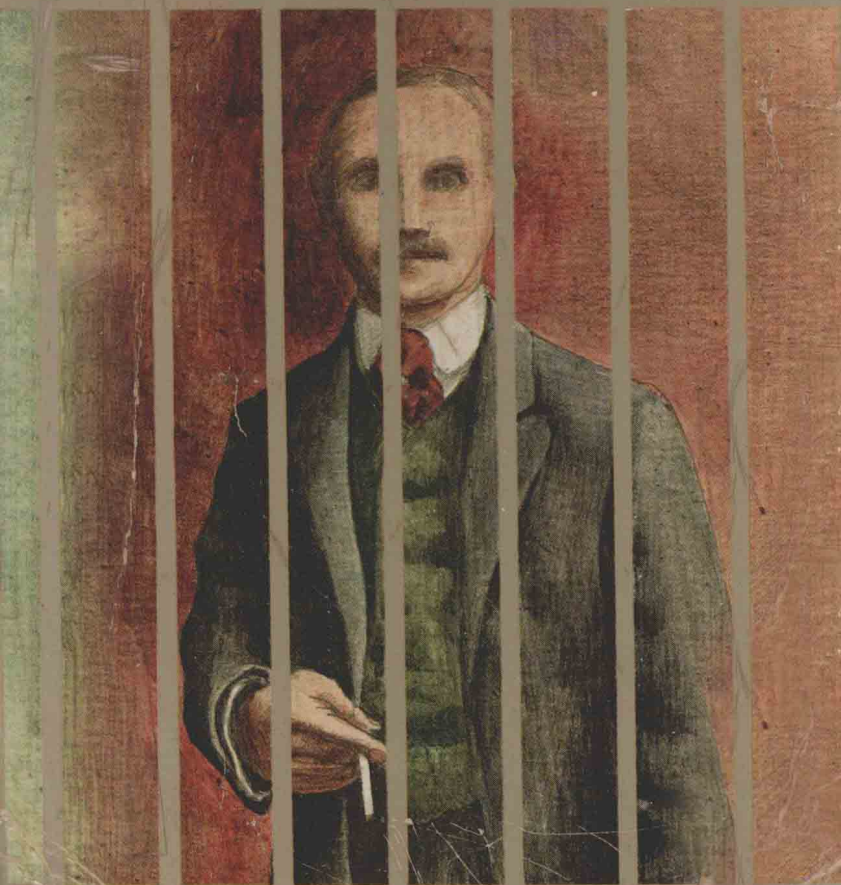


HENRY JAMES

SELECTED FICTION

EDITED BY LEON EDEL

An unrivalled selection from James' finest short fiction



Henry James
SELECTED FICTION

Edited, with an introduction and notes, by
Leon Edel

A Dutton



Paperback

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON

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"HENRY JAMES: SELECTED FICTION"
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Published simultaneously in Canada by Clarke,
Irwin and Company Limited, Toronto and Vancouver.

SBN 0-525-47140-5

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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HENRY JAMES, brother of William James, the philosopher, was born in New York on April 15, 1843. He was educated at Harvard University and in England, France and Switzerland. The first literary work to win him international renown was *Daisy Miller* (1879). As his style matured, James produced such masterworks as *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). He settled at "Lamb House" in Rye, England in 1896 and became naturalized as a British subject in 1915. James was awarded the Order of Merit in 1916 and died in London on February 28, 1916.

INTRODUCTION

THIS GROUP of stories and a short novel by Henry James are selected from three decades of his writing. The first story is of 1879, when he was thirty-six; the last is of 1909, when he was sixty-six. Arranged chronologically—and read in that order—the works here given show the artist's progression from a narrative of crystal simplicity to one of rich and elaborate complexity; his growth from maturity to greater maturity, from the creation of a formal, varnished beauty to a beauty deep and intricate.

