

and investigating aspects of appearance and reality. M. R. James (1862-1936) is the most celebrated ghost story writer of the late 1890s. His stories excel at details of physical horror and have ingenious plots where everyday worlds are disrupted by the invasion of terrifying malignant agents. James' *Collected Ghost Stories* were published in 1931 and have been reprinted many times.

The Turn of the Screw (1898), a novella by Henry James (1843-1916) offers a powerful and original interpretation of Victorian conventions. It begins with children's ghost stories told around the table at Christmas and develops into an ambiguous narrative where the distinction between subjective and objective phenomena becomes blurred.

The genre flourished through the 20th century. The first thirty years were dominated by specialised ghost story writers such as Algernon Blackwood (1869-1951), who excelled in stories dealing with the psychic and the macabre. *The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories* appeared in 1906 and was followed by more than thirty collections. Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) is the most prolific writer of this period. He explored the grey area between reality and imagination, and excelled in the creation of dreadful settings and chilling atmospheres. His most famous collections are *On the Edge* (1930) and *A Beginning and Other Stories* (1955). Like their Victorian predecessors, modern and contemporary writers of ghost stories show ordinary human beings confronted with mysteries beyond any logical explanation.

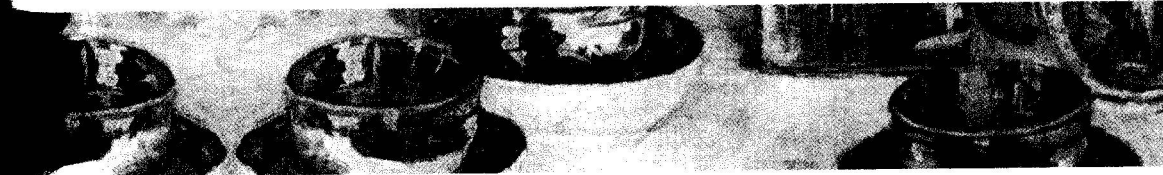
The recent publication of several anthologies of ghost stories suggests that there is still a growing demand and interest in these tales. The works of the best contemporary writers can be found in *The Oxford Book of Ghost Stories*, *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories* (which contains stories by female writers only) and *The Penguin Book of Ghost Stories*.

Study Guide

Answer the questions below.

- 1 What is a ghost story?
- 2 Which are its main features?
- 3 Which are the characteristics of Victorian ghost stories?
- 4 What is the main difference between 'classic' and modern ghost stories?
- 5 How did ghost stories evolve in the 19th and 20th centuries?

The Crime Story



A Glowing Future by Ruth Rendell