ABSTRACT

CATHERINE ELIZABETH ROSE. Haunted Houses, Haunted Minds: An Analysis of Liminal Spaces in the Supernatural Fiction of Henry James. (Under the direction of Dr. Allen Stein.)

Henry James is well-known for his realist novels; however, he was also a prolific writer of supernatural fiction. James’s ghost stories demonstrate his contribution to the development of the Gothic in American fiction. By weaving together the supernatural and the psychological, James is able to explore humankind’s reaction to the uncanny, the unknowable, and the uncertain. His ghosts are both products of the human psyche and evidence of an unknowable reality beyond physical existence, and James’s ambiguity regarding their nature enhances his fiction’s discussion of horror being the unknowable. In stories featuring haunted houses, James elevates a common Gothic element to a new level of importance by giving them both supernatural and psychological significance. The houses are symbolic of the protagonists, whose minds are haunted by a repressed fear of emptiness at the core of their existences. This essay examines “The Ghostly Rental,” “Owen Wingrave,” The Turn of the Screw, “The Real Right Thing,” and “The Jolly Corner,” emphasizing the connection between the haunted houses and the haunted protagonists who encounter uncanny apparitions inside these spaces. The protagonists are drawn to the haunted houses that embody the hauntedness of their minds, and they attempt to purge the house of the uncanny, in an effort to maintain control over their minds. In his supernatural fiction, James’s protagonists are unwilling to confront manifestations that contradict their perceptions of themselves, and avoid facing the truth that, at its core, it is impossible to know the self with absolute certainty.