The stories exemplify also different types of fiction written by Henry James: there is an "international" tale, a ghostly tale, a story about the "sense of the past," tales dealing with the anxieties of "poor sensitive gentlemen," a story of childhood and a short novel whose setting—like that of the ghostly tale—is the American scene, New York, the city of James's birth. Running through all the tales, no matter how we classify them, are those themes which we have come to regard as essentially "Jamesian." An American girl in Europe is faced with a "social rumpus" that goes on entirely over her head ("Daisy Miller"); a curiosity-mad "publishing scoundrel" seeks to pluck secrets out of a reluctant past ("The Aspern Papers"); a boy suffers from the mendacity of his parents ("The Pupil"); a man is haunted by his sense of a special fate reserved for him ("The Beast in the Jungle"); a man is haunted by the image of what he might have been ("The Jolly Corner").

A Henry James story, however, cannot with justice be reduced to such bare statement. The Old World and the New, for instance, is the larger theme of "Daisy Miller," and Past and Present is the larger theme of "The Aspern

Papers." But Past and Present are also the Old and the New, and so in a sense Henry James is dealing with the same inner substance in both these tales, even though the stories themselves are poles apart. And there is, in each tale, a deep moral value. The man who sets out to obtain the Aspern papers from the immortal Juliana is meddling with the Past; the American social set in Rome, which attempts to rearrange Daisy Miller's life, is meddling—with the Present, with innocence.

Similarly we can find golden threads that link "Daisy" with "The Beast in the Jungle." What both these tales have in common are men who have no understanding of women. We see the little drama of Daisy develop through the eyes of the expatriate American, Frederick Winterbourne; and he, as his frosty name suggests, is a very stuffy gentleman, who never can quite make up his mind whether Daisy is an outrageous flirt or a young innocent. "The Beast in the Jungle," on its side, is set in the very consciousness of a gentleman whose name is John Marcher, only a little less frosty, but just as chilly as Winterbourne. Marcher is totally incapable of entering into the feelings of his devoted friend, May Bartram. Thus in the one story a Daisy is withered by a wintry man and in the other a mature woman, whose name stands for springtime and sunshine, is chilled by a man whose name identifies him with the month of March. Winterbourne and Marcher!—in the whole of James's fiction they stand as arch-examples of men who see life only in the flickering light of their own troubled egos. At the end of each story, the one has failed to understand Daisy and the other May, and both are face to face with their failures, in a cemetery, by the graves of the women they should have loved.

In noting the similarities between these stories we must, however, not lose sight of their profound differences. A difference of time separates them, twenty-five years, a profound change in style, in manner, in method. The earlier James—the one who became famous on both sides of the

Atlantic with this little story of Daisy—was addicted largely to the recording of external action, allowing the characters to develop before us through the things they say and do. The later James, no less addicted to the theory of self-revelation of his characters, shows us the thoughts that govern their actions; a spirit of painful reverie hangs over "The Beast in the Jungle" as James probes Marcher's anxieties and fears. Marcher, in a curious way, is like a character in Dostoievsky, although he functions at the opposite emotional pole from the personages of the Russian master.

II

Henry James's continual growth and development throughout his life makes the study of his work much more difficult than that of other novelists. We have to read more of him before we can generalize and we have to take into consideration individual works in each of the different phases of his creativity. We can, after reading certain representative works of Dickens, speak of "a Dickens novel." By the same token we can speak easily of "a Mark Twain novel" or even "a Robert Louis Stevenson novel"—to choose writers of fiction who were, like James, more productive than most. But can we really speak of "a Henry James novel"? Do we mean for instance *Washington Square* or *What Maisie Knew*? *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Awkward Age*? *Roderick Hudson* or *The Sacred Fount*? A writer addicted to changes of subject and mood and to constant variations in technique could not expect his audience to be consistently loyal. Henry James won and lost more publics than most writers do during a lifetime—except during the phase when he exploited the theme of Americans abroad and Europeans in America. If James's readers had had their wish, he would have gone on creating Daisy Millers and Francie Dossons, Christopher Newmans and Pandora Days all his life. But he grew tired of the "international theme" and he was artist enough to seek out new subjects, new

experiments. The central problem in his creative life—and what artist doesn't face it at some time or other?—was how to reconcile his artistic inclination with what was wanted in the literary marketplace. A professional to his finger-tips, he tried to combine art with potboiling. This required considerable sleight of hand. In his case art nearly always won. The process was frustrating, inevitably, as James's tales of unhappy writers show.

