Tales of Henry James: The Texts of the Stories, the Author on His Craft, Background and Criticism Study Guide

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BOOKRAGS

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Daisy Miller: A Study Summary

On a beautiful June morning in the resort town of Vevey, Switzerland, a young man meets an American girl named Daisy Miller for the first time. The young man, Winterbourne, is twenty-seven years old and lives in Geneva, where he is rumored to be either a diligent student or the lover of a fascinating older, married European woman. He has come to Vevey to visit his aunt. Winterbourne is drinking coffee in the garden after breakfast one morning when a well-dressed small boy about nine years old wanders by on the path. The little boy asks Winterbourne for a lump of sugar, and when he agrees, greedily takes three. From his accent, Winterbourne can tell that the boy is American, like him. The boy's older sister Daisy comes to collect him. She is beautiful, with a lovely complexion and fine features. Winterbourne is instantly attracted to her, although at first she is not particularly interested in him.

Winterbourne speaks to the girl, which is slightly improper considering they have not been formally introduced by mutual acquaintances. She does not seem offended, and even accepts an invitation to tour a nearby castle, Chillon, with him. Winterbourne leaps at the chance, even though he is slightly scandalized that a young woman would consider being alone with him in public. Winterbourne's aunt, Mrs. Costello, is shocked by the Miller's lack of decorum and over-familiarity with their guide, or courier. Pretending to be scandalized, Mrs. Costello refuses to meet Daisy. Despite his better impulses, Winterbourne eventually adopts this negative attitude towards Daisy, even though he continues to see her. When they part in Vevey, Winterbourne promises to visit Daisy in Rome during the winter.

Winterbourne is a little infatuated with Daisy and imagines her sitting by a window alone, waiting for him. At the end of January, Winterbourne visits his aunt, who has taken an apartment in Rome for the winter. He plans to visit Daisy in a few days, but the very next day he encounters her by accident at the home of a mutual friend, Mrs. Walker. Winterbourne is disappointed when Daisy asks Mrs. Walker's permission to bring a close friend, Mr. Giovanelli, to her party. Winterbourne assumes that Giovanelli is a con man because of his flashy clothes, although the Italian man later proves to be a respectable lawyer. Daisy leaves Mrs. Walker's home on foot to meet Mr. Giovanelli in the square. Winterbourne volunteers to go with her, both because he is jealous and because it is improper for a young woman to walk in the streets alone. When they reach the square, Mr. Giovanelli is waiting for Daisy, who graciously invites Winterbourne to walk with them.

Mrs. Walker drives by in her carriage and stops. She is shocked that Daisy would walk in public with two men, although it is obvious that their outing is perfectly innocent. Mrs. Walker urges Daisy to get in the carriage with her, rather than create scandal by walking in public with a man. Daisy declines, rightly pointing out that she isn't doing anything wrong. Daisy does bring Mr. Giovanelli to the party, and in the following days, the two

spend a lot of time together in public. There is even speculation that they are engaged, or will soon be engaged. Winterbourne continues to see Daisy, and to defend her honor in conversations with his aunt, although he has private doubts.

Finally, one beautiful Roman midnight Winterbourne is enjoying the sight of the Colosseum by moonlight, quoted Lord Byron's poetry to himself, when he sees Daisy seated on the steps facing Giovanelli, who is standing in front of her. Winterbourne is shocked and realizes that Daisy is not a respectable young woman. Still, he urges Giovanelli to take her home, because the night air of the Colosseum is known to be unhealthy. This foreboding proves correct when Daisy falls ill with malaria and dies. Only after her death, speaking with Mr. Giovanelli, does Winterbourne realize that Daisy was completely innocent and all his suspicions were wrong.

On page 400, in a preface, author Henry James mentions that the story of Daisy Miller was based on a true incident related to him by a European friend, of an unaffected young American woman who formed an innocent friendship with an Italian man, completely unaware that she was violating social norms. James remembered the incident about nameless strangers and dramatized it to make a story. Later, he was chided by European friends as making a whole class of young American "flirts" seem better than they really were.

The critical discussion of this short story, by Millicent Bell, begins on page 431. Daisy Miller perfectly illustrates Henry James' ability to create uncertainty in the reader. Daisy Miller is a much more interesting character than the "bemused and sluggish" Winterbourne, yet we perceive her only through his eyes. This filtering of perception is typical of James. The story presents the typically masculine ways of looking at a woman of the time, as either virginal wife material or an immoral harlot. Ultimately, Winterbourne has been taught to classify everyone he meets, and Daisy Miller defies easy classification. His Victorian prudery and preoccupation with sex have deprived Winterbourne of the opportunity to develop a genuine relationship and lead an authentic life. Jame' story is a parody of the typical Victorian romance, as well as a commentary on the rigid social code of the European upper class at the time.

Daisy Miller: A Study Analysis

Daisy seems completely innocent and without guile, yet acts in ways that would be considered highly improper for a young European woman from a wealthy family. For example, she openly flirts with men she is attracted to, including Winterbourne. She also goes on a sightseeing trip alone with him, and even walks on a busy street in Rome after dark with a man. These actions are doubly shocking because they occur right out in the open, where anyone can see them. In the European culture of the time, young women were expected to be virgins, and to act disinterested in boys in public. They were never to be alone with a male. Married women were permitted to spend time alone with single men, a culture that made it much easier for a man to have a love affair with a married woman than with one who was single. Daisy knows nothing about these unwritten rules of European society and would not follow them if she did.

Although Daisy's behavior is willful and flirtatious, it is what today's psychologists would call authentic, meaning her actions match her thoughts and feelings. Daisy is innocent and chaste, and sees no reason to go to great lengths to disguise her interest in and affection for male friends. In Daisy's moral code, as long as she is honest and flirts in public, there is no reason to hide her true feelings. She has done nothing to be ashamed of, which is why she feels comfortable walking alone with a man in public. To Europeans, the fact that Daisy flaunts her friendships with men in public makes her especially wanton. They do not genuinely suspect that she is having sex with all her male friends, but because she does not follow the same strict rules of behavior as everyone else, they shun her.

Author Henry James does an excellent job of portraying ambiguity. At one point, Winterbourne sees what might have been a kiss pass between Daisy and Mr. Giovanelli under an umbrella. Their pose at the Colosseum fleetingly suggests that Daisy is performing oral sex on the Italian man. Neither, of course, is true, and eventually Daisy is proved to be innocent. However, the writer's skill raises doubts in the reader's mind, similar to Winterbourne's suspicions. It never occurs to Winterbourne that like him, Daisy merely wants to see the famous Roman ruin in the moonlight. Not until after her death does Winterbourne realize that all his suspicions were false and that Daisy was completely innocent.

This story is about the judgments and assumptions everyone makes about people every day, instead of taking the time to genuinely get to know someone. Someone may assume that a homeless person is mentally disturbed and not worth knowing, that someone who speaks English with an accent is ignorant or that anyone who is unemployed is lazy. These assumptions make it easier to navigate daily life, but they can also be inaccurate, depriving one of learning about many interesting and entertaining individuals. Because Winterbourne is unable to classify Daisy, he misses the opportunity of getting to know the woman who may have been the love of his life.

James' story underscores just how pretentious and artificial European manners were at the time. When Daisy strolls in the square with Mr. Giovanelli and Winterbourne, they are in full public view. In Rome, then as now, most residents stroll in the local square after dinner. No one really believes that Daisy is having sex with either man or with both men. Yet, they pretend to be shocked that a young woman would be alone in the presence of one man, let alone two. Winterbourne has been in Europe so long that he can think of a woman only as a wife or a lover, not as a friend. The problem with Daisy is that she is an individual, unique person, and Winterbourne has been trained only to see people as types fitting within predefined categories, not as real people.

The Aspern Papers

The Aspern Papers Summary

An unnamed young publisher is eager to lay his hands on the personal papers of the renowned poet Jeffery Aspern. He learns that Aspern's lover, the divine Juliana Bordereau, now an elderly woman, is living in Venice with her middle-aged niece. The young publisher rents a room from the two impoverished women, hoping to win their confidence and possession of the love letters. This effort is hampered by his fear of the powerful older woman and his halfhearted flirting with the niece, Miss Tita Bordereau. He has an opportunity to steal the papers, but is too timid to act. Eventually Juliana dies, and Miss Tita inherits the papers. If he marries the middle-aged, unattractive Miss Tita, the young publisher will have the papers. Horrified at her suggestion, the publisher wanders the streets of Venice all night. In the morning, he returns, resigned to the marriage, only to find that during the night, Miss Tita has burned the priceless papers.

