

Intermediate



B2 (Vantage)

R A I N B O W S

# The Turn of the Screw

Henry James



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**R A I N B O W S**

Henry James

# The Turn of the Screw

Adaptation, dossiers and activities  
by Annabel Pope



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# The Turn of the Screw

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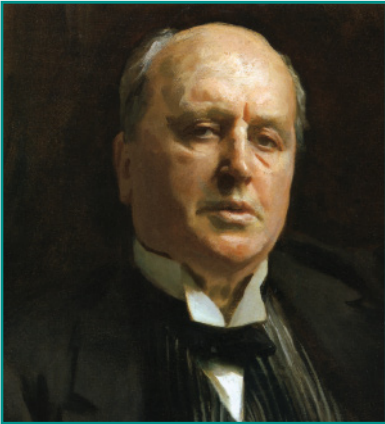
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# The Author

## Henry James

*“Art makes life, makes interest, makes importance...”*



Henry James was born in 1843 in Washington Place, New York, the second son of Henry James senior, and his wife, Mary Walsh. His brother, William, was a year older, while Garth Wilkinson, Robertson, and sister Alice were all younger than him. William became one of the greatest American philosophers, and Alice's diaries and letters have been published in recent years.

His father was a wealthy<sup>1</sup> intellectual, whose friends included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau. He decided that an education of travelling in Europe was better for his children than sending them to a rigid, conventional school.

Consequently, they made many voyages back and forth<sup>2</sup> between the United States and Europe, and stayed in Geneva, Paris, London and Bonn. The James house was full of curiosity, ideas and books, but the children had no time to socialise and make friends.

They finally came back to live in the States in 1860 when Henry was seventeen. By this time he had read all the classics, and already knew that he wanted literature to be his life.

In 1861, while working as a volunteer fireman, he had a life-changing accident which caused what he called, his “obscure hurt”. He never gave any details, but the injury prevented him from doing military service in the American Civil War.

His first book review<sup>3</sup> was published when he was twenty-two. He went on to write twenty novels, one hundred and twelve stories, twelve plays and many literary criticisms during his long career.

1. *wealthy*: rich.

2. *back and forth*: moved repeatedly from one place to another and back again.

3. *review*: a report in a newspaper, magazine, or program that gives an opinion about a new book, film, etc.

He returned to Europe, where he lived for a while in Italy, Paris and London, but he finally settled<sup>4</sup> in Rye, on the south-east coast of England. He never married, and his private life remains a mystery in spite of his hectic<sup>5</sup> social life and the many letters he wrote. Joseph Conrad, Emile Zola, Robert Louis Stevenson and George Bernard Shaw were just some of his acquaintances<sup>6</sup>.

Henry was a great admirer of Shakespeare, who kept his private life a secret, and after a period of depression when he was in his sixties, he lit<sup>7</sup> a bonfire<sup>8</sup> in the garden and burned forty years of letters, manuscripts and old notebooks.

His novella *The Turn of the Screw* was originally published in 1898 as a ghost story in a weekly series for the American literary magazine, “Collier’s Review”. Other well-known works are his novels *A Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors*, *Daisy Miller* and *The Golden Bowl*.

One of the themes in his writing was the difference in morals and manners between Americans and Europeans. In 1915, he gave up his American nationality and became British. He was still writing until only a short time before he died of a stroke<sup>9</sup> in 1916.

Sixty years after his death, his adopted country finally recognized his lifelong dedication to Art, and in 1976, a memorial stone to him was unveiled<sup>10</sup> in Westminster Abbey.



Illustration by E. Pape (1898)

4. *settled*: went and lived (in Rye) permanently.
5. *hectic*: very busy.
6. *acquaintances*: people that you know but who are not close friends.
7. *lit* (*light-lit-lit*): made something start to burn.
8. *bonfire*: a large outdoor fire.
9. *stroke*: a sudden serious illness caused by burst blood vessel in the brain.
10. *unveiled*: shown to the public for the first time.



## BEFORE READING

- 1 What nationality was Henry James? Tick the correct answer.

English    American    Australian    Irish    Scottish
- 2 Henry James wrote stories about people in many different countries. Where do you think *The Turn of the Screw* takes place? Tick the answer you think is correct.

Italy    Paris    America    France    England
- 3 What kind of story do you expect *The Turn of the Screw* to be? Tick (✓) your choice.

