

# Turn of the Screw



Katie Anderson and George Psarras take all the parts in Dragon's version of Henry James' 'Turn of the Screw.'

One of the things I've always liked about Jeffrey Hatcher's 1996 adaptation of Henry James's 1898 novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, now being presented by [Dragon Productions](#) in Palo Alto, is its minimalism. Part play, part ghost story, the piece is narrated and performed by just two actors. No fancy special effects are employed to sell the drama unfolding before us—the ill-defined fears conjured by our imaginations are supposed to be enough. Happily, in this production directed by Meredith Hagedorn, they are.

The play begins with a wealthy, unnamed London man (George Psarras) interviewing a prospective governess (Katie Anderson) to raise his orphaned niece and nephew. The man is prepared to meet his familial obligations to his unfortunate relations, but at arm's length—they live in Bly, his country place in Essex. In fact, he will only hire the governess under one condition; that she not contact him for any reason, no matter what transpires at Bly. The man clearly knows something the governess does not, but she needs the work and believes that in proving her worth to the master, she might snag a husband.

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She immediately heads to Bly, where she meets the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose (also played by Psarras, in the same attire he wears as the master), and Flora, a pantomime of the niece. Miles, Flora's older brother (Psarras again), arrives the next day, having been expelled from boarding school for being a corrupting influence on his classmates.

Miles is just 10, so this is a serious charge, but Miles knows more than most 19th-century boys his age, thanks to the pair of randy ghosts living at Bly. Miles also suffers from what 21st-century psychiatrists would describe as Attachment Disorder. Protecting her charges from their inner demons, as well as the ones roaming Bly's grounds, becomes the governess's mission. For a while, Mrs. Grose joins the governess

in this somber duty, but we only witness the governess's observations of the ghosts, making Mrs. Grose a collaborator if not a corroborator.

Anderson and Psarras work well together in their various pairings, and Psarras eases effortlessly from role to role. In one memorable moment, he melts before our eyes from the play's stentorian announcer to bashful Miles. As for Anderson, even though she only has one role, her job may be tougher, but she shifts from narrator to participant convincingly. And when her eyes widen in horror at the taunting ghosts before her, we feel a chill down our spines, too.

### **The Turn of The Screw**

Thursday-Sat at 8pm, Sunday at 2pm. Runs through Nov. 28

Dragon Theatre, 535 Alma St., Palo Alto

\$16-\$20

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