The unnamed main character, a young publisher, confesses to friends that he intends to obtain the private papers of the famous poet Jeffery Aspern. He has already written to the poet's aged lover requesting the papers, and had been rudely rejected. The Misses Bordereau are two shy, reclusive, barely respectable American women who lived in Venice. Unknown to her friends, the ancient Julianne Bordereau was the former lover of Jeffery Aspern, the most revered poet of the previous generation. She lived quietly and cheaply with her niece, a stocky middle-aged spinster named Miss Tita Bordereau. He visits the two women in their shabby, crumbling but charming gray and pink mansion in Venice and convinces them to rent him several of their vacant second-floor rooms. In return, he will pay the exorbitant rent of 1,000 francs per month and hire someone to plant flowers, reviving the large, tangled garden. He tells friends that if necessary, he will even develop a romantic relationship with Miss Tita to gain the papers.

When the publisher is ushered into her presence, the ancient Juliana wears a green eye-shade. The publisher refuses to believe she is blind, and thinks the shade (and later bandages) protect men from the searing power of her beautiful eyes. Once he moves in, the ladies ignore him, and for months he does not see them at all, although he sends his servant with arms full of flowers for them each day. Although he knows Miss Tita loves flowers, the two women never acknowledge them. Finally he stops sending the flowers for four or five days, and Miss Tita meets him in the palace's large hall to thank him. With this encouragement, he begins to send the daily flowers again.

The publisher spends most evenings out in Venice. Coming home early one night, he encounters Miss Tita in the garden, and learns that it is her habit to walk there in the evening. He begins to join her, and the two become acquainted. Although Miss Tita is much older than he is, he occasionally flirts with her. Finally he mentions the Aspern papers. Initially Miss Tita denies that they exist, then admits that Miss Juliana used to have some papers in her trunk, but they are gone now. Meanwhile, Miss Juliana

encourages the romance and even allows the publisher to visit her occasionally, although she is very ill.

Miss Juliana shows the publisher a miniature portrait of Jeffery Aspern, painted by her father. She asks him to find out what price it would bring if she sold it. He is reluctant to give it up. The older woman demands 1,000 francs for it, far more than the publisher can afford. As the old woman lay on her deathbed, the publisher flirts with Miss Tita more than ever, encouraging her to look for the hidden papers. She refuses to do so while Miss Juliana is still alive.

One night when Miss Juliana is ill, the publisher notices that the door to her rooms has been left open. He ventures into her study, where he imagines the priceless papers are in a tall secretary, and that Miss Tita has left it unlocked for him. He cannot bring himself to open the secretary, and is barely able to contemplate testing the knob to see if it is locked. Suddenly, the blind Miss Juliana appears in the doorway and he rushes out, convinced that she has seen him. She accuses him of being a scoundrel, and collapses between him and Miss Tita. Fearing that she is dead, the publisher runs away, leaving Venice. Miss Juliana did not die that night, but returning to Venice, the publisher finds that she has died and been buried while he was gone.

Strolling with Miss Tita, he learns that Miss Juliana tried to burn the love letters before her death. Miss Tita says that the papers are so private, she could share them only with a close relative — a thinly disguised proposal of marriage. The publisher's revulsion at marriage to this timid, dumpy middle-aged woman shows in his face. Miss Tita recognizes this rejection. Shocked and embarrassed, the publisher dashes off, walking the narrow back streets of Venice all night. By dawn he has made up his mind to accept Miss Tita's offer, as the only way to gain the documents. He returns to the house to tell her, only to learn that during the night she has burned the priceless papers. The publisher kept the portrait of Jeffery Aspern, and sent Miss Tita more money than she asked for it. Still, every time he looks at it he remembers how he lost the Aspern papers.

Henry James' wordy notes on the Aspern papers begin on pages 395 and 403. This novella was based on an actual incident, where a critic tried to rent rooms in Florence from the ex-mistress of the poet Shelley, in hopes of gaining her trust and access to her papers. The woman's fifty-year-old niece promised to share them with him if he would marry her. In another event, the guardian of Lord Byron's papers refused to show them to anyone and even burned one letter. James notes that readers often assume that stories are the literal truth, that writers simply document them, rather than inventing them. However, in this case the story was based on an actual event.

William Veeder's criticism of the novella begins on page 442. Veeder sees the story in Freudian terms, as revealing the main character's (and presumably James') ambiguous sexual orientation. The young publisher seems terrified of the powerful Miss Juliana, a figure Veeder refers to repeatedly as the "phallic mother". This plays on an exaggerated male fear of women, especially powerful women. The weak young man is attracted to Miss Tita when she is timid, but his real passion is reserved for Jeffrey Aspern, who is

dead. This confusion of heterosexual, homosexual and "fusional archaic" sexual urges is what drives the plot, in Veeder's murky Freudian jargon.

The Aspern Papers Analysis

Jeffery Aspern is a thinly disguised version of Lord Byron, a poet that author Henry James revered and mentioned often in his work. The young publisher is in love with the poet Aspern, whom he has never met. Aspern has been dead for many years at the beginning of the story. At the same time, he is drawn to Miss Tita's weakness and vulnerability, the only characteristics in women that attract him. Miss Juliana, as a powerful, beautiful woman, terrifies him. The weak young narrator is infatuated with Jeffery Aspern. Since Aspern is dead, the only way to establish a deep connection with him is by having sex with Miss Tita, who may be Aspern's illegitimate daughter.

The young publisher is amazingly weak, timid and ineffectual. When he is presented with the opportunity to steal the papers, he cannot bring himself to open the tall wooden secretary where they are hidden. In fact, he cannot even bring himself to check the lock and is stopped cold by the gaze of a blind old woman. He is terrified by Miss Juliana because she was a powerful woman, and even her mousy niece seems formidable to him.

Many critics have pondered over author Henry James' sexual orientation, whether it is homosexual or asexual. James' portrayal of heterosexual attraction is unconvincing. The sexual confusion of the young publisher may be a reflection of James' own feelings as a young man. Although he tries to establish a romance with Miss Tita, it is mostly harmless courtesies. When she proposes marriage, a logical if unappetizing solution to their mutual problems, it is not primarily her age that he objects to. He flees in terror at the thought of having sex with a woman.

Sadly, homosexuality in the Victorian era required secrecy and duplicity, which is reflected in the young publisher's characteristic response to his environment. Miss Juliana is a fascinating woman who has led an adventurous life. Yet, it never occurs to the young publisher to befriend her and listen to her stories about his idol, Jeffrey Aspern. Instead, he attempts to gain the papers by lying, cheating and stealing. Ultimately his deceit is not successful, party because he cannot deceive himself into believing that he is heterosexual. Eventually he is left with only the portrait, a reminder of his desire for the great poet. This passion is impossible to satisfy, both because the poet is dead and because he is male.

The Pupil

The Pupil Summary

A young man named Pemberton is hired by Mrs. Moreen as tutor for her frail twelve-year-old son, Morgan, more often referred to as the pupil. As she makes the offer, she runs a pair of soiled suede gloves through her hands. Pemberton, like many of James' heroes, is weak, ineffective and afraid of his own shadow. Specifically, he is too frightened by the exotic Mrs. Moreen to even ask how much he will be paid for the job. When he finally asks Mr. Moreen, the boy's father agrees to a generous salary, perhaps too readily. Pemberton is too timid to mention that he has not been paid, even when the situation continues for months at a time.

The Moreens are a flamboyant American family far more interesting than their tutor. Mr. Moreen and his older son, twenty-year-old Ulrick, always conduct themselves as men of the world — a phrase that becomes a cliche as their duplicity is exposed. Mrs. Moreen is sophisticated and shallow, well dressed, spending her time visiting other society ladies and receiving them in return. Her two daughters Paula and Amy are beautifully dressed, although not beautiful. Their gay socializing assumes a frenzied pace as they try to save the family by catching wealthy husbands. The family has little money at the start of the story. They survive by living in posh hotels for several months, then leaving without paying the bills. In this way, the family travels to Paris, Venice and other European capitals.

After a few sporadic salary payments to Pemberton, Mrs. Moreen demands that he work for free. After all, he is receiving his room and board from the family. He eventually agrees, as she knew he would, out of affection for Morgan. However, Pemberton demands that Morgan be told the truth — that his parents are not paying Pemberton. The Moreen's reluctantly agree. This action creates a shift of power and a turning point in the story. The affection between Pemberton and Morgan deepens. They wander Paris like lovers, intent only upon each other. Because of this revelation, Morgan loses all respect for his parents and feels he has no one left but Pemberton.

Eventually, when Morgan is fourteen years old, he urges Pemberton to accept a highly-paid position tutoring a wealthy young man in England. After a year, Pemberton receives a letter that Morgan is very ill. He returns, only to find the Moreens in even worse financial circumstances. In an amazing plot twist, Mrs. Moreen suggests that Pemberton take Morgan and raise him as his own. Pemberton is shocked, and the shock shows on his face. Morgan incorrectly interprets this as a sign that his passion for Pemberton is not returned. He collapses in a faint and dies soon afterward of a broken heart.

In his comments beginning on page 409, author Henry James reveals that The Pupil was based on a story told to him by an acquaintance on a train, of a flamboyant, pretentious band of American gypsies, whose youngest son was precocious.

Michael Moon, in a commentary beginning on page 453, examines the story from the viewpoint of a series of visual and erotic captures between the love triangle of the boy Morgan, his flamboyant mother and his tutor, Pemberton. Thus, the "pupil" has two meanings, student and eye. The Moreens' choices of velvets and other fine fabrics only reveal their shabby pretensions to wealth. In particular, Moon points out the suede gloves Mrs. Moreen is fondling in the initial scene. Suede literally means "undressed kid" in a dictionary of the time, therefore Moon believes that James consciously or unconsciously selected them to symbolize Mrs. Moreen's eventually offering her son to his tutor erotically, what he claims is just one of many examples of "perverse" energy in the work of Henry James.

Philip Horne, in a commentary beginning on page 457, takes issue with this interpretation of the suede gloves, although he acknowledges that James frequently translates his actual homosexual impulses into heterosexual scenes in stories. He points out that while many modern commentators believe that James was homosexual, during his young adult years he seemed more asexual or even frightened of sex (of any kind), especially including heterosexual sex and powerful women. Many readers over the years have found the Pupil and James' other work homoerotic. The pairing of a young lover and an older one may be autoerotic, meaning the sexual energy is focused on oneself. Horne also points out that while James referred to "queer affairs", in the Victorian age "queer" could mean many things, including unusual, odd, strange and even temporarily short of money.

Other critics have called Pemberton's moment of shock when being offered custody of Morgan a "homosexual panic", suggesting that Pemberton was momentarily paralyzed by terror at having his sexual orientation publicly exposed. However, Horne suggests that this was not James' conscious intention in writing the scene, although it may have been an unconscious one. He also notes that Horace Scudder, the editor of Atlantic Monthly, who first published most of James' work, rejected this story because the topic was "too delicate" for the magazine.

The Pupil Analysis

Although Moon's pun of "undressed kid" seems far-fetched, the symbolism of the soiled suede gloves is unmistakable. Suede was a very expensive fabric that feels like the softest skin in an intimate embrace. At the time, it was almost impossible to clean suede gloves. Once soiled, they were ruined forever. The implication is that Mrs. Moreen, in possession of something extremely valuable and delicate, treats it carelessly and destroys its value. If one believes that she is literally or figuratively giving her pubescent son to the tutor, the connection is obvious.The languid gesture itself carries sexual connotations. The Moreens are equally careless of their money, lavishly wasting it on expensive hotels and pastimes.

The Moreens are an interesting family. They are charming, amusing, intelligent, fluent in several languages and have even invented a private family language. In Charles Dicken's hands they would have been hilarious and poignant. In Jane Austen's,

fascinating, entertaining and perhaps tragic. James treats them as a natural disaster, a catastrophe of monumental, insurmountable proportions. His narrow view does not allow that someone who is not wealthy might be interesting or even admirable. James treats the Moreens as despicable, although their greatest sin for most of the story is not having much money.

However, the Moreens sink into villainy when they offer custody of their younger son to Pemberton. The implication that the fourteen-year-old Morgan will be sexually available to his tutor at some point is obvious. Morgan adores Pemberton and wants to live with him, but the tutor is frightened. He has no money to support the child, and such a household is irregular, if not downright scandalous. If the arrangement lasts for long, it will become apparent that the two are homosexual lovers — if they are not already. Although Pemberton and Morgan are attracted to each other, James leaves the issue of their physical involvement ambiguous. It may be that he believed readers would see physical involvement as impossible due to the age difference. What is apparent is that Pemberton has an inappropriate emotional involvement with the boy,and encourages the boy's passion for him. Even if they are not lovers, they are in love with each other.

The story hinges on a Victorian concept that some people were inherently finer than others, being born not just with superior intelligence but with greater sensibilities,or inborn moral sense and perception. Writers often portray artists including poets, writers and painters in this category. Morgan Moreen is one of these superhuman creatures. They were often afflicted with poor health or terminal illness, which was thought to fine-tune their sensibilities and generally displayed their superiority.

Brooksmith

Brooksmith Summary

Brooksmith is the short, extremely competent butler for Mr. Oliver Offord. Mr. Offord's poor health require him to stay at home, where he receives visitors every day. With Brooksmith's help, Mr. Offord conducts a salon of fascinating men — and a few women — discussing the great art and ideas of the time. While Mr. Offord steers the conversation, it is Brooksmith who chooses which visitors to admit, allowing in only those with great ideas, who would mix well together. Mr. Offord and Brooksmith are not just employer and employee, but the most "intimate" friends. Brooksmith is always on hand to clear up misunderstandings, acting as a moderator and even speaking French to the guests. In turn, it is obvious that Brooksmith enjoys the intellectual stimulation of the fascinating conversations.

Eventually Mr. Offord grows too ill to receive visitors. The narrator still stops by regularly, to chat with Brooksmith in the vestibule. Soon Mr. Offord dies, leaving Brooksmith a legacy of only eighty pounds. Brooksmith is grief-stricken, both with sadness for losing his good friend and the chance to mingle in society, even as a servant. The nameless narrator cannot afford to hire Brooksmith, and other members of the salon believe it would be improper, like hiring one's uncle or a dear friend as a servant. Eventually Brooksmith finds several jobs in lower-class households, although he doesn't last long at any of them.

Finally, Brooksmith falls ill, and the narrator is summoned by an aunt to his bedside. The narrator says a few encouraging words and leaves. It seems too embarrassing to give Brooksmith money directly, although he sends some the next day by messenger. Brooksmith recovers and hires out as a waiter by the day. The narrator encounters him several times, serving at dinner parties where the narrator is a guest. Then he sees the former butler no more, no matter how many dinner invitations he accepts. Finally he sees Brooksmith's aunt again. The woman tells her that after his mother's death, Brooksmith simply went out to wait tables one night and never came back, disappearing forever. The narrator reflects that Brooksmith was probably waiting tables for the gods, the only job he was suited for after being spoiled by Mr. Offord.

In James' notes beginning on page 394, he reports that Brooksmith is based on an incident involving the death of an acquaintance and her maid's grief at not only losing a friend, but any chance of mixing in society and hearing interesting conversation.

Brooksmith Analysis

James employs dramatic irony in saying that Mr. Offord was not rich, he had only his home and a pension. Many people would consider that great wealth, but James' characters are rich upper-class Englishmen who would not. By focusing this tale on the

butler, James defies the Victorian convention of ignoring the help, the servants who made everyday life possible and pleasant. The suggestion that the bachelor Mr. Offord and his butler and intimate friend Brooksmith were lovers is probably not something that James intended, although it may have been subconscious. It was customary for wealthy people in the Victorian era to leave bequests to their servants. Mr. Offord's bequest to Brooksmith is unexpectedly meager. It is enough to set up a tiny shop, although the unnamed narrator cannot imagine the dignified butler as a shopkeeper.

This story explores a common concept in books and novels, that employees, servants and slaves somehow love the people they serve. This idea was popular with the upper classes, those who could afford to purchase the most books in Victorian times. It is not, however, generally accurate — bosses are not universally loved now, and they weren't then. Although affection does occur, it is much more uncommon than fiction would lead one to believe. Interestingly, in true James' fashion he has transformed the fascinating female characters into two old male bachelors with a deep, possibly homosexual connection. The presumption inherent in this story, of course, is that the wealthy are far more intelligent, charming, amusing and perceptive than those with less money. The idea that poorer people could have lives just as interesting as rich ones seems never to have occured to James. Nor did the idea that servants might be relieved to be free of the constant demands of their masters.

The Real Thing

The Real Thing Summary

A distinguished gentleman and lady, Major and Mrs. Monarch, visit the main character, an unnamed illustrator. They are so well-dressed that he expects them to commission him to paint their portraits. Instead, they ask for work as artist's models. The two are obviously well-born and typical of the type that frequents country houses, not very intelligent but good, agreeable company. They insist they will make excellent models for his illustrations of the wealthy, because they are "the real thing". The illustrator reluctantly agrees to try them.

Meanwhile, he accepts an assignment to illustrate a famous book. If he is successful, he will be awarded the commission for a series of books. He uses his usual models, a freckled young cockney girl named Miss Churm and his Italian manservant, Oronte. The two are incredibly gifted. With a few changes in costume or pose, they can become any character, from a poor servant girl to a queen. The Monarch's are not so gifted. Try as they might, they could not look like anything except themselves. Both were tall, and in the illustrations always dominated the other characters.

The Monarchs are shocked to discover that the artist selects Miss Churm and Oronte to be the models for the highly refined main characters in the illustrations. Eventually an artist friend, Jack Hawley, points out that all the illustrations with the Monarchs in them are insipid, that associating with them has actually hurt the narrator's art. He tells them they cannot pose any more. Still, they insist on hanging around his studio and even doing the servant's work, making tea and washing the dishes. They suggest that the artist hire them as servants, but that is so unsuitable that he cannot bring himself to do it. Still, even if the episode hurt his work, he doesn't regret the experience.

The Real Thing Analysis

The artist's first impression is that the pair at too good-looking to be celebrities. This seems an unlikely conclusion to the modern reader accustomed to beautiful models and actors on TV. However, in the Victorian era, wealth was usually inherited and it was not usually accompanied by physical beauty. Their very name is regal, monarch meaning king and implying the beautiful butterfly of the same name. The artist is at first flattered and a little intimidated by the Monarchs. Later, he is gratified to have them waiting on him like servants, even though he feels it is inappropriate. Despite their pride and conviction that they are better than other people, the Monarchs have the humility to work as servants if necessary, to earn a living. In that sense, they are the real thing after all.

This story explores the nature of truth and reality. In fact, the Monarchs are not real wealthy English persons of the class they represent. Because they are poor, they are a

bit of a fraud. In the past they survived by traveling from country house to country house as invited guests. They really own almost nothing except their very beautiful, hand-tailored clothes. It is as if the Monarchs have played the role of gentility so long that they can no longer change or adapt. Miss Churm and Oronte, on the other hand, are real models. Like actors, they are able to assume any identity and vary their appearance to match the role. In terms of being artist's models, the Monarchs are not the real thing. The story also suggests that the nature of art is to make something what it is not, to improve upon it, rather than to accurately reproduce it. That is certainly what James seems to have done when he embellished and dramatized the kernel of an idea for various stories.

The Middle Years

The Middle Years Summary

On a soft, bright day in April, author Dencombe is resting on a bench along a path in the seaside health resort of Bournemouth, England. Dencombe is convalescing from an unspecified but serious illness. On his lap he holds a package he has just received. He opens it to find the first copy of his most recent novel, The Middle Years. He has published so many novels that he is no longer excited to receive the new one. He knows that when he opens it, he will see all the flaws that he should have revised before it was published. In addition, Dencombe is very aware that he is past the mid-way point in his life. He has fewer years to live. Worst of all, he feels that he has reached his peak, as a person and a writer. His physical health will continue to decline. He also thinks that he will never be a better person or a better writer than he already has been.

Dencombe is momentarily distracted by three people climbing the path below him. A a stout middle-aged matron, well dressed if somewhat flashy, is accompanied by a slender, mousy young woman and a well-dressed, fit young man. Dencombe makes up a little story about them, as writers are wont to do. He imagines that the young girl is a poor relation of the older woman's, and is madly in love with the dashing young male heir. The young man, however, is ignoring both his companions and reading a book with an attractive red cover.

Dencombe opens the book on his lap. Because of his severe illness, he has forgotten everything about it, and is looking at it through new eyes, as if it were someone else's work. He is relieved to find that it is excellent — shining jewels of prose adorn every page. It may be his last book, he may not be well enough or live long enough to write another, but it is a masterpiece. As the three companions approach, the young man, Dr. Hugh, wants to stop at the bench and read, but the younger woman, Miss Vernham, insists that he accompany the Countess. Dr. Hugh puts his book down on the bench and walks up the path with them. Dencombe notices that the young man has an early copy of his own book. Each assumes that the other is a book reviewer.

When Dr. Hugh returns, he lavishly praises the book. Dencombe learns that the overweight Countess has hired the recent graduate to be her personal physician. Miss Vernham is her paid companion. Dr. Hugh is shocked to see that Dencombe has marked up his copy of the book. Before Dencombe can confess that he is the author, he faints. Later he learns that Dr. Hugh got him back to his hotel in a bath-chair. The two men become close friends. Dencombe confesses that he believes his best books are still unwritten. If he only had another lifetime to work! Dr. Hugh assures him that he will have a second chance to finish all he plans, and it really seems that the young doctor will miraculously cure him. Dr. Hugh lavishly praises Dencombe's work and even says that it is the mistakes he admires.

Dr. Hugh spends more and more time with Dencombe, both as a friend and as a physician. This leads to his ignoring his duties to the Countess. Miss Vernham warns Dencombe to leave Dr. Hugh alone — that if Dr. Hugh is not more attentive to the Countess, she will disinherit him. Dencombe wants to leave the resort but collapses again, which his doctor sees as an ominous sign. A few days later, Dr. Hugh returns with a literary journal in hand. He wants to show Dencombe an excellent review of The Middle Years. The Countess has died suddenly, cursing Dr. Hugh and depriving him of any inheritance. It is apparent that Dencombe is dying. Dr. Hugh decides to with the man for whom he has sacrificed so much. Dencombe dies, realizing that we all only get one chance.

Henry James' comments begin on pages 398 and 413. In them, James reveals that he considered making the Dencombe character a painter rather than a writer. He had two original ideas for the plot — that the artist or writer should realize that what he had already accomplished was his masterpiece, or that he should be given a second chance and know exactly how to use it. This illuminates James' writing process, since he decided that the first plot would be stronger. He also notes that there should be a second character, a doctor, "a young pilgram who admires him". This adoration and admiration seems essential to James.

The commentary by Julie Rivkin begins on page 470. She draws a connection between revision and the act of reading, saying that both are essential to writing. She believes that Dencombe's dedication to revision reduced his output, and it is this that he regrets. In a sense, Dencombe now wishes to revise his life. In another sense, revision is life and the only end to revision is death. James work suggests that artistic creation is the source of all wealth. He sees only men as capable of artistic creation and women as parasites, because both the Countess and Miss Vernham have inherited money from talented men. She cites Dencombe's remarks on his own work as "jewels rare...hang[ing] between the columns of his temple" as a comparison to male genitalia, and confirmation of this theory.

Commentary by Joyce Carol Oates begins on page 480. She sees The Middle Years as having a myth-like quality and exploring the artist's ever-present fear that his or her work is worthless, or not good enough. There is also the issue of the isolation of creating art. While Dencombe rejects women, the metaphors of a wedding bell signifies a spiritual marriage between Dencombe and Dr. Hugh, if not a physical union. Through this union, Dencombe hopes to ensure his immortality.

The Middle Years Analysis

This story can be read in several different ways. First, there is the literal meaning. Probably many people die thinking that they have not accomplished all that they meant to in life. This may be especially true of artists or writers, because art is infinite. (The alternative is to feel that one is finished with life and eager to die, a depressing thought.) In modern terms, Dencombe finds that several items on his bucket list are not checked off. Apparently all of those items involve writing and books. Dencombe's wife and son

are dead, but he does not seem to have regrets about his family life. Perhaps his books are his children. Certainly, Dr. Hugh seems to assume the role of favored son and best reader for a time. Julie Rivikin and Joyce Carol Oates suggest two different readings of the story.

The nature of writing, and all art, is that one is constantly honing one's craft. Most modern writers believe, as Dencombe did, that revision is an essential part of writing. This story seems especially poignant now that life expectancies are longer, and many writers or artists are productive into their eighties. In a sense, everyone alive today has been granted the second chance that Dencombe only dreams of. On the other hand, life is finite, and there is still an urgency to use the time well.

There are homoerotic undertones in the story, where Dencombe takes the place of Miss Vernham, a potential wife, in Dr. Hugh's affections. In addition, Dr. Hugh abandons his professional commitments to the Countess and a large inheritance from her, to become a disciple of Dencombe's. The infatuation between the two men overshadows all other relationships in their lives. Although Dr. Hugh provides some medical advice, he in many ways acts as a son or significant other, rather than displacing Dencombe's physician.

In The Cage

In The Cage Summary

An intelligent, unnamed young woman works as a telegraph operator in a small English post office branch located inside Cocker's, an upscale grocery in tan expensive neighborhood in London. She is engaged to Mr. Mudge, an earnest, decent but dull grocer. Her father and siblings are dead, so she supports her alcoholic mother. Mr. Mudge is quite willing to support her mother and allow her to live with the couple after marriage. He has recently been promoted, and encourages the telegraphist to move to the cheaper Chalk Farms neighborhood, near his new job, so that he can see her every day. As an added inducement, she would also save three shillings a week on rent. However, the telegraphist has a mind of her own, and refuses, saying that it is worth three shillings to encounter the upper class people she sees at work daily.

Two of those upper-class people become important to the telegraphist. A lady dashes in and sends three telegrams, signed "Mary" or "Cissy". One is to a man named Everard at a hotel in Paris. When the man comes in later to send a telegram to the woman, she intuits that Captain Everard is having an affair with a married woman, Lady Bradeen. She pieces together tidbits of their lives from the dozens of telegrams they send, although sometimes she goes weeks without seeing either of them. In particular, she develops an infatuation with Captain Everard, which has no effect on her lukewarm affection for her fiancee, Mr. Mudge.

At one point the telegraphist is able to correct an error in a telegram sent by Lady Bradeen and at another point to recall a crucial series of numbers from a telegram Captain Everard sent months before. Lady Bradeen understands from these actions that the telegraphist is watching them, and she stops using that post office. The telegraphist makes it a habit to stroll by Captain Everard's posh rented apartment on the way home from work, lingering in the doorway. One day she encounters him there and speaks to him, walking with him to a nearby park. At first he does not recognize her, away from the post office. It is clear to both the reader and the Captain from her conversation that the telegraphist has a crush on him, and that he does not return her affections. The telegraphist believes that the Captain loves her but is naturally too refined to show it, given the difference in social status.

By chance, the telegraphist learns from a friend, Mrs. Jordan, that Lady Bradeen's husband has uncovered her affair with Captain Everard. The telegraphist has prevented it from becoming a huge scandal in some unspecified way, in helping them send corrected telegrams. The husband died shortly afterward, and Lady Bradeen will soon marry Captain Everard. The telegraphist is disappointed to learn that Captain Everard has almost no money and many gambling debts. Disappointed, she makes plans to marry Mr. Mudge within the month.

Henry James' comments on the story begin on page 414, where he reveals that the origin of the story is obvious—the revelations that people make to a telegraph operator without realizing it.

Commentary by John Carolos Rowe begins on page 483. He notes that at this stage of his life, due to arthritis in his wrist, James was dictating his stories to a secretary or typist, much as one dictated a telegram to the telegraph operator. Despite his frequent use of new technology, James seemed to regard telegrams, typewriters and other contraptions as competition for the writer. In fact, the telegraph industry did open up opportunities for young working-class women. By focusing on one of these young women, a class not usually seen in late Victorian fiction, James may have minimized the perceived threat from this emerging technology.

In The Cage Analysis

James' class prejudices are obvious in this story. He assumes that wealthy people are fascinating and people of modest means are boring — this is the telegraphist's main reason for not moving to Chalk Farms. This classism also accounts for the heroine's very strange emotional reactions to Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, which seem inexplicable by today's standards. The telegraphist is not shocked to learn that the Lady is cheating on her husband. That appears not to be a factor in the story at all, a commentary on Victorian morals. The telegraphist considers her social status so far below Everard's that she is gratified when he ignores her. In her mind, ignoring her proves that he is the fine gentleman that she love and admires. She is not jealous of Lady Bradeen, but flattered that someone she is infatuated with could be in love with a lady so elegant and beautiful. While these emotions make sense in the structure of the story, it seems unlikely that any real human being ever felt this way.

The telegraphist is an observer of life, as all writers are. She lives vicariously by figuring out the personal lives of those who send crytpic telegrams from her post office. There is dramatic irony in the conversation in the park between Captain Everard and the young woman. It is clear to the reader that Captain Everard does not return her affections, and even avoids her after her feelings become obvious.

Several essential facts of the story are never revealed, making it ultimately unsatisfying. The reader never understands why it matters which post office Lady Bradeen's reply is sent to. Nor is the meaning of the sequence of numbers remembered by the telegraphist, or their importance ever explained. While these details might have been crucial in a mystery or spy story, they are apparently incidental and insignificant in James' human drama.

The Beast in the Jungle

The Beast in the Jungle Summary

Touring a country manor house full of artistic treasures, fine paintings and curios one October afternoon, John Marcher encounters May Bartram. Marcher's theory is that he was invited along only because he got lost in the crowd. May is a guest staying at the house, and knowledgeable about the treasures it contains. Lingering over a portrait together, May reminds him that they met in Italy some seven or ten years ago. She even remembers that on a boat ride there, he confided a great secret to her. Marcher is shocked and embarrassed to recall that he had confided his great secret to May. The secret is that he believes that a something great will happen to him, an earth-shaking event both strange and terrible.

The friendship continues after May receives a small inheritance that allows her to buy a modest home in London, where Marcher lives. They become close companions, and it is obvious that May is in love with Marcher. He thinks of her as his best friend and closest companion. She is pretty, yet he never considers love, marriage or sex with her. Marcher leads an extremely quiet life, working a government job and accepting dinner invitations from a few friends. He intentionally keeps a low profile to avoid others detecting his secret.

After many years, May becomes very ill. Marcher visits her, and she tells him that the great, terrible event that he has waited all his life for has already happened. The event that was to define his life, to make him special, has already occurred. Marcher does not understand what she means. After she dies, he realizes that the great secret was that nothing was going to happen to him. His great, terrible event was the lack of any great, terrible event — a life where nothing happens. He realizes that he should have fallen in love with May, and had a normal life like everyone else, instead of waiting for something wonderful to happen.

Henry James' comments about the story begin on pages 399 and 417. In them, James mentions that the story revolves around "another poor, sensitive gentleman", an acknowledgment of his many weak male characters who brood much and very seldom take action.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's commentary on the story begins on page 503. She points out that until the end of the 1800s, about the time this story was written, homosexuality was literally "the love that cannot be named". It was completely unacceptable to mention it or allude to it in any form. Prior to the trials of Oscar Wilde, there was no recognized role for homosexuals in society that crossed class boundaries. In fact, James' "poor, sensitive gentlemen", "artists" or confirmed bachelors may have been as close as one could get to open homosexuality. Sedgwick cites Marcher's inaction as an other example of "male homosexual panic" that she finds in The Pupil. In this case, Marcher is

so paralyzed by fear that someone will uncover his secret that his life is essentially wasted.

The Beast in the Jungle Analysis

This story works best if it is read, as Sedgwick suggests, as an allegory about keeping the secret of homosexuality. Otherwise, it is literally a story where nothing happens — and it takes James thousands and thousands of words of impenetrable prose to say that nothing happens. Even if The Beast in the Jungle is about homosexuality, James is unable to approach the topic directly. Therefore, the story is about the fact that John Marcher has a secret that is hidden from the world. The content of the secret is less important than the ruse of maintaining it, which may have been how James and others of the age experienced homosexuality — that it was less ponderous than the ruse required to hide it.

Marcher's conviction that he is special, that something strange and marvelous is bound to happen in his life, is not unusual for adolescents. In a way, every adolescent feels that he or she is odd and unique. However, Marcher's secret becomes the central fact of his existence, taking over his whole life. As time passes, he becomes more and more afraid of this coming cataclysm, to the point of neurosis or anxiety disorder. He does not fall in love, marry or have children, because doing to might reveal his secret. It does not occur to him, as it does to May and the reader, that falling in love or having children might be the singular, wonderful yet disastrous event he is destined for. Alternatively, falling in love and marrying may be essential for the great event to happen, if the event is the death of a child, or finding a cure for the horrible disease that killed his wife.

The Jolly Corner

The Jolly Corner Summary

After living in Europe for thirty-three years, Spencer Brydon returns to New York, to live in his boyhood home on a jolly corner. The fifty-six-year-old man decides to renovate a second house that he has inherited, converting it into apartments that will generate more income. The rents from the two homes have enabled him to live comfortably in Europe all these years. Brydon is astounded by the changes in New York in the third of a century that he has been gone. Things he used to find ugly now charm him. The famous, modern improvements he often finds repulsive. Yet some things are unchanged, like his dear friend, the gentle, artistic Miss Staverton.

Brydon finds that he has an aptitude for overseeing the renovations of the second house into a large apartment building. He wonders how he would have turned out if he had stayed in New York and focused on making a fortune, rather than visiting the museums of Europe. Miss Staverton says that he would probably have made a million dollars creating ugly apartment buildings.

Brydon is living in a hotel but takes Miss Staverton to show her the house on jolly corner, his family home. It is completely empty. A cleaning woman, Mrs. Muldoon, comes in once a day but she refuses to remain after dark because she claims that the house is haunted. He begins to be obsessed with the idea that his alter ego, the ghost of the man he would have been had he stayed in New York, haunts the house on jolly corner. Miss Staverton admits that she has seen such a person in her dreams.

Determined to confront the alter ego, Brydon stays one night in the empty house. He confronts the dark ghost of the man he could have been, is engulfed and overpowered by this alternate self. When he comes to, it is afternoon. Mrs. Muldoon is there and he is cradled in Alice Staverton's lap. Miss Staverton admits that she dreamed of the dark ghost of Brydon again. He has seen his dark self and understands him. His alter ego has two fingers missing, perhaps from an accident. His sight is ruined, but he is wealthy. Miss Staverton cradles him in her lap and exclaims that she loves him, just the say he is.

The commentary by Kenneth Warren begins on page 515. The story mirrors James' own return to New York after some thirty years away. Almost everyone wonders about the "road untaken". In Brydon's case, that alternate reality would include staying in New York and choosing a life of commerce as a builder, and possibly great wealth, rather than pursuing a quiet, contemplative life in Europe. The fact that Brydon's alter ego is black echoes the racism of the time, when African Americans had little access to museums and other repositories of culture.

The Jolly Corner Analysis

The choice between culture or quality of life and money — crass commercialism - is one many people struggle with. It is reflected in many novels and short stories. In this case, James expresses it directly as a brutal psychological struggle between two parts of the same man. James wrote many ghost stories, although this is the only one included in the collection. Victorian readers were fond of ghost stories, which satisfied their need for the supernatural, and for horror, without actually presenting any frightening realities.

The chaste relationship between Miss Staverton and Brydon is one of the most convincing portrayals of heterosexual love in James' short stories. She is more like the current, European version of Brydon, but has great sympathy for his alter ego, the wealthy, blinded, culturally deprived builder of monstrous apartment houses. The ghost's blindness is symbolic. He is not trained to appreciate art and architecture, and was therefore blind to their beauty, and to the ugliness of his own structures, even when his sight was perfect. In some sense, it is the ghost's greed that has blinded him to the finer things in life.

The Art of Fiction

The Art of Fiction Summary

Introduction: Much of James' language for literary criticism is derived from the accepted terminology for discussion of painting, partly because James studied painting before turning to writing. His first writing assignments were nonfiction pieces on the great churches and museums of Europe. His essays on the craft of writing are not consistent, partly because they were written over many decades. Editorial considerations required that short stories in James' time be 6,000 to 8,000 words, a limit he found hard to work with. He preferred to write novellas, novels and longer short stories 10,000 words or more. Still, at some point he made a conscious effort to write more short stories, which were highly salable.

James believed that the writer could treat a story as a picture or a scene. A picture was a highly descriptive internal dialogue describing the main character's thoughts, feelings and memories. A scene was like a play, focusing on external actions including spoken dialogue. In reality, James alternated between both methods in all his stories, although the longer ones include more pictorial parts.

In The Art of Fiction, Henry James notes that art thrives on discussion, and that fiction should be considered fine art along with poetry, architecture, painting and music. Although there is an old superstition that fiction is wicked, this is untrue. Fiction should attempt to represent reality just as a painting does. Many people believe that fiction should be either educational or entertaining, however, few agree on exactly what this means. There is more than one way to write a good novel. Bad novels will eventually be ignored, just as bad paintings or statues are. He quotes Mr. Besant's general laws of fiction, that characters must be lifelike, that the author should write from experience, that characters should be distinct from each other. Mr. Besant also suggests that English novels should have a conscious moral purpose, that the story is everything, and that writers should keep a notebook of ideas and jottings.

While Henry James agrees with these rules in general, he finds them too vague to be truly useful. Imagination is more important than genius, in writing. A young lady who grows up in a small village may write about military life if she is "a damsel upon whom nothing is lost." So, James advises writers to be keen observers of everyday life around them. The writer should be able to take shreds of experience, mere glimpses of life, and extrapolate the complete universe of the story.

Although many people try to create divisions between novels, all of them contain some romance and all include both character and incidents. The writer, and other writers learn as much from their failures, their near misses, as their successes. Any premise is suitable for a novel as long as it is rich with possibilities. Characters should be a cross-section, not exclusively those who are good or pleasant. James sees story as inherent in every part of every novel. He suggests that a novel need not have a moral purpose —

in fact, it can no more be moral or immoral than a painting can. Most of all, fiction must be sincere.

Richard Hocks' commentary on the essay begins on page 423. Although James is known primarily as a novelist, he consistently produced high-quality short fiction throughout his career, including short stories and novellas. His short stories follow the progress of his career, from sharp critiques of European society to his later involved, convoluted prose featuring metaphor and imagery. A major achievement is his invention of Internationalism, a story about an American in European society. He also wrote ghost stories and was one of the first people to critically analyze the novel as an art form.

The Art of Fiction Analysis

The points raised by Mr. Besant have stood the test of time. Most of them are among the basics of fiction taught in any university today. Yet, James' points are well taken. The rules of fiction is much less precise than painting, and therefore harder to teach. What one writer considers lifelike another might think wildly unrealistic. James' confusion about what focusing on the story means reveals a great deal about his writing. Many critics would say that while portions of James' writing is brilliant, he lacks focus on plot, that little to no discernible action occurs in his stories, especially some of the later stories, that deal with interior monologue, point of view and consciousness.

Characters

Daisy Millerappears in Daisy Miller: A Study

Daisy Miller is a young American woman of about seventeen who is traveling in Europe with her mother and young brother. Her father, a wealthy financier, remains at home in New York. Because of his wealth, Daisy is able to wear the finest fashions from Paris, although she favors girlish frills and ruffles. Daisy's mother is in poor health and prefers not to accompany her daughter on her many outings. She seems to implicitly trust Daisy's integrity and virtue. In European society, integrity and virtue are beside the point — appearances are what matter.

Daisy is fresh, innocent and lovely in an unspoiled way. She has no pretenses, and acts on her genuine feelings. She openly flirts when men that she finds attractive, something that is forbidden in the strict social climate of Geneva at the time. She is friendly with people she finds interesting, even when they are not as wealthy as her father.

Daisy makes friends with a number of young men in Europe, and can often been seen innocently strolling with them in public parks or streets. This is scandalous behavior for a young European woman, who might have a lover in private but would never flirt in public. Friends are shocked when Daisy agrees to an evening sightseeing trip by boat to a ruined castle, alone with Mr. Winterbourne, whom she has just met. Despite her unconventional behavior, Daisy is entirely innocent and would probably be right at home in most modern high schools.

Pembertonappears in The Pupil

Pemberton is the quintessential weak, ineffective male Jamesan "hero", perhaps more properly referred to as a main character. Although he has graduated with honors from both Yale and Oxford, arguably the two most prestigious universities in the U.S. and Europe, he is afraid that the twelve-year-old student will be smarter than he is. Pemberton is too frightened to ask Mrs. Moreen what his salary will be, and when he is not paid, he is too scared to ask for it for several months.

Part of Pemberton's difficulty is that he is homosexual, which is absolutely forbidden in the Victorian era. He feels no attraction to the pupil's older sisters, or any other woman, and he is positively terrified of Mrs. Moreen. In addition, he is sexually attracted to his male student, Morgan Moreen, who is about a decade younger. Pemberton is probably not a pedophile. He seems immature for his chronological age, and may well be developmentally or socially his pupil's equal. However, then as now, society frowns upon intimate relations between students and teachers, and Pemberto must conceal this attraction while becoming more emotionally involved with his young charge.

Even when crisis looms, Pemberton is unable to act decisively to save his young charge. In fact, his indecision and timidity is read as reluctance, and his young student

dies of heartbreak. One of James' greatest contributions to literature is the concept that milquetoast, humorless characters like Pemberton, as annoying as they can be, may be suitable subjects for narratives.

Miss Juliana Bordereauappears in Aspern Papers

James' work is littered with strong, fascinating women who are incidental to his stories about weak, ineffective young men. Miss Juliana Bordereau is perhaps the best example. When she appears in the narrative, Miss Juliana is ancient and wizened, her compelling eyes blinded and shielded by a green eyeshade or bandages. In her youth, Miss Juliana was the mistress of the famous American poet Jeffery Aspern. As his muse, she inspired much of his poetry and their illicit love affair was legendary.

Now impoverished, Miss Juliana lives with her middle-aged niece — who may actually be her illegitimate daughter and therefore Aspern's child — in Venice, the most romantic of cities. The two live in a crumbling palace that like Miss Juliana herself, is still beautiful and romantic. In contrast to her great passion for Aspern, Miss Juliana is greedy and grasping, charging her boarder much more than the rooms are worth. She also tries to sell him a miniature portrait of Aspern, at a price far higher than market value. This greed may be an essential part of her character. After all, she pursued Aspern — greedy for his passion — when it was socially unacceptable for her to do so. Alternately, the greed may simply stem from her poverty and urge to provide for her niece. The reader may long to know more about Miss Juliana's fascinating life as the great artist's paramour and an independent woman in Victorian Europe, but James instead focuses on a male character so weak and ineffective that he doesn't even have a name.

Morgan Moreen appears in The Pupil

Morgan Moreen is the twelve-year-old boy that Pemberton takes on as tutor. The youngest in a family of pretentious, extravagant Americans who live flamboyantly and dishonestly, the child recognizes them for what they are — morally bankrupt pretenders. Morgan is more intelligent than other members of his family, but even more important, he has an inborn sense of honor and moral code that is far superior to his family's. He is so noble that when his beloved tutor is offered a better job, Morgan urges him to take it for his own good, even though it will leave the boy alone with his despicable family.

Brooksmithappears in Brooksmith

Brooksmith is the refined, well-educated but short butler of Mr. Offord. With consummate skill, he selects the participants in Mr. Offord's famous salon, ensuring that misunderstanding are avoided and conversation flows smoothly. When Mr. Offord dies, Brooksmith is crushed because he has lost his best friend and the intellectual stimulation of the salon.

The Monarchsappears in The Real Thing

Major and Mrs. Monarch are supposedly "the real thing", born to gentile upper-class British life. They look the part. Both are tall, good-looking and have excellent posture. The major has a full moustache, and a hand-tailored suit. His wife is well-groomed and beautifully dressed. They are accustomed to visiting friends at their country houses. Now in need of money, they appeal to an illustrator to use them as models for his work, with unexpected results.

Mr. Winterbourneappears in Daisy Miller: A Study

Mr. Winterbourne is the narrator of the story, a twenty-seven-year old man who lives in Geneva. He is represented as both a student and a young man having an affair with an older, married woman. Visiting his aunt in the resort town of Vevey, he meets Daisy Miller. She is a young American woman completely unlike the European women he knows, and he cannot understand her or clearly categorize her. Compared to Daisy Miller, Winterbourne is glum, stodgy, formal, weak and no fun at all.

