his recurrent but changing deployment of ghost texts as phantasmagorical entities that tie these stories to a scheme of doubling with the projection of overshadowing, imaginary, often testamentary, and irretrievable originals written (or to-be-written) by fictional authors.

In essence, what I argue from this comparative reading of James’s stories enabled by their grouping in collections purportedly focused on an apex of horror—the apparition of a ghost—, is that, from the family chronicle in “De Grey” to the inexistent play in “The Private Life”, not forgetting the edited diary in “The Way It Came” or the “scarce decipherable” letters (Complete Stories 260) and unidentified stolen novel in “The Third Person,” the author’s exploration and renewal of the ghost story genre often materializes in his fiction in the narrative trope of the ghost text, a piece of writing always elusive and in most occasions hidden or destroyed, construed as the veritable haunting presence. A story such as “The Private Life” gives prominence to a decisive element of James’s idea of the ghostly, which emerges from a movement counteracting the revelation promised to the reader of his “apparitional” stories: the disappearance of a hovering to text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


D’hoker, Elke, and Bart Van Den Bossche. “Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in a Comparative Perspective.” Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties 12, “Cycles,


NOTES

1. For a telling reflection on the evolution of the short story into a “prestige genre,” see Ferguson 186-89.
2. Namely, in the opening lines of Woolf’s essay on James’s ghost stories: “It is plain that Henry James was a good deal attracted to the ghost story, or, to speak more accurately, by the story of the supernatural” (319); as well as in the 1970 edition of the Ghostly Tales, which Edel retitled Stories of the Supernatural.
4. All citations are from Library of America’s multivolume edition of James’s Complete Stories. The volume number is identified in the first occurrence by roman numerals before the page number.
5. I allude to the original debate between Edmund Wilson’s psychological reading and Robert N. Heilman’s supernatural reading of “The Turn of the Screw.” For an updated perspective on this controversy, see Lustig 5 et seq.
6. See Edel, in James, The Ghostly Tales xiv; Lustig 86-104; and Ponnau 306.
7. I am employing Alessandro Viti’s expanded concept of macrotesto.
8. For an account and a critical reading of the real-life inspiration behind “The Private Life,” see Lind.

ABSTRACTS

Bien qu’il soit un auteur d’histoires de fantômes relativement prolifique, Henry James n’a jamais rassemblé ses récits fantastiques dans un volume spécifique ni ne les a regroupés de manière distincte dans sa production. Il les a plutôt glissés discrètement dans son corpus naturaliste. Dans cet article, Amândio Reis passe brièvement en revue l’histoire de la compilation et de la publication de ces récits, en particulier à partir des trois collections éditées par Leon Edel au cours du XXe siècle (en 1948, 1963 et 1970), afin d’échafauder un cadre critique qui lui permet d’interroger la tentative récente de produire un recueil définitif des prétendues « histoires de fantômes » de l’auteur (chez Wordsworth en 2001 et en 2008). Cet article, qui cherche à montrer comment une différence apparemment minime peut affecter et modifier la lecture de l’ensemble, confronte ce recueil à une publication antérieure dont il diffère à une histoire près. L’hypothèse finale est que les irrégularités de contexte offertes par ces deux recueils donnent lieu à une meilleure compréhension du spectral jamesien et clarifient ce que les histoires de fantômes représentent, en tant que sous-genre, chez cet auteur.
AUTHORS

AMÂNDIO REIS

Amândio Reis is a PhD candidate at the University of Lisbon with a thesis on the correlations between literature and knowledge in late-nineteenth century short fiction from a transnational perspective, focusing on Machado de Assis, Henry James and Guy de Maupassant. He is a member of the Centre for Comparative Studies (University of Lisbon), and a visiting student at the CERILAC – Centre d’Études et de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Lettres Arts Cinéma (University Paris Diderot – Paris 7). He is also a teaching assistant in the BA in Comparative Studies at the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities.