The Master Study Guide

The Master by Colm Tóibín

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

American novelist Henry James, now fully entrenched in the society of England, seeks to recover from a series of professional disappointments and personal tragedies. When his play, *Guy Domville,* ends in humiliation, Henry flees to Ireland, where Lord and Lady Wolseley entertain him. Unfortunately, due to his family's low origins, these nobles cannot fully accept him either, and Henry suffers further embarrassment at their table.

Returning to England, Henry throws himself into his writing with full vigor. The idea of a ghost story begins to intrigue him, and he develops this concept, using himself and his sister Alice as inspiration. This proves to be a habit of Henry's, appropriating the lives of family and friends for his short stories and novels. Failing his family and friends in their time of need is another habit, as the novel slowly reveals Henry's guilt over the deaths of his cousin, Minny Temple, his sister, Alice, and close friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson.

With Alice, Henry could not protect her from the world and blames himself for not preventing her bitterness. This leads him to be very attentive to and protective of little girls later in life. Sadly, though, despite this feeling, Henry did not provide his own sister with the utmost care. When Alice falls ill, Henry attends to her and takes her around Europe, but only so much as his own convenience will allow. Similarly, he does not visit Minny Temple when she lay dying, despite the fact he was residing near her quarters in Italy during the last days of her life. Constance's case, in particular, is a source of grief, since Henry could have prevented her death simply by visiting her, but he refused to make the time. They had developed an intense friendship, and Constance came to rely on Henry for her happiness. Henry made a comment about visiting her in Venice during the winter, and when he later made it clear that he had no real intention to do so, Constance's seasonal depression sent her over the edge. Constance committed suicide by jumping off her apartment building.

While Henry struggles with the demands of social decorum, his own homosexuality, and a contentious relationship with his famous brother William, the deaths of the three witty women overshadows his every action. Henry gains a degree of confidence and security when he moves from his rented London studio to a more peaceful and permanent residence at Rye and employs a Scottish typist to facilitate his writing once his hand begins to deteriorate.

Finally, coming to some degree of resolution with Constance's suicide, Henry meets the young sculptor Hendrik Andersen in Rome, and they begin a flirtation. While Henry does not manage to advance the relationship before Andersen travels to America, he does make some progress and gains confidence in his abilities as a suitor. Later, William visits Henry at Rye, and they resolve much of their bickering. Henry attends to his ailing brother, taking him to the best heart surgeon in London. William and his wife Alice also tell Henry that their psychic has given them a message: Henry's mother is watching over him, and he is not alone. Henry is not normally given to accepting the word of mediums, but this woman had specifically mentioned two significant objects in his home, a

painting from Constance Fenimore Woolson's apartment and a bust sculpted by Hendrik Andersen. Once William retires for the night, Alice gives Henry another message from the psychic: he will be the last of the James brothers, and Alice will be by his side when he dies.

Chapter 1: January 1895

Chapter 1: January 1895 Summary

Henry wakes from a haunting dream. In it, he walks the streets of an abstractly hostile Italian city, accompanied by a voice urging him forward, a voice he can't quite place. Henry comes to a crowded plaza, and two people turn to him. These people turn out to be his deceased mother and his Aunt Kate. They appear to want something, but at this point of the dream, Henry awakens with a start. To avoid sleep and further dreams, Henry begins to work on his writing.

Henry's current commitment is the impending premiere of his new play, *Guy Domville*. Henry sits through every rehearsal, alternating between boredom at the repetition and fascination with the production. Not a typically social character, the constant activity of the theatre has left Henry exhausted. Now, his one moment of solitude is interrupted by a visitor to his home. Henry's friend, an expatriate Russian princess, is saying goodbye to her companions in Europe before returning to her country against her wishes. The princess's husband has ordered her to take up residence in the impoverished countryside. The princess does not offer Henry an explanation, however, she does insinuate knowledge of Henry's secret, by dropping the name of his lost love, another man.

After his unexpected guest has departed, Henry returns to his writing. Unsettled by the mention of Paul, whose name none had dared mention in his presence in more than ten years, Henry begins to compose an account of an encounter more than two decades ago. Henry resolves that this story will never be published, not with his fantasy happy ending, nor with the cold reality that Henry had failed to act, and thusly, lost Paul forever.

At the theatre, Henry watches the final dress rehearsal before the night's opening performance and imagines friends and spectators enjoying the show. Just as the morning had found him lamenting that he could not seclude himself to write all day, now Henry is convinced he was born to write for the theatre. It occurs to him that he will have to be somewhere else on opening night, since he will be too agitated if he sits through the performance. Henry decides to go to the new Oscar Wilde play across town.

Arriving at his rival's venue, Henry immediately regrets this course of action. Henry endures what he considers to be a completely tasteless production, surrounded by an audience who are thrilled by every word. Meanwhile, across town, Henry's own play is a disaster. While his friends clap polite approval, the mass of the audience laughs in open mockery of the play. Henry arrives to take his bow, completely unprepared for the hooting and hollering from the galleries. Humiliated, Henry retreats from all the friends he has invited to witness his failure. After a moment's pause, Henry collects himself and returns to the fray.

Chapter 1: January 1895 Analysis

Though it is not explicitly stated in the first chapter, the Henry of this book is novelist Henry James, an American who spent much of his time in England and Europe. Colm Tuibnn lists an impressive bibliography of research in the acknowledgements, and also indicates that he sometimes employs phrases and thoughts mentioned in Henry James's letters. Nevertheless, *The Master* is itself a work of fiction, not a biography, and, as such, the topics and themes of this novel can be explored as presented, rather than in the more exhaustive context of James's real life.

For the purposes of this exploration, Mr. James will be treated as a character and not a historical person, such that foreshadowing and other story elements will relate to the progression of the novel. This will allow equal access for readers who are not familiar with James's life and works, and will also prevent confusion between actual events and character development that Mr. Tuibnn may have invented for the purposes of narrative.

From the beginning, Henry is presented as a man haunted by forces he can't quite name. Henry dreams of death, then immediately after, dreams of family members making demands of him that he cannot meet. These speak to some of the major themes of this book, including one's obligations to family and one's obligations to society, which falls under the broader theme of decorum. As the reader will later see, Henry has failed in both of these obligations more than once. Thus, he is a man boxed in by regret and loss, but still it is difficult for him to change his behavior. The reader gets an early taste of this when Henry is compelled to accept a visit from the Russian princess, who, from all indications, is a close member of his circle of friends.

Another theme related to the obligations of society is the idea of proper decorum. Victorian England had a particular sense of propriety, and correct behavior was a virtue among those in the higher social classes. That is not to say, however, that decorum was consistently observed by all, and indeed much criticism and conspiracy was accomplished by way of insinuating that the speaker would very much like to say something that manners forbid. Even the book's narrator observes a level of decorum, and, as such, Henry's homosexuality is only observed obliquely. The princess hints around the nature of Henry's relationship with Paul, leaving Henry and the reader to know what she knows, while sparing both the princess and the narrator the embarrassment of stating such outright.

What is interesting, though, is that Henry appears to approach his own sexuality through the lens of decorum. Even though Paul had made his intentions clear, Henry fails to act on his own desires, missing his chance to establish the relationship. Later in the book, there will be several characters who appear to share Henry's orientation, but because neither they nor the American author can address the subject, they cannot pursue any sort of connection.

Oscar Wilde, by contrast, is presented as a man without concern for decorum - and his stage audiences loved him for it. In coming chapters, this will get him in to trouble, but here, in January 1895, Wilde's successful *An Ideal Husband* proves to Henry that most

people prefer this sort of embarrassing boorishness to his flavor of thoughtful melodrama comprised in *Guy Domville*. Whether a reader agrees with Henry's poor assessment of Wilde's play is not important, but one should observe that Wilde is presented as a man very similar to Henry but without a care for polite society.

Chapter 2: February 1895

Chapter 2: February 1895 Summary

Henry begins to consider the nature of success and failure, and decides that it is more important to serve his art than the public taste. Nevertheless, after the disaster of *Guy Domville,* he requires a cheering of spirits, and decides to visit acquaintances in Ireland whom Henry believes will offer relief from having to discuss his work.

Henry agrees to spend one week with Lord Houghton and another with Lord Wolseley, two high-ranking British officials in the territory. Ireland, of course, was in a state of terrible unrest, as the British continually bungled attempts to establish rule over the island, and the Irish themselves began to fight back. Thus, both lords hoped to benefit from the presence of the famous American author in their homes, increasing their prominence and authority by association.

At Lord Houghton's castle, Henry is quickly cornered in conversation by a shrill woman who expounds on the Wolseleys' rudeness at length. Finally, she offends Henry by mentioning that he does not come from a noble family, which allows him to exit the conversation.

On traveling from Dublin to Kilmainham to visit his second hosts, Henry notes the destruction and squalor of occupied Ireland. Lord Wolseley oversees the Royal Hospital, an impressive building, primarily occupied by former British soldiers. At the hospital, Henry is attended by a man named Hammond, an army corporal who now acts as a servant to the Wolseleys' guests. The Wolseleys heap scorn on the Houghtons at lunch, telling Henry and the other guests that the Irish refuse to submit to his authority. Of course, Lady Wolseley does not go so far as to take up the Irish side, and casts them as a low and worthless population. Later, Lady Wolseley accompanies Henry back to his quarters, and suggests that she assigned Hammond to attend on him, because they are both homosexuals and a match could be made between them. Henry does not reply to her insinuation.

The next day, Lady Wolseley announces a costume ball. One of the other guests, a member of parliament named Mr. Webster, asks Henry to help his wife design a Daisy Miller costume. The hostess suggests that this would be against the rules of the evening, and dismisses the man. Later, Henry becomes more acquainted with Hammond, and both men grow comfortable with each other's presence. Henry's interludes with Hammond become a welcome rest from the combatively witty talks with Webster and Lady Wolseley. Webster is particularly obnoxious, being familiar with Henry's works and eager to take him to task for any slight against England. Soon, though, Henry begins to understand that Lady Wolseley is complicit in Webster's affronts, since they appear to share some secret bond. Henry observes the pair playfully trying on wigs in preparation for the ball.

What upsets Henry most, though, is that the young daughter of one of the guests is being completely ignored. Little Mona, aged 10 or 11, sits silently, watching Webster and Lady Wolseley. Neither adult makes an effort to engage her in their play or dismiss her to another room in the house. Mona herself is being the perfect little angel, which gives Henry a vague sense of uneasiness, since she appears to be working very hard at not doing anything.

At dinner, Webster insults Henry by alluding to the low heritage of the James family, asking Henry if he will visit the provincial town of Bailieborough in County Cavan. Worse, Henry realizes that Lady Wolseley finds the allusion terribly funny, and that she has discussed Henry's lineage with Webster. Though Lord Wolseley gives Webster a stern rebuke, Henry hopes to avoid further contact with either of the conspirators for the remainder of the night.

Henry returns to his room, where Hammond tries to help Henry relax. When this proves unsuccessful, Hammond withdraws, and Henry retires to bed. The next morning, Henry is again disturbed by the dangerous neglect paid to little Mona. The child scampers, underdressed, on the lawn, without adult supervision, though eventually, Henry surmises that someone is watching her from a high window. Henry feels a dire need to come to her rescue. Instead, he continues on through the house. Lady Wolseley urges him to dress for the costume party, and again prods Henry about Hammond. Webster boasts to Henry of his friendship with Oscar Wilde, being sure to mention Henry's failed play and Wilde's two successes in the same year. Webster also manages to imply that the two authors share other proclivities.

The party begins with the gentlemen dressed up and Henry taking great pains to avoid Webster. In the course of scanning the room, Henry lets his eyes rest far too long on Hammond, who does not turn away. When the women enter, Lady Wolseley is pleased to confirm that she has the most elaborate outfit, but attention quickly turns to Mona, who is dressed as Velbsquez's infanta. Henry is unnerved by her feigned womanhood, though none of the other guests seem to take notice.

Chapter 2: February 1895 Analysis

In this chapter, Henry's status as a foreigner comes in to focus. Though in most respects he behaves as a European, this chapter reminds him, time and again, that he can never be fully accepted. In England, family and title are key indicators of value, and though the James family is wealthy, it has no noble history. Henry's foreignness crystallizes in his reaction to Mona, a young girl who is primarily left her own devices and treated as an adult at the costume party. Henry can only think of her frailty, while the others in company do not pay her much mind at all, until she is made up like a lady for the ball, and they find the novelty adorable. This is the first and only time in the novel where Henry explicitly wishes for American company.

Henry and Hammond begin their flirtation, though Henry must recognize that the rules of decorum would never allow a servant to pursue his charge, and thus, Henry would

have to be the active suitor. Lady Wolseley plays Paul's role in telling Henry that such a courtship would be quite welcome, but again, Henry fails to act. As to the lady herself, there is clearly something going on between her and Webster, though the nature of their conspiracy is left to speculation. Are they lovers? Possibly, though it seems more consistent with the themes and structure of the novel that Mr. Webster is also a homosexual and that Lady Wolseley is in on the secret. This is far from a sure thing, but there is some supporting evidence. First, Webster's over-the-top reaction to Henry could be interpreted as jealousy of a rival. In addition, Webster seems to suggest that Henry's bachelorhood affords him benefits that Webster cannot obtain in marriage.

Webster's wife, though apparently present in these chapters, never enters the company's conversations. Another little hint is in Webster's friendship with Oscar Wilde and his sympathy with Wilde's marital troubles. This evidence might not convince every reader, and, indeed, it should not be taken as a definitive conclusion, but since decorum will not allow the author to confirm or openly speculate, the mere suggestion must be sufficient to generate rumor.

Chapter 3: March 1895

Chapter 3: March 1895 Summary

Henry decides to decline all social invitations and throw himself into his writing. In the solitude of his own home, he feels content, and finds the silence gives him a greater control over his thoughts. He can now choose what memories and ideas he will focus on, and which to ignore or push away.

Looking for story inspiration, Henry recalls a ghost story he had once heard, one that the teller had badly botched and that Henry felt he could make much better. As he develops the tale, he thinks of his sister Alice, who died three years prior. This leads Henry to consider the structure of his own family, the travels of his parents, and how each of his brothers and his sister were allowed to develop. William was nurtured and eventually became prominent in business and writing. Wilky and Bob were well tended, but Henry and Alice were left to themselves, with Alice growing ill at a young age and spending much of her life bedridden.

In their childhood, Alice had always demanded everyone's attention. There had been a family joke that she would marry William, her oldest brother, but the joke's repetition steeled Alice's need for her brother's approval, while also shrugging off the prospect of actual suitors. Later, Alice would be exhausted by social situations and incapable of relating to others. With each attempt at sophistication, Alice would embarrass herself further, not because she was unintelligent but rather because her high intelligence was without a proper social context. When Alice became ill, she reveled in her infirmity and the control it allowed her over the family.

Henry begins to cast the ghost story with Alice and Aunt Kate, realizing that the boy of the story would have to be an analogue for Henry himself. Henry thinks of this very group traveling in Geneva in the early days of Alice's illness and of the girl remarking on the benefits of various locales to different organs in the body. The girl spoke much of poetry and wanted to continue traveling until her death. Alice would recover somewhat until brother William got married, which led Alice into a nervous breakdown. The death of her father further damaged her prospects of recovery, and Alice eventually found herself permanently bedridden.

Alice was cared for by Katherine Loring, a close friend of Alice's but one unknown to the family. Alice and Miss Loring came to England to be with Henry. Henry observes that the women appear dependent on one another, and he cannot decide whether or not this is harmful to his sister. Alice's sense of humor grows more and more focused on death, though she does not seem unhappy.

Henry wrote two novels during Alice's stay in England, both of them influenced by her situation and sensibilities. Alice reads the books and enjoys them without comment. When Alice's condition deteriorates, Henry is relieved to find that Alice's fixation on

death is not a defense mechanism, that she really is ready for the end. Finally, Alice passes away.

Chapter 3: March 1895 Analysis

The fact that Alice "was the only little girl he had ever known" (49) should shed some light on Henry's concern for Mona in chapter 2. Mona would immediately recall in Henry memories of his dead sister and prompt him to make comparisons between them. Like Alice, Mona does not receive proper parental care, and the attention that is showered on her by adults is completely inappropriate. It is natural, then, that Henry should seek to protect Mona from Alice's fate, especially considering, as we will see in later chapters, that Henry failed to perform everything Alice asked of him in the months before her death.

Structurally, this chapter begins with Henry thinking about a story but quickly shifts into a series of flashbacks. The original course of thought returns occasionally, as Henry tries to plug his family into various roles in the ghost tale, but he can never hold the thought and instead returns to reminiscences. The flashbacks are thematically linked by the illustration of Alice's vulnerability and, ironically, her indomitable wit. Henry is most impressed with her intellectual strength and her physical weakness and the ways these aspects of her being intersect. Though Alice is incredibly intelligent, Henry also recognizes that she has some psychological problems, most notably a fear of abandonment. This fear manifests itself in her breakdown after William's marriage and her statement that she hates to feel vulnerable, and can be seen as a constant concern in her preoccupation with death.

Chapter 4: April 1895

Chapter 4: April 1895 Summary

Henry writes in his notebook of an orphaned brother and sister who share each other's feelings and perceptions, a connection that will lead to tragedy. The idea intrigues him, but he does not know a plot to go along with these characters. Soon, the idea combines with the ghost story. The concept inspires him to return to writing with full vigor, lifting him out of his previous failure.

Despite his new dedication, Henry still entertains a few visitors, most frequently, Jonathan Sturges and Edmund Gosse. Both men carry news of Oscar Wilde with each visit, and Henry could not let whichever one arrived later in the week discover that he had already learned the gossip from the other. The news is more scandalous each successive week. With the resounding success of his plays, Wilde is openly conducting a relationship with the Marquess of Queensbury's son, and there are rumors he purchases the services of young boys for prostitution. When Wilde announces he is suing Queensbury for slander after the marquess called him a sodomite, the situation quickly turns against the playwright, as witnesses come forth in favor of Queensbury. These witnesses, of course, will not only vindicate the marquess but also place Wilde in significant legal trouble.

Most Londoners familiar with the trial's developments believe Wilde will flee to France with his lover, but each day he appears in court. Gosse and Sturges report that all of Wilde's money is spent, making travel difficult, and that Wilde believes himself invincible after the success of his plays, making flight unthinkable. As the trial progresses, the witnesses reveal more patrons of prostitution. Gosse suggests that anyone who might be named by Queensbury's witnesses should leave London now, and observes Henry for his reaction. Henry curtly ends the conversation. Henry, for his part, is concerned for the fate of Wilde's children. Sturges informs him that Wilde's wife has taken them to Switzerland, where they will live on her money, which she kept separate from her husband's fortunes.

When Wilde is imprisoned, Gosse's friendship with Henry resumes, and they discuss the developments more calmly. They also speak of John Addington Symonds, a deceased friend of theirs who had been intrigued by "a problem in Greek ethics, the love between two men" (74). Symonds wrote books on the subject and did not try to hide his own sexuality. Symonds's wife was not amused by his writing or his sexual adventures, but Henry remembered her as not terribly interesting and more or less resigned to her fate.

Now, chatting with Gosse, Henry consider the Symonds family dynamic and begins to imagine a story of two parents, with conflicting ideas, who try to protect their child from the other's influence. The story is eventually published in *English Illustrated Magazine*,

and Gosse rebukes the writer, saying that many will recognize the true subject of the piece, or else imagine that Henry has written about Robert Louis Stevenson.

When Henry hears from Sturges that Wilde's wife visited him in prison to tell her husband of his mother's death, Henry again thinks of the children and how they might take in such a situation.

Chapter 4: April 1895 Analysis

The Wilde trial should demonstrate that public fascination with a scandal is not a new development. The author mentions that Gosse gets swept up in the outrage against immorality, and even Henry, who would not normally take an interest in Wilde's life, is intrigued by the series of developments. When Gosse and Sturges seek to gain knowledge to whether Henry might be implicated in the scandal, one must imagine that they do so as much to further their own cache of gossip as to protect their friend.

There are several issues here related to the theme of decorum, which Henry's informants highlight largely by ignoring the social conventions. First, there is mention that the men do their best to invoke euphemisms for Wilde's outrageous behavior and the young prostitutes he does business with. In the end, though, there is little they can do to avoid speaking candidly. Most shocking, though, is Gosse's questioning Henry as to whether he might be "compromised" (72). To address this subject, Gosse must not only raise the issue of Henry's sexuality but also suggest that Henry has paid for the services of young boys. Henry replies sharply that he has nothing to fear and that Gosse should not even have asked.

In Wilde's crisis, Henry again focuses on the fate of the children, picturing their upbringing and development with an infamous father. As in the case of Mona, he fears for their safety and ponders the ability of their parents to raise them properly. The situation, of course, is completely outside of his control, and it will be seen in later chapters that Henry is very keen on assisting others only so long as it does not interfere with his own life. That's not to say Henry doesn't regret this aspect of his personality, but, by this point in the narrative, the tendency has already played out with his sister Alice and Constance Fenimore Woolson and will soon emerge in his relationship with his servants.

Chapter 5: May 1896

Chapter 5: May 1896 Summary

Henry's hand begins to ail him. As more friends and distant relatives visit him from the States, he considers his father's constant wandering. Henry remembers a time in Boulogne, walking with his father, when the older man stopped to observe a female swimmer under the pretense of gazing into the horizon. Henry was shocked that his father continued staring, without regard for his presence.

In his consideration of England's locales, Henry finds a deep appreciation for Rye. Henry also thinks of his friend, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and how that man would speak of different subjects whether he might be in the company of Henry or brother William. While Holmes told William about his adventures in the Civil War, he and Henry found more common ground in discussing Minny Temple, a cousin of the James brothers.

Ms. Temple, orphaned at an early age, was a fiery spirit who was not shy about arguing with adults, particularly about the place of women in society. One summer, Henry and Holmes travel to meet the Temple sisters in North Conway, New Hampshire, and Minny manages to get them the last hotel room in the town, which the men must share. Although Minny is less physically attractive than her sisters, Henry finds her to be the most intellectually compelling, and he sincerely wants Holmes to view her the same way.

