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The story starts conventionally enough with friends sharing ghost stories 'round the fire on Christmas Eve. One of the guests tells about a governess at a country house plagued by supernatural visitors. But in the hands of Henry James, the master of nuance, this little tale of terror is an exquisite gem of sexual and psychological ambiguity. Only the young governess can see the ghosts; only she suspects that the previous governess and her lover are controlling the two orphaned children (a girl and a boy) for some evil purpose. The household staff don't know what she's talking about, the children are evasive when questioned, and the master of the house (the children's uncle) is absent. Why does the young girl claim not to see a perfectly visible woman standing on the far side of the lake? Are the children being deceptive, or is the governess being paranoid? By leaving the questions unanswered, *The Turn of Screw* generates spine-tingling anxiety in its mesmerized readers.

Novella by Henry James, published serially in *Collier's Weekly* in 1898 and published in book form later that year. One of the world's most famous ghost stories, the tale is told mostly through the journal of a governess and depicts her struggle to save her two young charges from the demonic influence of the eerie apparitions of two former servants in the household. The story inspired critical debate over the question of the "reality" of the ghosts and of James's intentions. James himself, in his preface to volume XII of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, called the tale a "fable" and said that he did not specify details of the ghosts' evil deeds because he wanted readers to supply their own vision of terror.

Henry James was a master at tracing the social boundaries of the Gilded Age -- between Old and New World, Europe and America, desire and convention, men and women. He brought an invaluable clear-eyed, and critical, sensibility to America's evolving cultural mores.