It was frustrating, but it also had its rewards. For, in his constant experimentation, James arrived at those important innovations in form which earned him the title of "Master" among his peers—if he can be said to have had a peer where techniques were concerned. There are few novelists writing today who have not, directly or indirectly, absorbed some of James's methods of storytelling. His most important innovation was to free the novel, and the short story, of the traditionally ubiquitous and often garrulous narrator who used to interpose his own personality and preachments between the story and the reader.

A confirmed realist, Henry James once accused Trollope of a "betrayal of a sacred office" because in his fiction the English novelist on occasions inserted asides reassuring the reader that after all the book was only "making believe." Henry James never could be accused of make-believe. If the novelist was a historian, as James insisted he was, a recorder of social history, manners, the life of his time, it was his duty to render this life with care and fidelity and truth. And if it was thus rendered, it could not be make-believe; it was as real as anything painted by a painter. In his search for viable forms to frame reality and sustain it, Henry James not only cut the strings of the balloon of fiction and sent it soaring away from himself, but he frequently stowed the reader into the basket before doing so. His art was so cunning that many readers, even today, take the journey in the belief they are upon the ground with the author rather than in the air with the story.

III

This scrupulous care in maintaining what James came to call "the point of view" is to be found in nearly all of James's fiction. I have said that *Winterbourne* gives us our view of Daisy, and makes us participate in his bewilderment. So, in "The Aspern Papers" James uses the first-person narrative to tell the story of the great Juliana and her valuable hoard of documents and arrives at a sustained effect since we read in the light of the narrator's own passion for the past as well as the candor with which he reveals his lack of scruple. The use of the point of view is particularly striking in "The Pupil," where we have two mirrors turned upon the situation: James gives us "little Morgan's troubled vision" of his family "as reflected in the vision, also troubled enough, of his devoted friend."

In "The Jolly Corner" and in "The Beast in the Jungle" we are inside the minds of the two troubled gentlemen, Spencer Brydon, whose vigil in the old house of his childhood on lower Fifth Avenue leads him to confront himself *as he might have been*; and Marcher, who gets his revelation of the great emptiness of his life—but too late. In these tales, tales sustained in mood and revelatory of inner tensions, James is foreshadowing the "internal monologue" of our time. By this method, the novelist comes closest to infusing a quality of poetry into his fiction. He is rendering the very "atmosphere of the mind."

The one story in this collection which is written in the conventional manner of nineteenth-century fiction, and where we are constantly aware of the novelist himself as narrator, is *Washington Square*. This short novel first was serialized in *Harper's* during 1880 with illustrations by George Du Maurier. It deals with the New York of Henry James's childhood. It had its origin in a story told James by his actress friend, the celebrated Fanny Kemble, who mentioned that her brother had jilted an English heiress, a

dull girl with \$20,000 a year. To receive a usable idea of this sort meant, with Henry James, a complete imaginative reworking of theme; and the Fanny Kemble anecdote emerged as a slender but vivid story, moved from the Old World into the New, into old New York, and turned into the drama of Catherine Sloper and her martinet father, in their house on the Square, the romantic aunt and the predatory suitor. The story has a certain Jane Austenish quality given the narrow and well-defined limits of scene, action and drama; but it is much closer to Balzac, who was invariably Henry James's model when he tried to "do" minutely such a scene. One thinks of *Eugénie Grandet* as having been in Henry James's mind as a model, but as is the case with all "influence" and all sources, where a great imaginative mind is concerned, these are but points of departure for the operation of an individual creativity. The model and the source become mere ingredients and before the work is completed have been totally absorbed. Technically *Washington Square* is superior to Balzac's love story of a girl for her cousin. The Jamesian drama moves in a straight line, the focus is entirely on Catherine and her dilemma. The Balzac work shifts in focus and lacks the sustained unity of its American successor.