Henry and Holmes enjoy the company of the women, but when they return to their room, they discover that sleeping arrangements must be addressed. Without speaking, Holmes undresses and washes himself, seemingly without concern, and Henry watches Holmes and considers the implications. As a former soldier, nudity might not seem an issue to Holmes, but this was not a barracks. When Holmes does not dress before crawling into bed, Henry is completely at a loss. Since a quick decision is necessary, he gets into bed as well, without questioning the situation. As they lie in bed, Henry is very conscious of their bodies touching and wonders whether Holmes is aware of it as well. There is no room for him to move away, so Henry sits awake and unmoving. Eventually, he decides that Holmes is awake, a feeling that is confirmed when Holmes turns to hold their bodies close.

The next day, another guest arrives, a military man and intellectual named John Gray. Gray and Holmes vie for Minny Temple's affections, and Henry is pleased to watch what transpires. Since Holmes and Gray were soldiers, there is considerable talk of the Civil War. Gus Barker, a cousin to the Temple sisters, and Henry by extension, was killed in the war when he returned to battle after suffering injuries. Before he was a soldier, though, Gus Barker was a model for art students, and this is what Henry recalls. William James was a student in the class, and Henry watched attentively as his brother

sketched Gus Barker's naked figure. Henry thought this was an inappropriate response to the mention of a dead war hero, but could not shake the image from his head.

The episode of Holmes, Gray, and himself seeking to win Minny Temple's affections led Henry to compose a new story. Later, the characters, events, and secrets of that summer would inspire still more tales. As Minny becomes ill, Henry gains further insight into her character as Minny's duel correspondence with Holmes and Gray becomes clear.

In Henry's first voyage to Europe, he lives Minny's dream of meeting with George Eliot and writes to his cousin about the experience. After her death, Henry fixates on her more, and develops a novel around the possible outcomes of her life with the three suitors. When Holmes visits Henry in 1896, they compare notes on that summer, and Holmes reveals that, at the time, he was, ,actively trying to regain the ability to enjoy life, a pursuit he has pledged to continue throughout his life. Finally, Holmes remarks that while he thought *Portrait of a Lady* was a fitting tribute to Minny, he did not like the ending. Holmes also rebukes Henry for not coming to Minny's side in Italy when she asked for him. After Holmes leaves, the accusation rankles with Henry and interferes with his work.

Henry wonders what Minny might have written to Gray in her last days, and resolves to travel to London to reclaim his own letters from her from his vacant apartment. After rereading them, his fears are confirmed. Minny does not outright ask for his help, but it is clear she desired it. Henry also realizes that, at that time, he would have resented her presence in his life. Henry then realizes that the story he has been writing is a nasty and cynical piece of work but believes the tale is quite compelling and so he continues work on it.

Chapter 5: May 1896 Analysis

The similarities between Henry's relationships with his sister and his cousin are so uncanny that, if the novel were not based on historical persons, one would have to conclude that the author has repeated himself. When one is forced to examine Alice James and Minny Temple as separate cases, though, Henry's pattern of failing those who depend on him becomes clear. Minny's death, which occurs before Alice's, might have taught Henry to appreciate his time with loved ones who showed evidence of illness. Indeed, he attends to Alice in her final days, rectifying his neglect toward Minny when she requested that he visit her in Italy.

This chapter most directly addresses the theme of art imitating life, and Henry indicates that the summer has provided him with all the raw material he will ever require for his fiction. Of course, much of what makes his stay at the Temples' so ripe is the hidden life, the aspects that he inferred from what his friends and cousins said and did not say. "Poor Richard," "Daisy Miller," and *Portrait of a Lady* are all named as being directly inspired by Minny Temple and her suitors Holmes, Gray, and Henry James.

Per the rules of decorum, carefully observed by the narrator, it is unclear exactly what transpired between Henry and Holmes in the hotel room. If taken at face value, it appears that Holmes insinuates himself to Henry by lying naked beside him, and Henry does not protest. However, the ending is ambiguous, and can be taken to mean that Henry and Holmes have sex. The tone of the following paragraph points to the more nuanced relationship suggested by the first, more literal interpretation, but whatever the case, neither man speaks of it again. Holmes hints more than once about that night in the days and years that follow, but he remains a gentleman and will not break the rules of decorous conversation.

Chapter 6: February 1897

Chapter 6: February 1897 Summary

Henry's hand deteriorates. At the suggestion of his brother William, Henry hires a stenographer to write his correspondence and, eventually, his fiction. The man he employs is a Scot named William MacAlpine, whose virtues include efficiency and not making comment about the material he is asked to type. Although Henry initially resists the transition, he becomes accustomed to the new method of work and welcomes the Scot as a regular sight in his home. Since transporting both the typewriter and the typist would be difficult, though, Henry resigned himself to working primarily at his residence rather than traveling around Europe to write. However, Henry would like to move away from London, and Rye is a quick favorite. Henry converses with the local citizens to let them know he'd like to find a home, and indicates where they can reach him if one becomes available. Through an unexpected source, Henry learns that Lamb House in Rye has opened. The prospect of owning a home, especially a prestigious dwelling like Lamb House, fills Henry with excitement. Henry is afraid someone will beat him to the deal, but his fears are alleviated when the owner happily grants Henry a twenty-one-year lease.

Preparing for his move, Henry experiences some misgivings, primarily in the thought that this is likely the house in which he will die. In more cheery enterprises, he must prepare his affairs for the transition, including packing up his belongings and arranging new furniture for Lamb House. Henry also writes letters to his friends, informing them of his new address. Lady Wolseley arrives in town to help Henry shop and decorates his home to her tastes. As she guides him through London's secret treasures, Henry makes a note of his favorite shops and returns later to make purchases of which Lady Wolseley might not approve.

On one such solitary outing, he comes across Lady Wolseley at one of the shops, conducting some sort of hidden business with the dealer. When another customer arrives and announces both their arrivals, the situation turns awkward as Lady Wolseley and the dealer attempt to conceal their acquaintance. Henry is surprised when his friend does not recover the situation, so instead, he takes pains to restore the conversation to shopping, and he eventually settles on buying a tapestry that Lady Wolseley does not like at all.

As Henry prepares to leave London, Gosse visits again and again. At one point, Gosse asks Henry to talk about his father's greatest story, a tale Henry James Senior, repeated with great drama that Gosse had only now learned Henry had witnessed first-hand. Since Henry was very young when it had happened, he relies on his aunt's account. One night while reading, Henry's father had been stricken by a fear that completely debilitated him. As James deteriorated, he was not shy about describing his ordeal to others, and eventually, he a philosopher was recommended to him who believed this type of suffering meant one was close to learning God's plan.

Unsatisfied with his earlier ghost stories and needed a strong tale for inclusion in *Collier's*, Henry revisits the ghost story about two children abandoned to the care of a nanny. As he dictates the story to the Scot, Henry is surprised to find the governess of the tale taking on a life of her own, developing in ways Henry had not originally intended. With this strong matron, the children become a secondary consideration, though Henry realizes that he has very clear ideas of them, as well. Near the story's completion, Henry nearly uses his sister Alice's name in place of Flora, the little girl of the serial. Henry stops himself, but he is overwhelmed with feeling and must stop writing for the day.

After the typist has gone, Henry recalls the episode of Alice's life that influenced the development of the characters in his story. Alice had once avenged herself against her over-strict Aunt Kate by mimicking her in such a way that the aunt knew she was being mocked but could not point to any improper behavior. This behavior informs Henry's sweetly deviant characters, but the real-life episode lays him low with grief.

Chapter 6: February 1897 Analysis

Henry takes up a permanent home, establishing himself once and for all in England, and in particular, in Rye. Lamb House serves to moor Henry and provide him with something he can call his own. It is also interesting that he now looks forward to social engagements, at least in theory. Of course, the reality also hits him that, since this is where Henry will be spending the rest of his life, Lamb House is where he will most likely die. Although in some regards, Henry appears rather fixated on death, this is the first time the reader sees him consider his own mortality.

The episode of Lady Wolseley in the shop suggests outright that she had come to that location to meet the second, noisier customer, and that Henry's arrival prevented her from carrying out her intentions. This would lend credence to the idea that she was having an affair with Mr. Webster back in chapter 2. Another reading, of course, might raise the possibility that Lady Wolseley is not looking to meet a man herself, but rather that she wants to introduce the customer and the shop keeper, similar to her matchmaking attempt with Henry and Hammond. A thorough defense of Lady Wolseley as a faithful wife is not essential to the understanding of the novel, but her curious friendships are worth speculating upon. In this case, the most straightforward interpretation is probably accurate, and this would have Lady Wolseley conducting a secret affair - after all, if she had gone to the store with the intention of setting up two men, this is not something she would need to hide from Henry. Still, the reader is left with the same questions Henry must ponder, and the narrator does not provide any definite answers.

Henry's father's illness will grow in scope over the coming chapters, and the influence it had on him and the family will be made clearer. As Henry recounts the tale of the dark shadow that haunted his father, Gosse interjects with comments reflecting the contemporary developments in Freudian psychology, displaying his fashionable tastes

once again. Gosse also struggles with decorum, demanding that Henry tell him a story that Henry would prefer to keep private.

Chapter 7: April 1898

Chapter 7: April 1898 Summary

In America, William James gives a speech dedicating a war memorial to the 54th Regiment, the first organized unit of black soldiers in the United States Army. William writes to Henry about the event, and Henry replies that he would love to have seen it, though he is secretly happy he does not have to discuss the speech. Their brothers, Wilky and Bob, had fought in the 54th and 55th regiments, and Wilky had died in the service. Neither William nor Henry had fought in the Civil War, and Henry feels uneasy when the subject comes up among veterans. Henry does not know how he would react to hearing William eulogize the soldiers.

Henry James Senior devoted his life to books and study after a childhood accident caused him to lose a leg, and he saw the Civil War as an exercise in philosophy, and one the noble North would ultimately resolve to everyone's benefit. Henry James Senior did not want his own sons to fight, however, because he believed their lives were too valuable to society to risk losing. William attended Harvard, and their mother invented an illness to keep Henry at home. When the illness failed to materialize, Henry concocted a plan to follow William to Harvard and study law, presenting the idea to his father in abstract idealist terms to win him over. Henry does not find his vocation at Harvard, but he does find Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, which transforms his view on American literature and gives him another subject to intelligently discuss with his family, who, of course, know the author personally.

During the first summer of the Civil War, Henry and his friend, Perry, visited a camp for wounded soldiers, and were surprised by the conflict's human toll. The boys are about their age, but have been physically and mentally wrecked by the war. Despite their father's early misgivings, by the time Wilky is old enough to join the Army and Bob is old enough to lie about his age, Henry's two younger brothers are enlisted with their father's blessing.

Cousin Gus Barker is the first of the James clan to die, and, while William and Henry remain safe at Harvard, they are mocked by their professors and their own feelings of helplessness. Wilky, though, enjoyed soldiering, and volunteered for the 54th Regiment to gain a place in this exciting and historic event. Henry James Senior traveled to Boston to watch the regiment march, but neither Henry nor William elected to see their brother off.