A love story    A detective story  
 A ghost story    A science fiction story  
 A classical novel    A frightening, disturbing tale
- 4 Henry James called *The Turn of the Screw* a novella or tale, rather than a story. Is there a difference between a tale and a story? Which of the following definitions do you think is a tale and which a story? Put a T or an S in the boxes below.

An account, often spoken, of what happened to somebody or of how something happened.	
An imaginative narrative especially one that is full of action and adventure.	
An exciting spoken description of an event, which may not be completely true.	
A description of events and people that the writer or speaker has invented to entertain people.	





# The Turn of the Screw

## The beginning of the end

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### Chapter 1

T

The scene was set for the story which we had all been waiting for so impatiently. Christmas dinner had been eaten. The fire in the great fireplace lit up the darkened room as the huge logs<sup>1</sup> slowly burned and warmed the guests and the big, cold house. Douglas began to speak in his deep, clear voice. He was serious, but he could not hide his emotion.



“I knew the lady who gave me this story very well,” he said. “She was my sister’s governess, and a very fine person. We became close friends, although she was older than me. She had never told the terrible story to anyone before, and she left me the manuscript, written in her beautiful handwriting, when she died twenty years ago. She wrote down exactly what had happened to her, what she had kept secret all those years.”



‘Is it a very frightening ghost story?’ someone asked.

Douglas replied sharply<sup>2</sup>.

“This is no ordinary ghost story. Do not expect simply to be frightened by so-called supernatural phenomena. It is a strange and awful tale which has never been heard before. I do not know what effect it will have on you.”

By now of course we were all extremely curious and no more questions were asked. We felt strangely cold, in spite of being so near to the fire.

He went on.

“Before I begin, I must give you a little background information, to help you understand the story better. This lady was the youngest daughter of a poor country clergyman<sup>3</sup>, well-educated but with no experience outside of the small village in which she lived. She badly needed to earn some money, so she answered an advertisement to be a governess to two children. She was just twenty years old.

1. *log*: a thick piece of wood cut from a tree.

2. *sharply*: quickly and suddenly.

3. *clergyman*: a male priest in the Christian church.



## The Turn of the Screw

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The interview was in London in Harley Street. An extremely pleasant and cheerful young gentleman introduced himself as the guardian for two young orphans<sup>4</sup>, his niece and nephew. He was handsome and very persuasive as he spoke to her.

‘My dear, I can see that you are just the sort of person the poor children need. Unfortunately, their last governess, a young lady not unlike yourself, died suddenly, it was very tragic. I have no time to go to the country, and I certainly have no idea how to look after two young children, even though they are adorable. The house is very comfortable, there is a housekeeper<sup>5</sup> and a cook, maids<sup>6</sup> and a gardener. I think you will have everything you could possibly need, and you will find the two children very good company. Will you accept? We all need you desperately!’

He took her hand in his for a moment, and asked her to think about his offer and to let him know in two days’ time.

It was not an easy decision. She was afraid of leaving her home and beginning a lonely life. She felt nervous and inexperienced, but the money he offered was good, and to have such a fine gentleman as an employer could surely only be a good thing.

She accepted. The gentleman was very grateful and kind, and lost no time in making all the arrangements. Before saying goodbye, he gave her one condition to keep to. When she looked back, she wondered why it had not seemed a little strange to her at the time. He was, however, so charming<sup>7</sup> and convincing that it had been easy for a young girl not to pay very much attention to his words. He suddenly became serious and said, taking her hand for the second and last time,

‘I must ask you to promise me one thing. My business is so important that I cannot be distracted by other problems. You must never contact me, ask me any questions or send me any letters. You will receive all the necessary money from my solicitor<sup>8</sup>. I give you complete responsibility.’