The novel has been criticized for giving but a scant picture of old New York. It has been argued that the story could just as easily have been set in some other country. The fact remains that James has caught the quality of those outwardly "quiet lives" that were lived in the old elegant houses in "uptown" Manhattan of the early century: and they are American lives. We can detect also marked tenderness for the scene as exemplified in one passage James inserted in the novel, a rare passage indeed for any fiction of his. He calls it a "topographical parenthesis" but it comes much closer to being autobiography than topography—or fiction. "I know not," James writes of Washington Square, "whether it is owing to the tenderness of early associations but this portion of New York appears to many persons the

most delectable." There is little doubt whose "early associations" are being invoked, for he goes on to say:

"It was here, as you might have been informed on good authority, that you had come into a world which appeared to offer a variety of sources of interest; it was here that your grandmother lived, in venerable solitude, and dispensed a hospitality which commended itself alike to the infant imagination and the infant palate; it was here that you took your first walks abroad, following the nursery-maid with unequal step and sniffing up the strange odour of the ailanthus-trees which at the time formed the principal umbrage of the Square, and diffused an aroma that you were not yet critical enough to dislike as it deserved; it was here, finally, that your first school, kept by a broad-bosomed, broad-based old lady with a ferule, who was always having tea in a blue cup, with a saucer that didn't match, enlarged the circle both of your observations and your sensations."

We know that Henry James could have written "I" in the above paragraph every time that he wrote "you." For he has set down here a passage of his own life and revealed to us at the same time how retentive the memory of that small boy in the New York of the late 1840's and early 1850's was. He remembered that the saucer didn't match the cup; the ferule probably was easier to remember, being an instrument that sometimes can be menacing; and the odour of the ailanthus, recalled by James later as unpleasant, gives to this passage a quality—in its attention to the senses—almost Proustian. James's excuse for this barely concealed introduction of moments from his own childhood was that "it was here . . . that my heroine spent many years of her life." If Henry James was not born right on the Square, as this passage suggests, he came into this world at 21 Washington Place, a few doors from it, where New York University stands today. His maternal grandmother lived on the Square and in his memoirs we can easily find the teacher with the ferule.

Late in life Henry James came to consider *Washington*

Square a "meagre" work, perhaps because it contains none of his technical devices. He excluded it from the selective edition of his novels and tales. Posterity has disagreed with his judgment and the story has come to be regarded as an American classic, not only because it catches an atmosphere long gone but because, for all its easy-going narrative, it is a tight little drama—as the play *The Heiress* derived from it, proved. Much Jamesian dialogue was bodily incorporated into that drama from the novel and with little change, so artfully did he address it always to the ear.

IV

In these tales, then, within the lively and witty narrative, the even-surfaced tone, the evocation of the spirit of near and faraway places, the creation of a mood, Henry James tells us that in our world there are persons who show no respect for the sanctity of the individual, who freely meddle in the lives of other individuals, who are blind to the tender vessels of feeling that are children and adolescents, and who use them cruelly as pawns in the clumsy game of their own muddled lives; persons who live in a tiptoe world of fear, an agony of anxiety and wasted passion because of nightmares residing in their own minds; and persons who, in the house of life, wander in mortal terror lest they may encounter—their selves! These are not moral preachings. Henry James never sits in judgment; nor does he hold up to the reader any given course of conduct. He sets forth his "observation and testimony" in the form of fundamental propositions drawn from his own life and his insight into the lives of others. He seeks, in his stories, not to set down some moral law, as certain critics insist, but to arrive at concretions of feeling and experience. He did recognize, however, that there was "one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer."