Wilky's regiment was set to attack Fort Wagner, a key base held by the Confederates, and the hope was that the primarily black Union soldiers would unnerve the South. This didn't pan out, and the 54th Regiment was slaughtered. Wilky survived the attack and returned home, barely alive. As the James family tends to their injured son, Henry preserves Wilky's Army blanket as a relic of his experience.

Bob's experience in the war is less dramatic, and the James parents become upset that he does not show more sympathy toward Wilky. Wilky resolves to rejoin the war when he recovers, William returns to Harvard, and Henry stays home, where he writes a short story that is accepted for publication. Henry's father and William joke with Henry about the content, but they are both proud. Unlike their pride in Wilky and Bob, this is an affection that comes without suffering.

Soon, the James family would move from Newport to Boston. There, Henry began writing stories that draw on sense memory, his first big breakthrough coming from the powerful sensations he felt when holding Wilky's Army blanket.

Chapter 7: April 1898 Analysis

Although many chapters spin very quickly into flashback after a framing sequence, this chapter deals almost exclusively in the past and barely bothers checking in with Henry in April 1898. This suggests a particularly powerful series of memories, and, indeed, here we gain insight into Henry's thoughts and experiences during the Civil War, and also his early career as a writer. The family dynamic is explored, as well, and Henry's role within the unit becomes more explicit. Henry and William are the intellectuals, and Henry, even more than William, is expected to find his own way. Everyone comments that Wilky's strongest aspect is his smile, which they miss when he arrives home from war in agony.

Chapter 8: June 1898

Chapter 8: June 1898 Summary

Mrs. Florence Lett visits Henry, and they discuss the suicide of their mutual friend, the novelist, Constance Fenimore Woolson. During their conversation, Mrs. Lett's daughter enters the room, climbs on Henry's lap, and falls asleep. Henry feels great affection for her at this moment, and feels pleased to be trusted by the young girl. When Mrs. Florence Lett and her daughter depart from his company, this happiness ruminates with Henry, but also mixes with the reflection that Constance Fenimore Woolson was his closest friend and now she is dead.

In Rye, Henry hires two servants to compliment the staff he has brought with him from London. These new faces are a maid named Fanny and an ugly but enthusiastic young man named Burgess Noakes, who performs whatever duties might be required. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Henry's butler and cook, accompany him to Lamb House. The Scot, Henry's typist, likewise moves to Rye. For the Smiths, however, the transition is less than ideal. They do not appreciate having to leave their old familiar neighborhood, and are not at all happy with the new one. Nevertheless, they are loyal, particularly since Henry had shown them remarkable generosity in times of need. When Mrs. Smith's sister needed somewhere to stay to recover from an operation, Henry gave permission for her to occupy the guest room in his London apartment, on the condition that she would be gone by the time he returned from his own sister's funeral in Italy. Of course, when Henry returns, Mrs. Smith's sister is still in the house, and neither employer nor servant is quite sure how to address the situation. The woman has cancer and is thus likely to require further medical attention, so Henry has no choice but to let her stay. He also finds it necessary to pay for much of Mrs. Smith's sister's hospital care.

Around this time, Mr. Smith develops a drinking problem. Additionally, the bond forged between Mrs. Smith and Henry through his caring for her sister grants Mrs. Smith a power in the household beyond her station, an unintended consequence that Henry cannot now undo. Thus, Mrs. Smith becomes querulous, which alienates her from the shopkeepers in Rye, the vendors that supply her with the goods to do her job. She soon begins to openly disrespect Henry. Then Mrs. Smith begins to drink. Henry finds himself struggling to hide the Smiths' drunkenness from his guests.

When Mrs. Smith's sister, now fully recovered, visits Lamb House, Henry makes polite conversation. Henry manages to both gain her address for future reference and to imply that he is in sympathy with her regarding Mrs. Smith, whom Henry realizes this sister has just scolded. Later, Henry considers who he might consult for advice on the situation, and imagines his sister Alice's mocking laugher or his sister-in-law's stern plotting. Henry also thinks of Constance Fenimore Woolson and how she would have the most elegant solution.

Only a select group of people knew how close Henry had been to Constance Fenimore Woolson, and, of them, only Lily Norton dared to ask Henry if he had any insight into the woman's death. Henry replied in a letter that Constance experienced frequent battles with depression, particularly when she was left to herself, and that she had finally lost the struggle. When Lily Norton comes to visit, Henry is impressed by her commanding, graceful presence and by her keen intelligence. This woman reminds Henry of his sister Alice, and so he wants very much for her to think well of him.

Before dinner, he discovers the Smiths drunk in the kitchen, and Mrs. Smith has ruined a tablecloth. Mrs. Smith refuses to replace it. Henry barks orders at Mr. and Mrs. Smith to set things right. They comply, but with Smith still drunk while he serves dinner, Henry realizes he will have to act quickly in firing the pair. Lily takes no notice at first, but when Burgess Noakes comes out to aid Mr. Smith in serving the food, she realizes what is happening.

Having recently introduced Constance Fenimore Woolson to their conversation, Lily Norton now becomes less restrained. Constance sharply implicates Henry in her death and for showing little care for his friend after she had died. Lily Norton says that Constance and their other friends had expected Henry in Venice that winter, and when he did not arrive, this magnified Constance's depression. Henry replies that there was never a firm plan for him to travel.

The next day, Henry orders Mr. Smith to remain in bed to recuperate, and Henry arranges for a doctor to visit him. Meanwhile, Mrs. Smith has become even more unruly, and Henry sends for her sister, Mrs. Ticknor, to discuss the situation. The other servants take over caring for the house and attending to Lily Norton and Henry's other guests, a friend of Lily's and one of Henry's, in town for a visit. Once the guests depart for a walk in town, Henry informs Mrs. Ticknor that he wants to fire the Smiths, and that he will provide them with some parting money but that she should find them someplace to stay. Mrs. Ticknor agrees and thanks Henry for his generosity. Henry regrets the sad fate of the ruined Smiths, but knows he cannot afford to have them around his house any longer.

Chapter 8: June 1898 Analysis

The episode of the Smiths can be viewed as an intricate exploration of the theme of decorum. Mr. and Mrs. Smith are intensely loyal to Henry and very skilled at their work. All this changes when, against the conventions delineating master and servant, Mrs. Smith asks Henry to take her sick sister into his home. By accepting this proposal, Henry weakens his power by introducing a personal connection into their working relationship. Henry's authority is further compromised when Mrs. Ticknor's recovery takes longer than expected, and she remains in residence after Henry returns from Italy. From here, Henry loses the right to criticize, correct, and instruct, and the Smiths' behavior spirals out of control until Henry is compelled to release them from his service.

As to Constance Fenimore Woolson, there is something very interesting taking place with the chronology of the novel. The chapter does not mention the date of her death, though the fact that it is only mentioned at any length now would suggest this is a recent occurrence. In fact, Ms. Woolson committed suicide in January of 1894, a full year before the first chapter of this book. Viewing Henry's relationships and his reactions to various events of earlier chapters through this new light is telling. It accounts for much of his guilty preoccupation with death and also speaks to the private nature of his grief. As we see here, though, he is rarely willing to discuss the woman herself.

First, with Mrs. Lett, he appears more interested in the woman's daughter than his own dead friend. As with other children, Henry is immensely concerned with her happiness and wellbeing, though he disregards the needs of his friends and family if such prove inconvenient. Perhaps Henry is interested in saving these young girls from becoming ironic and bitter souls like his sister Alice and Constance Fenimore Woolson. Later, with Lily Norton, Henry seeks to distance himself from Constance's condition, which makes him appear callous but may also protect him from an overwhelming guilt.

Lily Norton falls into the mold of Alice James, Minny Temple, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, a strong, independent woman. Henry finds himself drawn to this sort of person as the closest type of friend, and it should be noted that, unlike Alice, Minny, and Constance, Lily is still alive, which would make her very valuable to Henry. Henry sincerely wants to impress her and become closer, but Lily's insistence on discussing Constance Fenimore Woolson unnerves Henry and makes further acquaintance difficult. Compounded with the embarrassing revelation of his house's disorder, thanks to the Smiths, it appears unlikely that Henry will gain the wished for confidante.

Chapter 9: March 1899

Chapter 9: March 1899 Summary

Henry travels to Paris to tour the city with the daughters of Ellen Temple, Minny's sister. The girls, Rosina and Bay Emmet, have a coarseness about them that Henry seeks to correct, and they love teasing Henry about this. Though very different from each other, both of Henry's young cousins remind him in different ways of Minny Temple.

Being in Europe again after five years of not leaving England also brings old memories to Henry's mind, and he cannot keep himself from thinking of poor Constance Fenimore Woolson. After he leaves the girls to their own European vacation, Henry travels south to Marseilles on his way to Venice. In Venice, Henry is again captivated by its sites and splendor, but cannot help feeling a heavy sense of doom knowing that this was the city where Constance had jumped from a terrace. Henry knows the building and the street, and can no longer find beauty in the surroundings.

Remembering his first meeting with Constance, Henry recalls being fascinated by independence and fondness for solitude. Henry does not mention her in letters to family, though, for fear they might tease him about marriage. Nevertheless, they become very close friends, regularly writing letters to each other and discussing Henry's writing.

Constance, though also a novelist, does not discus her own work. Henry also realizes that she becomes unnaturally depressed with the completion of a novel and also tends to depression in the winter months. Once, at an opera in London, Henry noticed Constance sitting alone and tried to invite her to share a private box with him and his companion Mrs. Kemble, much to the dismay of the latter. Constance, though, was caught completely unprepared and did not know how to react. Henry realized that she was incredibly lonely, and that this loneliness was made more acute by being witnessed by others.

As they become closer, Henry realizes that his own informal, noncommittal system of planning trips, and then changing or abandoning those plans without much thought, was having an effect on Constance. Henry discovers that "everything he said and wrote was contemplated by her at length in private" (219), and that a stray word could unnerve her completely. When she decides to leave England for Florence, Henry sets her up with acquaintances of his in that city to keep her company. Constance accepts, because of Henry's insistence, though she says she prefers to be alone. In introducing her to Francis Boott and his daughter Lizzie, Henry realizes that his secret relationship with Constance will come to light, and wonders if Constance will be offended that he's kept it a secret.

In Florence, Constance is surprised to find herself enjoying the Bootts and realizes that Henry has used their home as direct inspiration for the setting of *Portrait of a Lady*. Constance also notes that the Bootts themselves exactly resembled characters from the

book. Constance is suspicious that she may be used for source material in a future novel. In his next letter, Henry shuts down this avenue of inquiry, partly because he did indeed believe that throwing her in with these characters might produce some dramatic results.

When Henry visits Florence, Constance offers him the house she has rented on Bellosguardo, Casa Brichieri-Colombi, before she has had a chance to move into it herself. Henry keeps his presence in the city secret from his other friends, save Francis Boott, and thus avoids both a potential scandal and the inconvenience of frequent visitors. Boott visits, though, and mentions that he and Lizzie are concerned about Constance, having noted her depression. Boott also notes how much happier she becomes when Henry is around. Boott insinuates that Henry should consider remaining at Bellosguardo for Constance's sake, but when Constance moves in to the Casa Brichieri-Colombi, Henry finds his own lodgings in Florence and begins to circulate with his other acquaintances there.

Henry listens to gossip about a coveted set of Lord Byron's letters, which will become the inspiration for a story. Later, he moves on to Venice but finds himself sorely missing Constance. Henry writes to her, saying that he cannot decide whether to return to England or Florence, knowing how she will interpret this statement. Constance replies that he can stay at her home in Bellosguardo, where he will have rooms to work and where they can enjoy each other's company without the interruption of others. Henry accepts and moves in with Miss Woolson, while again keeping his presence in the city secret from friends and family.

Henry begins to realize that Constance is not well and the she has been stricken with a severe depression during his time away. Constance's deafness, which had begun as an affliction of one ear but was gradually taking the other as well, also upset Constance, and she soon became withdrawn even in Henry's presence. Constance perks up again in the spring, while Henry works on the story of Byron's letters, now recast as writings from Shelley. As the story develops, though, Henry realizes that the details he is altering have brought the story inline with his own experiences in Florence with Constance Fenimore Woolson.

When Henry receives a letter from Alice while staying with Constance, he discusses his sister's condition with her. Constance shows sympathy and an unexpected insight, and soon the women begin to correspond. After Florence, Constance moves to England, taking homes in several cities before deciding to move back to Italy, this time to Venice. While in transition between Great Britain and the Continent, Constance meets Henry in Paris. By this time, she is plagued by pain in her ear and is considerably worn down by the world. Constance indicates she will not be able to see much of him.

They have dinner together on Henry's second night in Paris, during which Henry suggests that he would like to spend his winters in Venice. Once Henry returns to London, though, he is dismayed to learn that Constance and her friends are looking to find him a place in Venice. Henry realizes that she is talking about their friendship with a good number of people, and wonders how others will interpret their relationship. Henry

tries to suggest in his future letters that he is living happily in seclusion in London, and hopes that by not mentioning Venice, she will drop the subject. Further, now that Constance has become more involved in social circles, Henry realizes that if she should as much as visit, there would be no way to avoid attending many engagements.

Eventually, he finds it necessary to write to Constance's friend, Mrs. Curtis, telling her has no intention of renting rooms in Venice, but that he appreciates her efforts. Henry knows Constance will see the letter and hopes this will put her off the idea. Constance does not write to him for a long time, and when she does, her tone is distant and formal. Constance informs him that she has moved into new lodgings in Venice, at Casa Semitecolo. Constance also mentions that she is looking forward to "a bookless winter" (237).

In January, Henry receives a telegram that Constance is dead. Henry is not sure who to ask about her death but soon is struck with horror at the idea that she committed suicide. A second telegram confirms his fears. Slowly, Henry considers what he has lost, his dearest friend and finest critic. Henry also struggles to assuage his sense of guilt, recalling that Constance knew his habits and could not be expected to socialize when he was deep in writing. Henry also realizes for the first time that Constance desired him as a more constant companion, despite her knowing that Henry had no interest in marrying her. Henry must finally acknowledge that he could have prevented her death simply by appearing in Venice that winter. Henry is not sure to what degree mutual friends of theirs may have realized this situation, and begins a campaign of letters to establish her death as a moment of desperation rather than a planned act, though, of course, he knows otherwise. Henry decides he will travel to Venice, to be close to her presence in her former rooms at Casa Biondetti, where she had been content before moving to Casa Semitecolo.

Arriving in Venice, Henry imagines that Constance planned every detail of her death, including the aftermath, and would have anticipated the moment of his arrival at her former apartment. Henry consults with Constance's sister and niece as to what should be done with her belongings. Henry's concern is to preserve her papers and any unpublished manuscripts, and he hopes Constance's family will not object. They do not, and are happy to leave to Henry the task of examining her writings. For himself, he asks for a painting from her wall of the American wilderness, and again Constance's relations agree this is a fine idea.

Henry does have another less noble motivation for wanting to look through Constance's letters: upon searching out letters from himself or his sister Alice, Henry pitches this correspondence into the fireplace so that they will never enter the public record. When not engaged in the work of preserving or destroying Constance's papers, Henry dined with her sister and niece, as well as other Americans of his acquaintance in Venice. Henry is shepherded between these engagements and Casa Biondetti by Constance's own ferryman, Tito, who adored her and knew all her habits.

When Constance's kin leave the city, Henry realizes no one has dealt with Constance's clothes. Henry employs Tito to help him dispose of the effects at Constance's favorite

spot in the river. Solemnly, they lay her dresses on the water, one at a time, and wait for them to sink. They are horrified when a few resurface, and Tito fights them down with his pole.

Chapter 9: March 1899 Analysis

Henry's entire relationship with Constance Fenimore Woolson is laid out in this one, long chapter. Again, the author begins with a framing sequence but does not return to March 1899. It should be observed, however, that in traveling to Europe, specifically Venice, he is going against his inclinations to avoid painful memories, and also the contentment of his solitude in Rye.

It is also notable that what he enjoys most about his young cousins is their lack of interest in him. This is the first time Henry is seen to interact with children for any extended period of time, and rather than feeling the strong urge to save them, he comes closer to treating them with the same neglect he shows toward his adult friends. Of course, decorum would prevent Henry from trying to correct his peers' grammar. The two paragraphs that compare the sisters to Henry's friends are possibly the most succinct assessment of his social relations, as in the first, he wishes his friends would be less eager to meet with him, and, in the second, Henry decides he could altogether do without most of his friends.

It is fitting, then, that he should become so close to Constance Fenimore Woolson, who so closely matches Henry's views on other people. Constance enjoys being alone and has little use for flattery or pretension. When Constance begins visiting the Bootts and realizes that Henry has used them for inspiration in *Portrait of a Lady*, the theme of art imitating life comes into focus. This will also play an ironic turn when Henry develops the story of Shelley's letters using himself and Constance as characters. Henry's description of the characters' relationship matches the real-life story more closely than Henry realizes, with the woman wanting an "unconventional attachment" that would serve in place of marriage but be otherwise quite equal to it (230). Of course, art imitating life plays out most dramatically when Henry sees that Constance foresaw and indeed could have scripted the aftermath of her death.

Henry's adherence to decorum also plays a significant role in this chapter, and indeed is cited as a contributing factor to his abandoning Constance. Though the Bootts seem ready to forgive the impropriety of an unmarried man living with an unmarried woman if it will save Constance from her depression, Henry is unwilling to take part. During his first stay in Bellosguardo, he moves out when Constance moves in. The second time around, they live together in secret, and Henry leaves when their situation is about to be discovered. At the time of these events, Henry's permanent residence was a rented London flat, so he certainly had no pressing commitments to remain in England. Additionally, Henry himself remarks that Bellosguardo is an excellent place to work.

Furthermore, with Constance's value on privacy, it is unlikely he would meet with many social interruptions and, in fact, would probably have to put up with more guests in

England. Later, when Constance does take a more active social role, Henry is very concerned that their relationship will be a subject of gossip. Knowing of Constance's frequent depression, particularly in the winter and after finishing a book, her final letter should have overridden all of his concerns for social decorum. Instead, Henry ignored the signs and abandoned his friend for reasons of convenience and social propriety.

This failure to save Constance is key to Henry's development in *The Master,* which begins one year after Constance's death, with Henry experiencing haunting dreams. The early deaths of Alice James and Minny Temple inform many of his relationships, but Constance Fenimore Cooper can be seen as the immediate and direct influence of Henry's current ill thoughts. Of course, that does not necessarily go to say that it will change all of his behaviors, because he still regards friends as an inconvenience.

Chapter 10: May 1899

Chapter 10: May 1899 Summary

Once again, in Venice, after a five-year absence, Henry finds himself trying to avoid the street where Constance Fenimore Woolson committed suicide. At the same time, he feels Constance's presence beckoning him to that very scene. Henry resists her, though, and backtracks to his hotel. The ordeal upsets him, and Henry leaves Venice for Rome. While sightseeing in Rome, Henry encounters a very intense young man, who does not speak, but who leaves an impression on the author with the fierceness of his gaze. Henry feels uneasy in the man's presence, and avoids him on the tour.

On another evening, that man appears as a dinner guest of Henry's hosts and is introduce as the sculptor Hendrik Andersen. Andersen is again quiet but otherwise appears friendlier. At the dinner, Henry gives a speech about the profound affect Rome has on American visitors and expatriates, and Andersen appears deeply moved by the oration. Andersen asks to accompany Henry to his favorite place in Rome, wherever that might be. Henry replies that he frequents the Protestant cemetery, and they make plans to go there the next morning.

Andersen meets Henry at his hotel, and much to the novelist's surprise, is quite shy in a one-on-one personal situation. They walk to the cemetery, and Henry shows him the grave of Keats. Henry also visits the grave of Constance Fenimore Woolson, though he does not point it out to Andersen. As he lingers, though, the sculptor notices Henry's reverie, and Henry is compelled to reveal that Constance was a friend of his. Henry then shudders when he tries to keep himself from crying, and Andersen takes him in his arms to comfort him. Henry recovers, and they leave the cemetery to visit Andersen's studio.

At a restaurant near the studio, Andersen chats familiarly with the staff and customers, showing off his famous novelist friend and showing off for him. In the studio, Henry examines Andersen's large statues, very detailed, except for the faces, which are left blank. Their discussions reveal that Andersen grew up in Newport, only a few streets away from where the James family had lived. Like Henry, Andersen had to contend with a well-regarded older brother. Henry also finds it strange how closely Andersen resembles the protagonist of his early novel *Roderick Hudson*.

Henry and Andersen begin to see more of each other, and while their temperaments are not similar, they are complimentary. Andersen speaks a great deal about himself, and is not shy of boasting. Meanwhile, he takes it as a matter of course that Henry should be very quiet. Henry invites Andersen to Lamb House, though he suspects that the serene solitude that attracted him to Rye will cause the young sculptor to be bored by the city.

Henry buys a small bust from Andersen as a memento, which makes Andersen overjoyed. They go to Andersen's favorite restaurant to celebrate and bid each other farewell. When the bust arrives in England, Henry writes to Andersen, thanking him for

the piece and describing its placement in his home, again inviting the sculptor to Rye. Andersen writes back telling Henry that he will in fact visit on his way to America. Henry becomes simultaneous anxious about Andersen's arrival and departure. Henry has grand visions of Andersen moving in to Lamb House and using a renovated garden shed as his studio. Henry fears repeating his failure to pursue Paul Joukowsky.

Andersen arrives in a nervous twitter, talking constantly about his work and ambitions. Henry lets him talk, remembering how great it felt to be an artist who had not yet experienced failure. The next day, Henry begins work early to distract him from thinking about what Andersen might be doing while he prepares for the day. When a heavy rain arrives to make outdoor ventures difficult, Henry is not sure how to entertain his guest. They grab umbrellas, and Henry shows Andersen a nearby studio he hopes the sculptor will consider leasing for future visits to Rye. Unfortunately, unknown to Henry, the studio is in a terrible state of disrepair, exaggerated by the rain dropping down from the leaky roof. Andersen's visit is not going at all how Henry had imagined, and Henry cannot seem to gain the artist's attention in any meaningful way. Andersen is preoccupied with his American voyage, and with his own grandiose vision for a "world city" comprised of the best architecture of the great civilizations.

Henry finds himself distracted by his work, as well, having embarked on an interesting story that morning. Andersen, though, prods Henry to contribute a review of his sculpture to a magazine, a request Henry tries to deflect but cannot outright refuse. The following morning, Henry suggests they go to the sea, which excites Andersen and distracts him from the importance of his own art.

Andersen takes a swim in the brisk waters. Andersen speaks to Henry about Newport and how poor his family was when they arrived from Norway. Before dinner, Henry shows Andersen his study where he does his writing. Andersen is suitably impressed. They both retire for the evening, and Henry listens attentively to Andersen's room, trying to imagine exactly what he is doing at each moment. Henry pictures Andersen undressing, step-by-step, and how the man might appear against the surroundings of the guest room at Lamb House. When the floorboards no longer creak and Henry decides that Andersen is in bed, he then wonders if the sculptor is reading or has turned out the lights. Eventually, Henry takes up reading to distract himself and drifts into sleep.

When they part the following afternoon, Henry imagines a story dramatizing Andersen's family situation, and then sees him off with a hug and well wishes.

Chapter 10: May 1899 Analysis

In his short time in Venice, Henry confronts the lingering essence of Constance Fenimore Woolson, and, in doing so, achieves a small victory over his own passive nature. Though Henry does not allow Constance's spirit to guide him back to the street of her death, he does negotiate a position much closer than he had previously dared, and speaks to the dead woman, confirming his sympathy and his decision not to go

nearer to the scene where she died. Later, visiting her grave in Rome, he finally allows himself to weep over her death.

Henry's relationship with Hendrik Andersen also shows a greater deal of success than Henry has achieved in his other romantic pursuits. That does not mean that all goes well or that the situation is not complicated, but Andersen pursues him, and Henry allows himself to be pursued. Henry admires Andersen's beauty and his engaging presence, but sometimes finds his egotism wearisome. Nevertheless, Andersen's enthusiasm is another plus, because it reminds Henry of the wonder of beginning a career in the arts. Like Henry, Andersen is an expatriate, born in Norway but identifying with America and now living in Rome. Thus, they are both significantly removed from a European society where family name equals status, but they have gained enough recognition by their art to travel in those circles.

When Henry begins to view Andersen as a character in his seldom-read *Roderick Hudson*, the theme of art imitating life is inverted when fictional characters come to life. Henry's habit of using his friends to further his own work comes back at him, though, when Andersen asks him to write an article promoting his career. The situation is made even more difficult by the fact that, while he concedes there is some talent, Henry is not particularly enthusiastic about Andersen's work. Andersen's time at Lamb House passes without the sculptor making any advances toward Henry, and Henry finds himself too disenchanted with his own missteps as a host to even consider that Andersen might still be interested. Nevertheless, Henry engages in a very simple and vivid fantasy while he listens to his guest prepare for bed. Although Henry misses his opportunity here, the door is left open for future flirtations.

Chapter 11: October 1899

Chapter 11: October 1899 Summary

Henry waits for his brother to visit Lamb House and recalls the unsolicited advice he had received from William when he was preparing to outright purchase the house in Rye. William first offended Henry by refusing his offer to stay in Henry's old apartment in Kensington before coming up to Lamb House. Instead, William spent some time in Germany, where he wrote to Henry, cautioning him against making any rash decisions about real estate without William's input and further stating that the asking price for the house was much too high. Henry writes back in a defensive tone that he will buy the house anyway.

When William arrives in Rye with his wife, Alice, Henry sees that his brother's health has greatly deteriorated, because William has difficulty descending from the train and appears quite weak. Henry takes William and Alice to Lamb House and gives them a tour, and Alice, at least, seems very pleased with the surroundings. William does not disagree. Later, in private, William and Alice confide in Henry that they've been to a psychic. They tell him that their mother wants Henry to know she is at rest and that Henry is not alone. The medium also displayed intimate knowledge of Lamb House from her visions, including the bust over the mantelpiece, which she specifically mentioned. The psychic also indicated the painting that Henry took away from Constance Fenimore Woolson's Venice apartment. At this point, Henry is overcome with emotion and asks his brother and sister-in-law to give him some time to himself and not to raise this subject again until he is ready to discuss it.

At dinner the next night, Henry is still reeling from their talk, but William's and Alice's stories about mutual friends quickly lighten his spirits. Henry only finds himself wishing sister Alice could also sit with them that night. Henry remembers a joke Alice had played on brother William and his wife, mocking their belief in syances and how he still cannot reveal her deception. As his family's stay lingers on, Henry begins to realize how ill his brother has grown, because Alice constantly watches over him, for fear he will have a heart attack. Henry arranges for William to see a heart specialist in London, who advises William to stay in London and rest to the greatest degree possible. William does his best to follow the doctor's orders, though he resents his condition and cannot abide by the restriction against the exercise of writing.

William's infirmity gives Henry some time in private conversation with Alice, and, despite her otherwise impeccable good manners, one night, she decides to bring up Henry and William's sister Alice and the feud that existed between the two women. Alice's opinions of her deceased sister-in-law are entirely disparate from Henry's views on his sister. In her eyes, Alice James was a selfish girl who wasted her short time on earth in bitterness. Alice also implies that the sainted Miss Loring was codependent on Alice James's illness and that the two shared a lesbian relationship. At this, Henry recalls that

she was very interested in the details of Andersen's visit and had even been curious about Henry's valet Burgess Noakes.

William and Alice's children arrive for a visit, and Henry receives word from Lady Wolseley that she will also be in town. Henry arranges a lunch for them all to get together. The eminent woman provides much entertainment, though she cannot be said to aware of most of it. Henry's nieces can barely restrain their laughter, and William engages in ironic flattery. When she begins to speak about the peace that England has brought to Ireland, though, William grows more openly sarcastic.

After lunch, Henry notices that Lady Wolseley has brought along a familiar face. Hammond has traveled with Lady Wolseley to attend to her, and the men resume their subtle flirtation. After showing Hammond the garden and the study, Henry offers him copies of his books that Hammond indicates he has not read but would very much like to read. To avoid questions from Lady Wolseley, Henry agrees to send the books to Hammond's address in London. Though she does not discover their arrangement, Lady Wolseley watches Henry and Hammond with amusement, and appears pleased with herself for setting them up with each other.

William approaches Henry, in as gentle manner as he can, to state that he believes Henry's talents are wasted in writing about English society. William says that there is nothing interesting to write about, and, anyway, Henry does not have the necessary understanding of English society to do it properly. William suggests Henry return to America and write about the Puritan fathers. At this point, Henry cuts him off, saying that he has no interest in historical fiction, and further, that such a form is below him. William keeps their discussion to himself, but the awkwardness of the confrontation, compounded with his illness, causes him to become even surlier.

William has a need, Henry realizes, and, indeed, has always known, to express his authority. When their father was dying, William was in Europe on sabbatical from his university lectures, and both his wife and sister had found it necessary to conspire to prevent his return. They knew William would argue with his father and be overbearing in arranging his affairs. The Alices did, though, invite Henry back to the States to assist them in care taking. Thusly, Henry becomes executor of their father's estate, much to William's dismay. A week after his father's death, Henry receives a letter from William, which he assumes is for him, but is actually intended for the late Henry Senior. Henry takes the letter to the gravesite and reads it aloud, weeping openly at the conclusion. Henry writes to William telling what he's done, believing he's done well but knowing his brother will be furious. As executor of the will, Henry further enrages William by keeping him current on each decision, reveling in the power. When William finally returns, Henry exercises one final act of authority by turning their father's ongoing financial affairs to William and signing over his inheritance to Alice, William's wife.

Another night, while Henry is explaining to his niece why Isabel Archer returned to her husband in *Portrait of a Lady*, they hear a crash upstairs and go to check on William and Alice. They arrive to find Alice comforting William, who appears terrified of some unseen thing. After William has been calmed, Alice confides in Henry that, for some

time, he has been experiencing horrible nightmares that startle him from sleep and upset the whole house. At first, she was afraid for William, but she soon learned to soothe his nerves. One of Alice's first psychics told her that her fears arose from the sense of abandonment caused by her father's suicide and told her she did not have to worry about disaster striking William. This fear was also why Alice did not want her husband present while his father died, because she had enough to worry about without William's hysterics. After a pause, Alice relates another revelation from her most recent and trusted psychic: Henry will be the last surviving James brother, and Alice is meant to look after him.

On New Year's day, Henry has Gosse over for dinner, one of the few guests permitted during his family's stay. Gosse speaks, at length, about the controversy surrounding the mandated national day of prayer arising from the English defeat by the Boers in South Africa. This is mainly by way of namedropping those he's spoken with on the subject rather than to express an opinion of his own. William remarks that he wrote a catty letter to the *Times,* expressing his distaste for the whole affair, which the paper did not print.

Gosse changes the subject, asking the writers about upcoming projects. William will be lecturing at Edinburgh on religious feeling, which is essentially one's personal reaction to faith rather than a specific endorsement of one creed. Henry gives two short summaries of tales he is working on, both of which bear strong similarities to his own recent life.

The final days of the William James family's stay in Rye House are calm and happy and everything Henry had dreamed that time with his brother could be. They part warmly, and Henry returns to work.

Chapter 11: October 1899 Analysis

Henry begins the chapter considering all he did not tell Andersen about his life, the difficult relationships with his father and brother and his abject failure of *Guy Domville*. Henry knows Andersen is only interested in the power and glory of art, and the he would be confused that Henry has known anything other than success. Andersen is, however, quite open about his own family. Andersen's tendency to grandiose visions is a stark contrast to Henry's dark brooding, despite the fact that Henry has several significant achievements and Andersen, as yet, has none.

This chapter, though, is primarily devoted to William James and the sibling rivalry that exists between him and Henry. Henry takes offence easily from his brother, but William is not innocent in provoking his brother. William constantly berates Henry on practical and financial matters, to a point where Henry basically throws a tantrum in the letter affirming that he will purchase Lamb House. It is remarkable, then, that Henry refrains from casting judgment against William and his wife when they tell him their dead mother sent him a message through a medium. Granted, the psychic did mention two emotionally charged objects in Henry's house, the bust crafted by Andersen and Constance Fenimore Woolson's painting, but, even so, this would be a lot for most

people to swallow. Later, Henry stands up to William's suggestion that he write about American subjects, flatly stating he has no interest in historical novels and that he wishes to remain true to his art, even if it does not win him popular favor.

Sister-in-law Alice's assessment of Alice James is strange in that it perfectly falls in line with all that Henry has thought about her, but William's wife does not romanticize the girl's life and so the picture is less favorable. Also, Henry's surprise at the suggestion that his sister was a lesbian should speak to his feelings of isolation, not recognizing in his closest kin an aspect of his own being that sets him apart from society. Another interesting change takes place in Henry's conversation with Alice. Alice becomes more caustic, and Henry begins to find her much more interesting. Henry appreciates witty women who speak their mind, and, until now, had not counted his sister-in-law in that number.

