



The Turn of the Screw

Henry James (April 15, 1843 – February 28, 1916)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Catalog:	DB-1263
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Ever since *The Turn of the Screw* first appeared in early 1898 in 12 installments of *Collier's Weekly* magazine, readers have been uncertain about the exact nature of the evil and horror they have experienced. The tale is told on Christmas Eve by an unnamed narrator who listens to a friend's story about a governess he once knew who is now dead. She had been hired by the absentee owner of Bly, a country house, to look after his recently orphaned niece and nephew. She begins to see the figures of a man and woman lurking about that no one else seems to see. The housekeeper tells her that two recently deceased employees of the estate, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, had been sexually intimate and had spent many hours with the children. She comes

to believe that they are haunting the grounds, make themselves visible selectively, and are in touch with her young charges. Is it true? If so, why? Or is she crazy? The situation intensifies and unfortunate things happen, but the question is not resolved. Henry James returned to ghost story often, but tried to avoid stereotypes, preferring "the strange and sinister embroidered on the very type of the normal and easy". The book is classified as both a ghost story and gothic tale; critics have been attempting to "solve it" since it was published. One described it as a "modest monument to ambiguity". Quite so. It has been adapted frequently for the stage, films and television, often with new titles.

Henry James (April 15, 1843 – February 28, 1916) was an American novelist and critic and a key figure in the development of literary realism in the 19th century. He was born in New York to a well-to-do and celebrated family: his father was a lecturer and philosopher noted for his ties to Swedenborg; his older brother William was a leading philosopher and psychologist; and his sister Alice found fame as a diarist. The family traveled abroad extensively during his youth, settling in Newport, RI and then Boston. After a brief term at Harvard Law School he began to write in earnest, publishing reviews and stories for magazines. In 1869 he toured Europe and settled in London, where he remained for much of the rest of life. Much of his work addresses the cultural differences between Europe and America, often writing from the point of view of the character and adding depth with the use of interior monologue, shifting points of view, and a keen awareness of consciousness and perception. His style shows the influence of Balzac, Maupassant, and Zola, and has been likened to impressionist painting. His work can be grouped into three periods, the first concluding with *The Portrait of a Lady* 1881, the second with *The Turn of the Screw* in 1890, and the late years characterized by the trilogy of masterpieces, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1911, 1912, and 1916.