Duncombeappears in The Middle Years

Duncombe is the author of the novel The Middle Years. He is past middle age, and convalescing from an unspecified serious illness. Duncombe was married, but his wife and son are dead. He feels that he has just reached his full powers as a writer, and his greatest wish is to have a second chance at life, to write more books. Unfortunately, his health deteriorates and his wish is not to come true.

Dr. Hughappears in The Middle Years

Dr. Hugh is an M.D. who has recently graduated from medical school. He is working as personal physician to the wealthy, obese Countess when he meets Duncombe, an author he greatly admires. Dr. Hugh develops an intense friendship with Duncombe and eventually leaves the Countess, giving up rights to an inheritance from her, to be with Duncombe.

The Telegraphistappears in In the Cage

The unnamed telegraph operator is the main character of In the Cage. A slender young woman, she works in a post office branch inside an upscale grocery store in a posh London neighborhood. She is engaged to a stodgy grocer, but puts off the wedding because she finds entertainment in the personal lives of the ladies and gentlemen who send daily telegrams to each other. In the process, she develops a crush on dashing Captain Everard, who is having an affair with a married woman, Lady Bradeen.

Captain Everardappears in In the Cage

Captain Phillip Everard is a gentleman who frequently sends telegrams from the local post office. In doing so, he inadvertently shares details of his personal life with the young female telegraphist, who falls in love with him. Captain Everard does not return the girl's affections and tries to avoid her after she reveals her feelings. He is well-born, but has little money and large gambling debts.

Lady Bradeenappears in In the Cage

Lady Bradeen is a beautiful, petite English lady. Although married to the wealthy Lord Bradeen, she is having an illicit affair with Captain Everard. They frequently send each other coded telegrams. When the telegraphist corrects one of her telegrams, she realizes that the young woman knows everything. Lord Bradeen soon discovers the affair, but dies before he can make the scandal public. Lady Bradeen marries her dashing lover.

John Marcherappears in The Beast In the Jungle

John Marcher is a tall, well-born but inconspicuous gentleman with a small inheritance. He works in a government office in London. His life is dominated by his belief that he is special and is fated to experience some unique, possibly disastrous event. He avoids falling in love, marrying and having children in anticipation of this mysterious event, which never happens.

May Bartramappears in The Beast in the Jungle

May is the faithful friend of John Marcher, the only person that he has ever told about his obsessive belief in his destiny. She loves him, and lives simply in a small house in London on a meager inheritance. It is May who first realizes that the great event in John Marcher's life is that nothing noteworthy happens to him.

Spenser Brydon appears in The Jolly Corner

Spenser Brydon is a fifty-six-year-old American man who has lived in Europe for the past thirty-three years. He returns to New York after the long absence, and is amazed by the changes. This move sparks a deep insecurity in Brydon, and he begins to wonder what he would have been like if he had stayed in New York and become a wealthy businessman instead of living in Europe as an art-lover and a bit of a dreamer.

BOOKRAGS

Miss Stavertonappears in The Jolly Corner

Miss Staverton lives in a modest house on a small street in New York. She is carefully frugal, and manages to live on a small inheritance. Like Brydon, she is a devotee of arts and culture, who has pursued a life of the mind rather than marrying and having children. Still, she is devoted to Brydon, whether he is a dreamer or a businessman.

Objects/Places

Vevey, Switzerlandappears in Daisy Miller: A Study

The narrative of fresh-faced American girl Daisy Miller begins in Vevey, a resort town on the shores of Lake Geneva. The author compares it to Saratoga Springs, New York and Newport, Rhode Island, vacation spots in the northern U.S. It is described as full of stylish young girls.

The Colosseum in Romeappears in Daisy Miller: A Study

The climax of the story occurs in Rome, where both Winterbourne and Daisy Miller are separately enjoying the Colosseum by moonlight. Daisy catches a fever there, and dies.

Veniceappears in The Aspern Papers

The story is set in Venice, the most romantic of cities that has inspired many poets. This is particularly appropriate, since Venice is a gorgeous, crumbling, romantic ruin. Miss Juliana is the ancient mistress of the poet Jeffery Aspern and a bit of a gorgeous, crumbling, romantic ruin herself.

The Aspern Papersappears in The Aspern Papers

American Jeffery Aspern was the premier poet of the previous generation. Living both in America and in Europe, he had an affair with the beautiful Miss Juliana Bordereau, the great passion that inspired much of his poetry. The main character of the story hopes to recover the priceless letter that Aspern wrote Juliana, as well as the poet's private notes, which are in the old lady's possession.

Parisappears in The Pupil

In the Pupil, the Moreen family travels around Europe, staying in hotels in Paris, London, Venice and other cities. It is Paris that is the most important to the developing relationship between Pemberton and his student, Morgan Moreen. There, they walk in the rain, meet in cafes and visit museums much like two lovers.

Londonappears in Brooksmith, The Beast in the Jungle, In the Cage

Brooksmith, the Beast in the Jungle and In the Cage are all set in London in the late 1800s.

New Yorkappears in The Jolly Corner

Brydon returns to New York around 1900, after an absence of thirty-three years, to find a massive, burgeoning city that has grown far past his imagination, in unexpected ways.

The Cageappears in in the Cage

The Cage refers to the enclosure of the branch post office inside an upscale grocery in London where the young female telegraphist works. The innermost area of the cage is the sounder room, where the telegraph instrument itself is kept.

The telegraphappears in In the Cage

The telegraph was emerging technology at the time James wrote about it. It enabled one to send a message at a great distance almost instantly, but also required that the message go through an intermediary, the telegraph operator. It provided many employment opportunities for young women.

House at Jolly Cornerappears in The Jolly Corner

Brydon has always described his boyhood home in New York as a house on a "jolly corner". When several relatives die, the house eventually passes to him, along with a second, less grand home. He returns to New York to renovate the second house into a block of apartments. He finds that the house on Jolly Corner is haunted with the ghost of the businessman he might have been.

The Middle Years appears in The Middle Years

A major plot point revolves around the recently published novel The Middle Years, written by Duncombe, a middle-aged author in poor health.

Themes

Homoeroticism

Many of James' stories, including The Pupil, Brooksmith, the Aspern Papers and The Middle Years, involve intense emotional relationships between men, often between a younger man and an older man. Henry James was homosexual, a fact he hid during his life. There is great debate among critics on whether these characters were sexually involved with each other or not. James was certainly a good enough writer to have indirectly implied sex if he wanted to. However, he may have chosen not to due to the strict late-Victorian moral code, which denied that the "love that shall not be named" even existed.

A strong, intimate relationship occurred between the Brooksmith and his employer, Mr. Offord. In The Middle Years, author Duncombe develops a love for Dr. Hugh, which is returned. One of the most interesting pairs is the unnamed male narrator's passion for Jeffery Aspern, the dead poet. The most scandalous is that of tutor Pemberton and his fourteen-year-old student, Morgan Moreen. Even if these pairings are read as merely powerful friendships, in many cases they are inappropriate. It is hard to escape the sexual overtones, which may have been created by James unconsciously.

James' portrayal of heterosexual relationships seldom approaches the same intensity, especially in his earlier stories. The unnamed young man seems to have no real feelings for Daisy Miller, while the role of May in The Beast in the Jungle could as well be filled by a man. Some critics including Eve Sedgwick have suggested that Henry James translated homosexual experiences in his life into heterosexual experiences on the page, with varying degrees of success.

Whether James meant these to be homosexual affairs or not, he has a penchant for weak, young, sensitive, indecisive men of ambitious sexuality as narrators. Especially in his early work, these young men are frequently terrified of women, especially powerful older women like Miss Juliana and Miss Tita in The Aspern Papers and the Countess in The Middle Years. There is much speculation that the terrible secret of John Marcher in The Beast in the Jungle is actually homosexuality.

Internationalism

Many of the stories involve Americans living in Europe. Henry James was educated in Europe and lived in England for more than thirty years, traveling extensive on the Continent. He was familiar with Paris, Rome, Venice, Geneva (where he attend university), Naples and of course London. Many of James' plots, including that of Daisy Miller: A Study revolve around the different expectations and behaviors in the U.S. and Europe, and the clash of cultures when the two meet. This is a major plot point in The

Jolly Corner, as well. In fact, that story seems to suggest that the most elevated type of culture and artistic appreciation was possible only in Europe.

In many ways James created the stereotype of the "Ugly American", although he does not use that phrase. His Americans are more concerned with business and money, and less well-educated, particularly regarding art and literature. Americans are seen as excessively brash, honest, loud and pretentious. In several cases they are unscrupulous, as the unnamed young American who tries to cheat two elderly women out of the Aspern Papers. Although James makes a few negative observations about the formality of European behavior, on the whole he seems to prefer it.