With Lady Wolseley as a guest at Lamb House, the tables are turned on Henry's own awkwardness in Ireland. Here, surrounded by intellectual Americans, the woman appears truly ridiculous in her manner and opinions. Similarly, Gosse's visit shows him still obsessed with fashionable trends in politics and philosophy and tries to introduce psychology and transcendentalism into dinner conversation just to show he knows about these things. Gosse also highlights his association with the Prince of Wales, which William successfully uses against him in their verbal sparring.

Hammond is reintroduced and, despite adhering to the rules of decorum, Henry manages to be much more forward with the soldier than he had been previously, and indeed much more flirtatious than he was with Andersen. Possibly the open-ended conclusion of Andersen's stay has given Henry a greater confidence.

The final chapter of *The Master* is notable for how much of it takes place in the present rather than in flashback. This structural shift can be viewed as Henry's finally getting over his past failures, both literary and personal, and forging ahead with his life. The lone flashback, to the time when Henry James Senior, was dying, shows Henry in a position of strength, administering his father's will and successfully keeping William out of the way. Whatever childishness may be observed in his behavior, this episode displays Henry's competence and his solemn sense of how things ought to be done.

Characters

Henry James

An American novelist living in England, Henry James is haunted by the memories of dead friends and relatives whom he has failed to comfort. First, he does not visit beloved Cousin Minny Temple in Italy while she lay dying. Later, Henry fails to keep his sister, Alice, active in a manner that may have improved her health, though he does attend her bedside until her death. Henry's greatest tragedy, though, is his failure to make a promised trip to Venice, which led his closest friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson, to throw herself off a building.

With all this in the background, the novel opens with Henry's play *Guy Domville* spectacularly failing, the entire audience in an uproar of derision. Henry tries to lock himself away from the world, but is compelled to accept a visit from an old friend who is going into exile in Russia. This friend reminds Henry of his lost love, Paul Joukowsky, adding another layer of depression.

Throughout the book, Henry works to come to terms with his guilt and restore his credibility as a writer. The latter proves much easier than the former, because Henry's every encounter generates story ideas. Henry relishes his time spent writing but returns time and again to the people he has lost. Henry's relationships with Minny Temple and his sister, Alice, two highly intelligent women who died young, makes him particularly protective of little girls, and he often disapproves of their parents' disregard for them.

Henry is intensely private, which is a large contributing factor to his interpersonal failures, since he has difficulty making time for others. This secrecy also causes him to shy away from discussion of his own life, and he works to prevent others from discussing it, as well. Because of his strict adherence to social decorum, he has difficulty pursuing his homosexual love interests and is uneasy about appearing too intimate with women, though his interactions with friends prove that he is more concerned with propriety than they are.

Alice James

In his strange way, Henry looks up to his younger sister, Alice, as a prime example of a woman's intellectual wit. A girl starved for attention even before taking sick, Alice quickly grew bitter once her health began to fail. Alice developed an extremely morose sense of humor, though her ability to express herself never diminished. If anything, her infirmity gave her the leisure to develop her mind to its greatest capacity and made excuses for her offensive behavior. In their childhood, a family joke suggested that Alice would marry her brother William, and though this was never meant to be taken seriously, it damaged the young girl's marriage prospects. When William married another Alice,

Alice James suffered her first nervous breakdown. This becomes a point of rivalry between her and William's new wife.

William James

Henry's brother and fiercest competitor, William is also a renowned writer and speaker. In many ways, Henry followed William's lead, though he had his own reasons. William, like Henry, avoided the Civil War by attending Harvard, though, unlike Henry, William was actually there to study. William inherited his father's business sense and attended to the family's financial affairs after their father's death, following a brief coup in which Henry Junior took over the will. William and his wife, Alice, are both enamored of psychics, and they learn from one such visit that Henry needs to know that their mother is watching over them and that he is not alone. William is very ill when Henry meets him in 1899, and they have their final dramatic conflict of philosophy before making peace.

Alice James

William's wife does not get much attention in the course of the novel, but becomes important near the end. Alice forces Henry to confront less flattering truths about his dead sister, and also promises to be by his side after William passes, to comfort Henry in his last days. The specificity of this promise reassures Henry in a manner he was not aware he needed, and it may be seen that Alice is overtly offering what Minny Temple and Constance Fenimore Woolson dared not ask of Henry.

Minny Temple

Minny Temple is Henry's cousin, and possibly the great female love of his life. Minny, like Henry's female friends throughout life, has a sharp wit and fierce independence, never afraid to speak her mind. Henry arranges courtships from Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and John Gray, both of which show degrees of success. When she dies, though, these relationships compromise Henry's privacy, as Minny had written to both men about his behavior. Holmes, in particular, is dismayed at Henry's lack of attention to Minny, noting that she became very upset when Henry did not visit her in her illness. Minny serves as the inspiration for Henry's *Portrait of a Lady*.

Constance Fenimore Woolson

Constance is Henry's closest friend, a wry and witty novelist, who gives him valuable criticism on his own work. Constance is, however, plagued by depression, particularly in the winter and after finishing a book. Constance and Henry share a house in Florence for a time, where both work and enjoy each other's company. When they are apart, Henry arranges for Constance to meet friends who will keep her company. All of these friends, particularly Francis Boott and his daughter Lily, remark that they are worried about her but that Henry makes her considerably happier. They urge him to move in

with Constance for her own benefit and that their friends would keep the arrangement secret to avoid scandal.

Not only does Henry not follow their advice, the mere discussion of his situation with Constance makes him uncomfortable, and he returns to England. When Constance moves on to Venice and establishes her own circle of friends, Henry realizes that she is talking about him and making plans for him to rent rooms in the city. Though Henry had vaguely indicated a desire to spend winters in Venice, he had not committed and now resolved himself firmly against the idea. Henry arranged for Constance to discover his displeasure, and she wrote back to him that she was looking forward to "a bookless winter," a clear sign that her depression was now out of control. Constance committed suicide, and Henry is forced to face the fact that he could have saved her if he had simply gone to visit Constance, like she believed he had promised to do.

Hendrik Andersen

A Norwegian sculptor who identifies himself as American, Andersen grew up in Newport, hearing constantly of the great James family. Now, meeting the writer in Rome, Andersen is immediately smitten. Though Henry is at first alarmed by the sculptor's intense presence, they quickly strike up a flirtation. The artists see each other daily, and before leaving Rome, Henry buys a bust from Andersen and invites him to Lamb House. Andersen eventually accepts the offer, staying for three days on his way to America. The visit does not prove romantically fruitful, though the men do share some manner of bond and the possibility for a future liaison remains open.

Henry is sometimes put off by Anderson's egotism and grandiose visions regarding his art. The young sculptor can speak of little besides his own ambitions, which both upsets and inspires Henry, who cannot help dwelling on his own failures.

Lady Wolseley

Lady Wolseley is a friend of Henry's, though not one that is above idle gossip and malicious pranks. When Henry stays as a guest at Lord Wolseley's Royal Hospital in Ireland, the lady attempts to set him up with the servant and former soldier named Hammond. However, she also conspires with a man named Webster, who may be her lover, to humiliate Henry at dinner by alluding to his family's low social status.

Later, Lady Wolseley helps Henry decorate his newly acquired house in Rye, though she is not particularly concerned about his tastes in furniture. When Henry has her visit during his brother's stay, Lady Wolseley's ignorance of conditions in America and even the situation in Ireland, which her husband oversees, provides great amusement for the James brothers.

Hammond

A former soldier now in the employ of Lord and Lady Wolseley, Hammond is a polite and quiet spoken man, who has a calming influence on all those around him. Henry is particularly taken with the man, who attends to him during his time in Ireland. Lady Wolseley placed Hammond with Henry, hoping to spark a romance but such does not materialize at the Royal Hospital. Later, when Hammond reappears in Rye, the men have a greater opportunity to talk, and Henry arranges to send him several books in the hope they will be able to converse further. Their second meeting comes after Henry's experience with Andersen, which may have emboldened his spirits. Another difference is that, in the second instance, Hammond is not in a position directly subservient to Henry, which could also be important, considering Henry's reliance on the rules of decorum.

Edmund Gosse and Jonathan Sturges

Of the two men who bring news to Henry of Oscar Wilde's shenanigans, only Gosse becomes his own character in the novel. Gosse is not always first with the information, but he's always got a strong opinion about it. Gosse is a man driven by "the latest craze," changing his opinions and behavior based on popular fashion. Wilde is the talk of the day, so Gosse talks about Wilde. When the persecution of homosexuals begins when the widespread prostitution becomes known, Gosse, likewise, becomes indignant at the moral depravity and suggests Henry should consider leaving town. Toward the end of the book, Gosse is also mocked by William James, with Henry's blessing.

Objects/Places

Royal Hospital in Dublin

Here, Henry is shown in polite society, which can prove less than polite. Lady Wolseley plays both friend and foe, and Henry meets Hammond for the first time.

Apartment in Kensington, London

Henry's home and office until moving up to Rye.

Temple Sisters' Home in New Hampshire

On a visit to his cousins' home, Henry oversees Minny Temple's courtship with Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. and John Gray. While at a hotel on their first night in town, Henry also has a strongly suggestive homosexual experience with Holmes.

The Scot

Henry's typist serves the story more as a device than a character, because his arrival on the scene improves Henry's writing but limits his ability to travel.

Lamb House in Rye

Henry could not be happier when his ideal home becomes available in the quaint town of Rye. Henry will finally have a permanent dwelling, which, to Henry, represents a solid protection from the world.

Newport, CT

Childhood home of the James family and also of Henrik Andersen.

Paris

Henry takes his young cousins, the Emmet sisters, around the city and remembers visiting Constance Fenimore Woolson in Paris, years earlier.

Florence, Italy

Henry cements his relationship with Constance Fenimore Woolson in Florence, introducing her to his friends and taking up residence in her house for a time. Henry is happy to live and work on her estate but flees to England when their situation threatens to expose itself into scandal.

Venice, Italy

Henry visits Constance at her new home, but fails in a promised future visit. Constance Fenimore Woolson commits suicide here, due, in part, to Henry's negligence.

Rome, Italy

A favorite city of Henry's and the location of his first meeting with the sculptor Henrik Andersen.

Protestant Cemetery in Rome

Many famous English writers are buried here, including Constance Fenimore Woolson. Henry tells Hendrik Andersen this is a place he frequently visits in Rome, and it becomes the site of their first 'date.'

Themes

Decorum

Decorum is the idea that there is proper way to behave in society, and the system of rules that defines what this behavior entails. In Victorian England, this system was rigidly stratified. As an American, though, Henry James would not fit into the entire system of rules - for example, his family became wealthy, but, since he had no title, he could not be considered upper class. Henry's fame, though, provides him some allowance in traveling in the higher circles of English society, and he almost completely buys into their sense of propriety. Thus, he becomes offended when a servant talks out of place and when Gosse hints that Henry may have purchased the services of young prostitutes.