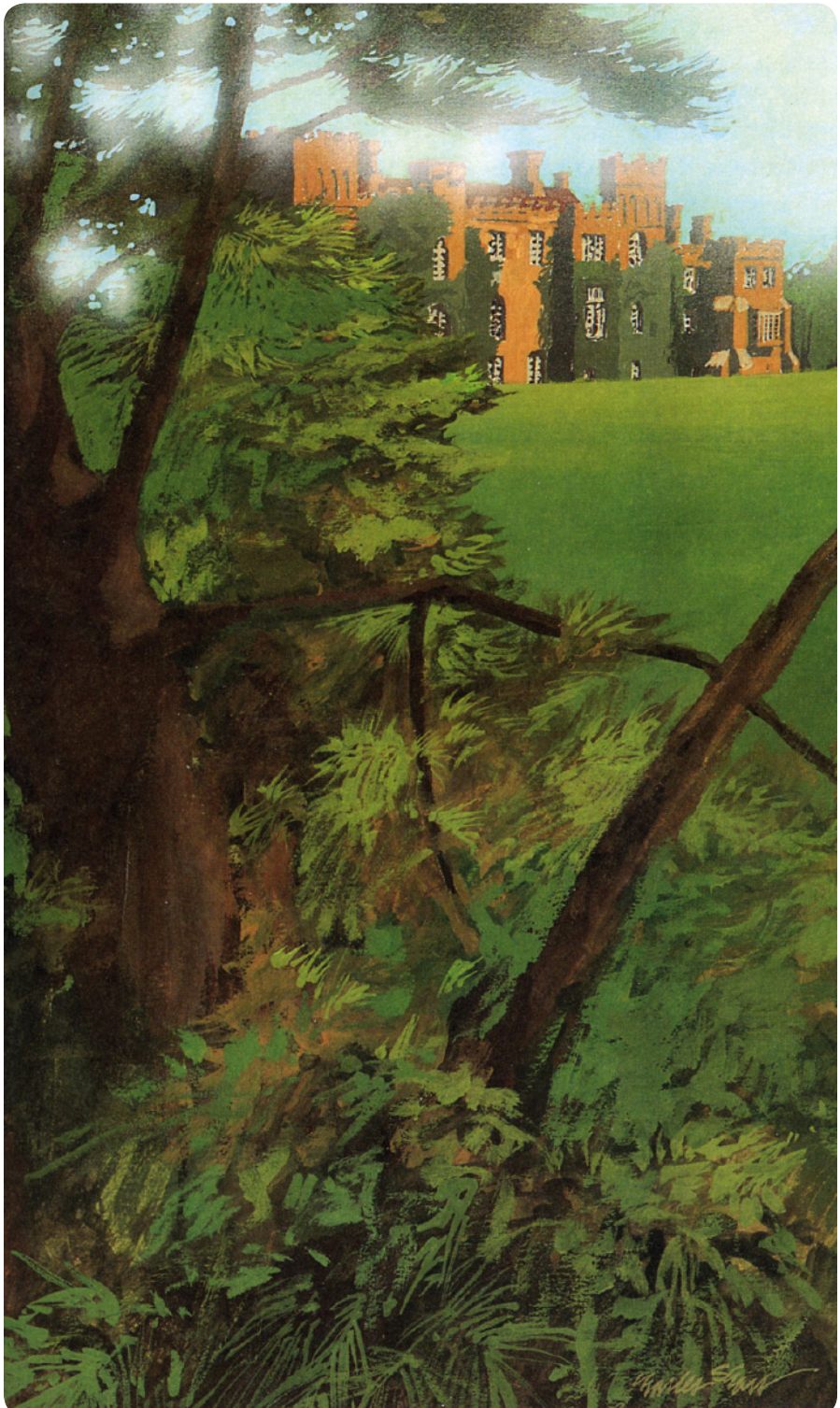
4. *orphan*: a child whose parents are dead.

5. *housekeeper*: a woman whose job is to manage the cooking, shopping and clearing in a house.

6. *maid*: a woman who works as a servant in someone’s home.

7. *charming*: pleasant and attractive.

8. *solicitor*: a lawyer who advises people on legal matters.



The coach finally stopped outside Bly, a remote but surprisingly pleasant-looking house. (Raintree, 1981)

## The Turn of the Screw

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“And now I'll begin the true tale”  
(E. Pape, 1898)



She had spent the whole journey worrying. By the time it was nearly over, she was in a terrible state of anxiety. Her heart was beating too fast with all the responsibility she had taken on, she was afraid of meeting the housekeeper and servants and the little girl whom she was going to look after. The coach finally stopped outside Bly, a remote but surprisingly pleasant-looking house. It was a large, three-storey<sup>9</sup> house, built of red brick. The garden was bright and cared for, with plants of every colour in the flowerbeds. Tall trees grew there, and she remembered how a cloud of large, black birds had flown off into the golden evening sky as the horses came to a stop.

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9. storey: level of a building, a floor.