

**Enigma in Narrative: The failed Quest for Meaning/Truth of the Narrative in  
Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw***

吳宜盈 Yi-Yin Wu

**Abstract**

According to Peter Brooks' psychoanalytic theory of narrative regarding Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", the beginning of the narrative is oriented toward the end, with a desire to narrate. The readers' quest for meaning at the end resembles the narrative's desire for an ending. In this case, the narrative of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* leaves such questions unexplained as whether the phantom is real and how Miles dies. My presentation will explore the following questions: why the governess does not offer a final clarification to the events in her narration, what the effect of such narration abruptly ending is, and how and why the truth remains unrevealed. Judging from Brooks' theory on plotting, this narrative has no meaning and pauses at the climax of Miles' sudden death. The structure of the frame narrative and the genre would be re-scrutinized. Several examples of the narrative strategies in her communication with the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, would be analyzed to demonstrate the thesis, how the enigma is left untouched, how a foreshadowing statement is avoided, and a presumed conclusion is introduced.

The other focus concerning the plot structure will be the reoccurring encounter of the governess with the phantom, which functions as a "binding" of the events and reinforcement of tension, as Brooks' theory claims. The oscillating middle part of the narration consisting of the repetition of her facing the ghost is enormously prolonged and never reaches the quiescence of an end. This narrative challenges Brooks' presumption that the significance of the text will unfold during the plot development and that the repetition helps the text gain its ultimate meaning. The increasing mystery in the plot without an end presents an unusual type of narration, indicating an untypical narrative aim, which is worth further investigation.

Keywords: narration, frame narrative, psychoanalytical literary interpretation, Gothic novel