The adherence to decorum also makes it difficult for him to pursue relationships, because his homosexuality lends another degree of complication to flirting. Most importantly, Henry will not consider breaking the taboos against cohabitation to save his friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson, from despair.

It is interesting to note that Henry's friends are often very willing to forgive breaches of decorum in the service of a greater good, particularly in Henry's relationship to Constance Fenimore Woolson. Other friends are willing to discard certain rules, just because following them seems silly, like when Lady Wolseley and the Russian princess openly discuss Henry's past and potential lovers, despite the fact that he would like to conceal his homosexuality.

When Henry does break with propriety, however, like in the episode of the Smiths, it is at his own peril. Henry allows his servants, the Smiths, too much familiarity, and loses ground from then on, until he is forced to dismiss them. One aspect of decorum that Henry consistently struggles with is the obligation to society, the constant need to entertain guests and be entertained by others. Henry would rather be left alone and regularly finds excuses to turn down invitations and refuse visitors.

Art Imitating Life

Henry catalogues every experience, every joke, and every bit of gossip for possible inclusion in upcoming works of fiction. Henry's sister, Alice, is a regular template for Henry's female characters, particularly in the case of children. Some of his friends discover this and, as a rule, are not pleased. This practice leaves Henry at a distance from his companions and causes him to view life as source material for his books; thus, friends are only as important as the stories they evoke. Perhaps this is why Henry surrounds himself with a particular type of women, women who are intelligent and brash. They would certainly provide better stories than the more subtle and subdued kind.

Henry realizes that some acquaintances, such as Constance Fenimore Woolson, are much more than fodder for fiction, but, in the midst of his writing, he cannot be interrupted by real relationships. Henry turns away guests to revise his own experiences into stories and places his dedication to writing above visiting friends. It is notable that the theme of art imitating life is occasionally inverted, such as Constance's elaborate planning of her death as a novel and Andersen acutely resembling a character from Henry's *Roderick Hudson*.

The Value of a Witty Woman

It is interesting that not only are all of Henry's closest friends women, but they are a particular type of woman. Henry values intelligence and independence and finds women who are able to go against social convention to express themselves freely to be appealing. This seems to go against his own regard for decorum, but it is possible he values in others what he cannot find in himself, which would also explain his difficulty when these women make demands on him that he cannot meet.

Minny Temple, Alice James, and Constance Fenimore Woolson all have an independence that sets them apart and makes them unfit for polite society, and Henry's other acquaintances, Lily Norton and his sister-in-law, Alice, only become interesting to him when they lash out at him. Even when such women express disapproval of Henry's behavior, as Lily Norton, Alice James, and Minny Temple do more than once, he finds their rebukes thrilling and can't wait to hear what they say next. Too often, though, this sharp wit comes with bitterness, because all of these women have suffered to one degree or another, and his sister, Alice, in particular, developed a morbid sense of humor. As a result of his sister's anger and illness, Henry becomes very protective of little girls, which suggests that, on some level, he does care about these women's happiness above the value of their conversation.

Private Life

Henry values his privacy above all else. Henry does not like his life or habits to be discussed, and he is not even particularly fond of the company of others. On more than one occasion, he regrets the need to appear in public, and is almost fearful of discussing his writing with all but a few select readers. Further, he has much that he does not want the world to discover, such as his homosexuality and allowing Constance Fenimore Woolson to die. Henry's reluctance to be associated publicly with Ms. Woolson is exasperated when she begins openly discussing his life and plans with a new circle of friends whom he has not even met. This leads him to abandon any pretence of visiting her in Venice, an abandonment that feeds the woman's depression and contributes to her suicide.

In this and other chapters of his life, Henry is quick to shut down inquiry into these areas of his life, and is fiercely critical of anyone who brings his behavior into question. When Gosse suggests Henry should flee London to avoid being arrested for buying prostitutes

and when Holmes criticizes Henry for mistreating Minny Temple, Henry sharply ends the conversation and walks away. This defensiveness also plays out in his dealings with William, because Henry wishes to let his brother into this private life, but only so much - he cannot abide being advised. Thus, Henry is excited to tell William about his purchase of Lamb House, but put off when William tries to look after the financial arrangements. Henry replies with an angry letter, much more direct and outspoken than he'd intended, telling William the real estate affair is none of his business.

Style

Points of View

The Master is told entirely in the third person, though it focuses exclusively on Henry James. Every thought and every event is from Henry's perspective, and the novelist adopts a tone appropriate to Henry's disposition to describe his world. The narrator knows only what Henry knows, such that when Henry encounters Webster and Lady Wolseley in a curious conspiracy, the nature of their relationship is never made explicit.

The book is often heavy with a sense of doom, with the multiple deaths of Henry's friends weighing down the narrator's perspective. The narrator largely observes the same sense of decorum that Henry values so highly, doing his best not to pry and subtly insinuating bits of gossip rather than relaying them outright.

Setting

The narrative takes place between 1895 and 1899, though much of the novel is comprised of flashbacks. The "present-tense" sections take place mostly in England, at Henry's apartment in London and later at Rye. Henry spends some time in Ireland recuperating from the humiliation of *Guy Domville*, and this episode establishes his social standing.

Henry also goes on a European tour of Paris and Italy, which is described as his first trip to the Continent in five years. The major events of this holiday take place in Rome, where Henry meets the young sculptor, Henrik Andersen. Scenes from earlier in Henry's life range from his childhood in Newport, to his time at Harvard, to travels throughout Europe, most notably his stay in Florence with Constance Fenimore Woolson.

Language and Meaning

The narrator's sense of decorum requires a subtlety of language, and as such, many subjects are only obliquely approached. For example, it is never expressly stated that Henry is a homosexual, though it is clear from his interactions that this is the case. Similarly, the narrator delicately handles Henry's guilt and anguish over his failures and will sometimes describe Henry's physical actions, while leaving the reader to interpret their meaning.

When Henry dismisses himself, the reader is meant to recognize this as a definitive gesture, Henry standing up for his own dignity. In other cases, other circumstances lead Henry to remove himself, and, in each case, these reasons are delicately expressed. The author also strives to place his language solidly in the vernacular of the time, lending the book an air of authenticity.

Structure

Most chapters begin with a framing sequence, taking place at a particular moment in Henry's life, and then proceed to a series of flashbacks. As the book progresses, the framing sequence receives less and less space, while the prominence of the flashbacks increases. This pattern reaches its height in the chapter on Constance Fenimore Woolson, whose death influences Henry throughout the book.

After her death is laid bare, Henry lives primarily in the present in Rome and almost exclusively in the here-and-now during his brother's visit to Rye. Also notable in the structure is the slow revelation of events that occurred before the opening of the book, again, most dramatic in the instance of Constance's death. These influences are crucial to understanding Henry's behavior, but the reader often does not learn of these events until late in the book. Plot points in the narrative's present are thus illuminated by revelations in following chapters.

Quotes

"His attempt to be earnest, hesitant and polite had not fooled women like her who watched his full mouth and the glance of his eyes and instantly understood it all." (Chapter 1, page 7)

"You are an American and nobody knows who your father was or who your grandfather was. You could be anybody." (Chapter 2, page 24)

"[Hammond] has great charm, does he not, and discretion, I think?" (Chapter 2, page 27)

"[Mona's] gaze was neither puzzled nor hurt, but there was a sense that she was putting energy into a look of mild contentment and sweetness." (Chapter 2, page 32)

"His grandfather had come to America in search of freedom, and in America he had found more than freedom. He had found great wealth, and that had changed everything. County Cavan did not cost Henry a thought." (Chapter 2, page 37)

"It suddenly struck him that what he longed for now was an American, preferably someone from Boston, a compatriot who would understand or at least appreciate, as nobody present seemed to, the strangeness here." (Chapter 2, page 44)

"It is terrible to be an unprotected being." (Chapter 3, page 59)

"You must tell me something that you are sure is true." (Chapter 5, page 103)

"For so many years now he had had no country, no family, no establishment of his own, merely a flat in London where he worked. ... It was as though he lived a life that lacked a fazade, a stretch of frontage to protect him from the world. Lamb House would offer him beautiful windows from which to view the outside; the outside, in turn, could peer in only at his invitation." (Chapter 6, page 123)

"You're the consistent one, the one who'll always know how to mind himself. At least we have you." (Chapter 7, page 182)

"'I think she deserved a better life,' Lily said, 'But it was not to be.' In her last phrase there was no air of resignation or acceptance, but rather one of blame and bitterness." (Chapter 8, page 204)

"He found their indifference to him charming, a relief, and he wondered if some of his old friends, who demanded his attention too much and who monitored too closely what he said and did, might be encouraged to follow the example of the Emmet sisters." (Chapter 9, page 211)

"It was as if both he and Constance had risked too much in their gamble with Venice, and she had lost everything while he had lost her." (Chapter 9, page 214)

"All of his friends knew not to make demands on him, and Constance knew that too." (Chapter 9, page 240)

"And for the sake of something hidden within his own soul which resisted her, and because of his respect for convention and social decorum, he had abandoned her there." (Chapter 9, page 242)

"This, he thought, was her last novel. They all played their assigned roles." (Chapter 9, page244)

"As Henry saw Andersen and tried to make sense of him, it was as though one of his own characters had come alive, ready to intrigue him and to puzzle him and hold his affections, forcing him to suspend judgment, subtly refusing to allow him to control what might now unfold." (Chapter 10, page 273)

"Past failure did not interest Andersen, who remained fascinated by future triumph." (Chapter 11, page 295)

"Miss Loring was a strong woman in search of a weak friend to care for. You know, any time I saw them together I thought that they were the happiest pair on God's earth." (Chapter11, page 307)

"It is easier to renounce bravery than to be brave over and over." (Chapter 11, page 325)

Topics for Discussion

Henry is enamored of Hendrik Andersen, despite not being particularly fond of the sculptor's work. What challenges might this present to a potential relationship? How would Henry's fame color Andersen's eventual failures? How do you feel about loving someone you do not believe has the skill to succeed?

Contrast today's cultural views on homosexuality with those of Henry James's time. What has changed? What remains the same? Are there ways in which Victorian society was more accepting than our own? Some research may be necessary to address this topic.

Colm Tuibnn has Henry James express distaste for the historical novel, and *The Master* is an historical novel about Henry James. Argue Henry James's position that the historical novel is a flawed medium, using either your own views or research on what the real-life James said on the subject. Also, argue the opposite position, that the historical novel is a valid medium for education or entertainment or both.

What do you feel are the benefits and drawbacks of a system of manners like the decorum observed by polite Victorian society? Is there a version of decorum in today's America? If so, how would you define it?

Do you believe it is immoral to use real-life friends and family as inspiration for fiction? If so, why? If not, why not? Write a short story using either a real person in fictional circumstances or a fictional person in a real-life situation, and write about your thoughts while composing the tale.

William remarks that, as a foreigner, Henry can never fully comprehend the inner-workings of English society, and his attempts to write about English subjects are weaker for this distance. Do you believe a person can be fully accepted by a culture that is not his or her own? Can he or she grow to understand this new culture as a native would?

How does the use of flashback contribute to your understanding of the narrative? Create a timeline of the events described in the book. Does this linear representation offer any new insights into Henry's state of mind?