At every point in the work of Henry James we are made aware of the fine intelligence that insists upon our observing the maximum that is to be seen, whether it is people, or their setting, or a problem in conduct, or the atmosphere of a place, or, indeed, a whole fragment of social history. If "Daisy Miller" deals with the relationship between Daisy and Winterbourne, it at the same time tells us a great deal about the life and the standards of expatriate Americans just as *Washington Square* tells us how wealthy New Yorkers of the mid-nineteenth century took the measure of their lives. The quality of mind of the author may be felt in every tale, and it is seen best when it probes the delicate relations between persons, as in the case of Morgan Moreen and his tutor, or Marcher and May Bartram.

This story ("The Beast in the Jungle") has by degrees come to be regarded as among the greatest of Henry James's tales. By use of symbols and names—symbols of unashamed simplicity—he gives to his story a series of muted overtones that act as a kind of musical score, *pianissimo*, for the tale. In using the months to name his characters—March and May—in having the two meet in a country house named Weatherend, suggesting temporal changes and the seasons, James establishes at once the "tone of time" that is so important for this tale. The surface of its story, with its tense, slow rhythm, gives the effect of long, wasted, futile years within which the symbolic beast is crouched for the spring. We follow Marcher's spiritual adventure through this time-jungle, to the moment when the lurking beast finally rises for its final leap—the Beast that symbolizes the fear of himself, the fear to do, the blinding fear that shuts his eyes to his own passion and to the ultimate moral truth that in this world love belongs only to those who can give it to others; and that those who cannot give it are incapable of recognizing it when they receive it, because of the blindness of their own egotism. The story is one of the profoundest of our time as it is, psychologically, one of the truest.

One day during the summer of 1888 Henry James wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson: "I want to leave a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible and going in for number as well as quality, so that the number may constitute a total having a certain value as observation and testimony." The stories in this book, taken as a whole, do have this value. They must be read, however, not so much as prose narratives but as if they were plays, on the stage, in which the reader, as the playgoer, is asked to follow closely what goes on. James always demanded attentive reading; and, read attentively, he rewards the reader with stories that are not merely accounts of things that happened, but which are perfect works of art. He is recognized today as an American writer who brought the novel, on our side of the water, to a precocious maturity and by the same token altered the whole course of the English novel's history as an art form. He passed, in his fiction, from the novel of outward detail to an ultimately disfurnished novel in which only enough scenery is on the stage to serve the needs of his actors. In the same process, he transferred analysis of character and motives into the mind. If England can boast that in the nineteenth century it had a George Eliot who gave the novel a finer purity of design and made of it a more exalted literary form, if France can boast that with Flaubert the novel attained a great architecture and acquired tools it had never before possessed, America can say that after them came Henry James to set in order the whole House of Fiction.

V

Henry James left a large body of comment on the art of fiction. Toward the end of his life he recorded, in a series of remarkable prefaces, the "story" of his stories—not only their genesis, but the ruling theories that had guided him. Although the novelist destroyed most of his personal papers, there has survived a series of his notebooks and these,

edited by the late F. O. Matthiessen and by Kenneth B. Murdock, were published in 1947.

In order to give the readers of this volume a picture of the growth of a Jamesian story, it has been thought apposite to append to each tale that portion of the preface in the New York Edition referring to it, together with—where such notes survived—the notebook entries made when the idea of the story first came to James. In this way it is possible to see the planting of the first seed, its growth, and finally the author's own recollections and comment upon the finished work. Where necessary, I have added such relevant editorial notes as might clarify certain allusions and bridge the gaps between the original note and the final preface.

James's historic essay "The Art of Fiction" written in 1884 and published in a volume of essays, *Partial Portraits*, in 1888, has been included here not only because it is his finest statement, in compact form, about the art he practiced, but because it in turn illuminates the working notes and the prefaces. The essay remains, after almost three quarters of a century, a great manifesto on a great art and the basic truths it contains apply to fiction in our time as in Henry James's.

James was an inveterate reviser of his writings. While not all critics agree on his late revisions of his early works, scholars who have carefully compared the different texts are unanimous in pointing out that most of the changes usually clarify and heighten the artistic surface of James's prose. In the light of this, the texts of the stories here selected are printed from the definitive versions.

LEON EDEL

New York University
March 1953

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