AUTHOR DATA SHEET Macmillan Readers

Henry James

The author and his work



Mary Evans/Edwin Wallace

enry James was born in America, but lived $oldsymbol{\Pi}$ much of his life in Europe. He was always very aware of being an outsider – a person living outside his own country. Many of his major novels and stories contain American characters in a European setting. James was fascinated by the differences in behaviour between people from America (the New World) and Europe (the Old World). So he often wrote about their relationships, and how they interacted with each other.

James was born on April 15th, 1843, in New York City into a wealthy family. Much of his childhood was spent travelling with his family between America and Europe. He studied with tutors in Geneva, London, Paris and Bonn. At the age of nineteen, he attended Harvard Law School for a short time, but he soon left. He much preferred writing fiction and reading to studying law. In 1864, he published his first short story, A Tragedy of Error, and from then on became a professional writer. James wrote a huge number of works, including novels, short stories, plays, travel books, non-fiction essays, biographies and autobiographies. He wrote 22 novels and 112 stories. His two most famous stories are The Portrait of a Lady and the shorter novel, The Turn of the Screw.

James never married. He seemed to be attracted equally to men and women, and had friends of both sexes. In 1899 James met the American sculptor Hendrik Christian Anderson in Rome. At the time of their meeting, James was fifty-six and Anderson was twenty-seven. James and wrote many loving letters to Anderson. James loved writing letters, and wrote letters of great affection to both his male and female friends. Many of his close friendships lasted for many years. He was a sociable person who enjoyed the company of other people. Although he was not rich himself, he was often invited to stay at the homes of the rich and famous.

James moved permanently to England in 1876. He lived in London for a number of years, then moved to the small town of Rye, on the east Sussex coast. He lived in a beautiful historic house called Lamb House, situated on the top of a hill, with a lovely garden. James was very happy living in Lamb House. However, he continued to go back to America from time to time. When the First World War broke out in 1914, James was very shocked. At that time, America did not want to support Britain in the war. But James wanted to show his loyalty to Britain, so in 1915 he became a British subject. However, shortly after this he died, on December 2nd, 1915.

James's first serious novel, Roderick Hudson, was published in 1875. As in Daisy Miller, most of the characters in the story are Americans in Europe. James's next book, *The American*, (1877) follows a similar theme. It is about the adventures of an American businessman in Europe. However, James did not set all his novels in Europe. In 1880, his novel Washington Square was published, which is set in New York and is about the relationship between a father and daughter. The daughter has found the man of her dreams, but her father is against the marriage. This was followed by The Portrait of a Lady, in 1881. James set this novel mostly in the Italian city of Venice. It is about a young American woman who suddenly becomes very rich, and travels to Europe to learn more about herself. In the story, James again focuses on the differences between people in the New World and the Old.

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In the 1880s, James started writing stories with political themes, like The Bostonians (1886) and The Princess Casamassima (1886). At the same time, he started writing plays. He very much wanted to be a playwright, but he was never successful. He wrote about twelve plays, but most of them were never produced. After 1895, when one of his plays failed in its opening night, James returned to writing fiction. He wrote three major novels, which were published just after the beginning of the twentieth century. The first was The Wings of the Dove (1902). It is about a rich voung American girl who has a serious illness, and a young British woman who is hoping to make money so that she and her journalist boyfriend can become rich. The second major novel was *The* Ambassadors (1903), which again follows the theme of an American in Europe. The third major novel was The Golden Bowl (1904), which is about marriage, and the relationships of a father and his daughter.

James wrote a large number of shorter stories, which some people find easier to read than his long novels. The most famous is The Turn of the Screw (1898). This is a ghost story about a governess in charge

of two young children, who keeps seeing the ghost of the previous governess in the house where she works. James also wrote works of non-fiction like the essay The Art of Fiction (1884). He was one of the great letter-writers of his age, and wrote over ten thousand personal letters. Some of the people he wrote to were other famous writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson (author of *Treasure Island* and Kidnapped) and Joseph Conrad (author of Heart of Darkness).

James's work has not always been popular with literary critics. After his death, some critics said that James's style of writing was very difficult. They thought that his sentences were too long and his language was too formal. Other critics, like the writer E. M. Forster, thought that James did not deal openly enough with writing about sex. But James is a great writer because he analyses situations very well. He creates very strong plots and can make us believe in his characters. Many films have been made of James's novels because of his ability to create excellent stories.

A selection of works by Henry James

Novels

1907

1909

The American Scene

Italian Hours

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1875	$Roderick\ Hudson$	1878	French Poets and Novelists	
1877	The American	1879	Haw thorne	
1878	Daisy Miller	1888	Partial Portraits	
1878	The Europeans	1893	Essays in London and Elsewhere	
1880	Washington Square			
1881	The Portrait of a Lady	Autob	biography	
1886	The Bostonians	1913	A Small Boy and Others	
1886	The Princess Casamassima	1914	Notes of a Son and Brother	
1902	The Wings of the Dove	1917	The Middle Years (unfinished)	
1903	The Ambassadors			
1904	The Golden Bowl		s and TV films	
1917	The Ivory Tower (unfinished)	1996	The Portrait of a Lady	
1917	The Sense of the Past (unfinished)		Directed by Jane Campion	
	· · · · · ·		Starring Nicole Kidman, John Malkovich and	
Novellas (short novels)			Viggo Mortensen	
1888	The Aspern Papers	1997	The Wings of the Dove	
1888	$A\ London\ Life$		Directed by Iain Softley	
1898	The Turn of the Screw		Starring Helena Bonham-Carter, Linus	
1900	Mrs Medwin		Roache and Alison Elliott	
1903	The Beast in the Jungle	1997	Washington Square	
1908	The Jolly Corner		Directed by Agnieszka Holland	
			Starring Jennifer Jason Leigh, Albert Finney,	
Travel writings			Maggie Smith and Ben Chaplin	
1884	A Little Tour in France	1999	(TV) The Turn of the Screw	
1905	English Hours		Directed by Ben Bolt	

Literary criticism

Firth

(For a list of Henry James's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)

Starring Jodhi May, Pam Ferris and Colin