Art and Artists

Many of the stories focus on art or on artists. James clearly sees art as the highest calling, and in The Middle Years, suggests that artistic talent is the source of all wealth. This belief accurately foreshadowed the current shift of the American and European economies to those driven by intellectual property and service industries, rather than manufacturing. James' characters are respectable only when they are artists, like the author Duncombe, or consumers of art, like his acolyte Dr. Hugh. Other artists include the editor of The Aspern Papers, and the illustrator in The Real Thing. While Brydon of The Jolly Corner is not an artist, he is a sensitive man who has devoted his life to being a consumer of art and knows a fair amount about architecture.

The prototypical James character is a slender, sensitive, timid young unmarried man who writes or paints, thinks a great deal and seldom acts in a forceful way about anything. In some ways, James' portrait of an artist is a portrait of a homosexual male, and that may not be an accident. This seems to be what he thinks of as the artistic type. These characters are all residents in Europe, and often of modest means but still members of the upper class. His artists were thought to be unusually intelligent and talented, but above all to possess a sensibility, making them more perceptive and more prone to strong emotion. Both the student Morgan Moreen and his tutor Pemberton fit this profile.

Women cannot be artists in James' world view — just one reason they are not worthy of respect. This is best illustrated in his condescending attitude towards The Countess in The Middle Years. Her money comes from her husband, a gifted baritone (which in the late Victorian era implies an opera singer.) After his death, the Countess has inherited his money and wastes it.

Style

Point of View

In many ways point of view is the story, in Henry James' work. His stories are really more about internal dialogue and perceptions of reality, rather than actions or events. He often filters the story through a narrator, giving the reader access only to the thoughts and perceptions of that character, not the actual facts of the situation. This is an early example of an unreliable narrator — a point-of-view character who may not see the truth, or the whole truth. In Daisy Miller: A Study, the young, timid, unnamed narrator reports the habits and personality of the fresh-faced, forthright young American Daisy Miller. Because the reader sees Daisy only through this filter, it is much harder to form an impression of her and impossible to know if that impression is correct. That story even has a second point of view, a first-person "I" character who appears only twice in the text, inconspicuously. James' narrator frequently have no names, as the young publisher in the Aspern Papers and the telegraphist in In The Cage.

James' default narrator is a sensitive, timid, artistic, unmarried young man perhaps best illustrated by the publisher in The Aspern Papers. These characters are frequently surrounded by powerful, flamboyant, fascinating, interesting women whom James largely ignores. These include The Countess in The Middle Years, Miss Juliana and Miss Tita in the Aspern Papers, and Mrs. Moreen in The Pupil. Any one of these compelling females would make a more powerful, traditionally interesting story than James' mousy little artistic men. Yet, the crux of the stories lies in these men's perceptions of the world around them and their actions — or inaction — in response.

Setting

Most of the stories are set in the great cities of Europe, a location that would have been familiar to upper-class readers in both the U.S. and the Continent. The author's intimate knowledge of the cities adds a great deal to the stories. Specifically, Daisy Miller: A Study is set in the resort of Vevey, Switzerland and Rome. The Aspern Papers is set evocatively in Venice, the grandest and most beautiful of cities, where the narrator pursues the mistress of the world's greatest poet. In The Pupil, the Moreens travel from one European capital to another, through London, Paris, Rome, Geneva and other cities. They are pretentious, dishonest gypsies who run up bills at luxury hotels and then leave without paying.

A number of stories are set in England, the country where James lived most of his life. Brooksmith, the impeccable butler, could not exist anywhere else but London. The telegraphist from In the Cage and the unnamed illustrator from The Real Thing also live in London, as does John Marcher of The Beast in the Jungle. The use of actual neighborhoods, good and not-so-good, creates a sense of realism. The Middle Years is set in the popular seaside health spa of Bournemouth, where Dencombe has gone to

recover from a serious illness. At the end of his career, James came home to New York, and so did Brydon in The Jolly Corner.

Language and Meaning

Every story is sprinkled with phrases in foreign languages, usually French. These underscore the Internationalism of Henry James' work, a belief that the English language was simply not sufficient to express the stories, and that he could create greater rapport with his readers if he included such language. Footnotes added by the editors explain the meaning of such phrases as "sur la retour" and "de race" but James expected his readers to understand them without translation.

The language shows a progression because the stories span James' long career. Earlier stories such as Daisy Miller: A Study and The Aspern Papers are concise, told in a fairly straight-forward manner that many modern writers would envy. The author has a real gift for concisely capturing a minor character's personality in just a few sentences, as when he mentions that the narrator's aunt always has a headache. His style grows progressively more ornate, complex and convoluted as he matures, a style that even his most famous fans have called impenetrable. This lush style, combined with extensive descriptions and powerful imagery, is what readers have come to expect of James.

The more ornate style later in his career may have stemmed indirectly from James' having arthritis of the wrist, which made it painful for him to write. In later years, work including The Beast in the Jungle and In The Cage was dictated to a secretary, whom James preferred to call an amanuensis. James had three secretaries in his life. His ideal secretary was a mindless typist, who would not judge the work in progress. One of them took down his words in shorthand, a practice that annoyed the author because he could not read the work. The other two typed the words directly on Remington typewriters. While the typing was slower, James was said to have found the noise of the typewriter restful and even inspiring. James found dictating much easier than writing and said that speaking pulled the words out of him. Some critics of the very ornate style would say that they pulled too many words out.

Structure

James referred to everything shorter than a novel as a tale, which gives the volume its title. The text is divided into three sections. The first section of 370 pages consists of nine of Henry James' most famous short stories, a selection that spans his very prolific and long career. They are presented in chronological order and range in length from a few thousand words in Brooksmith, to the novella In the Cage.

The second section of fifty-one pages is the shortest, and contains Henry James' on work about writing. It includes The Art of Fiction, his essay on the craft of writing both novels and shorter works. It also contains jottings from his notebooks, the notes that the author made for himself when the idea first struck him. Prefaces that he included in book-length collections of short stories, to introduce them, are also included. Many of

them were from the New York Edition, a well-known collection of his works. In many of the prefaces he mentions an insignificant event or observation that sparked the idea for the story.

The third section is devoted to ninety-nine pages of criticism and commentary on the short stories. Each is by a different author, and some of the critics disagree with each other. There are two commentaries on The Pupil and two on The Middle Years. There is no commentary on Brooksmith and The Real Thing, while the other stories have one commentary each.

Quotes

"He had come from Geneva the day before, by the little steamer, to see his aunt, who was staying at the hotel — Geneva having been fora long time his place of residence. But his aunt had a headache — his aunt had almost always a headache— and now she was shut up in her room, smelling camphor, so that he was at liberty to wander about."
Daisy Miller: A Study, p. 4

"In Geneva, as he had been perfectly aware, a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely-occurring conditions; but here at Vevey, what conditions could be better than these? — a pretty American girl coming and standing in front of you in a garden."
Daisy Miller: A Study, p. 6

"One doesn't defend one's god; one's god is in himself a defense. Besides, to-day, after his long comparative obscuration, he hangs high on the heaven of our literature, for all the world to see; he is a part of the light by which we walk. The most I said was that he was no doubt not a woman's poet; to which she rejoined aptly enough that he had been at least Miss Bordereau's."
The Aspern Papers, p. 54

"Mrs. Moreen exhibited no discomfiture; she only continued blandly: ;Mr. Moreen will be delighted to meet your wishes. As I told you, he has been called to London for a week. As soon as he comes back you shall have it out with him.'"
The Pupil, p. 134

"Mr. Moreen had a white moustache, a confiding manner and, in his buttonhole, the ribbon of a foreign order — bestowed, as Pemberton eventually learned, for services. For what services he never clearly ascertained: this was a point — one of a large number — that Mr. Moreen's manner never confided. What it emphatically did confide was that he was a man of the world. Ulick, the firstborn, was in visible training for the same profession — under the disadvantage as yet, however, of a button hole only feebly floral and a moustache with no pretensions to type. The girls had hair and figures and manners and small fat feet, but had never been out alone. As for Mrs. Moreen, Pemberton saw on a nearer view that her elegance was intermittent and her parts didn't always match."
The Pupil, p. 136

"Mr. Offord, the most agreeable, the most lovable of bachelors, was a retired diplomatist, living on his pension, confined by his infirmities to his fireside and delighted to be found there any afternoon in the year by such visitors as Brooksmith allowed to come up. Brooksmith was his butler and his most intimate friend, to whom we all stood, or I should say sat, in the same relation in which the subject of the sovereign finds himself to the prime minister."
Brooksmith, p. 173

"How was it that we all sat where we wanted and moved when we wanted and met whom we wanted and escaped whom we wanted; joining, according to the accident of inclination, the general circle or falling in with a single talker on a convenient sofa? Why were all the sofas so convenient, the accidents so happy, the talkers so ready, the listeners so willing, the subjects presented to you in a rotation as quickly fore-ordained as the courses at dinner? "
Brooksmith, p. 175

The gentleman, a man of fifty, very high and very straight, with a moustache slightly grizzled and a dark grey walking-coat admirably fitted, both of which I noted professionally — I don't mean as a barber or yet as a tailor — would have struck me as a celebrity if celebrities often were striking."
The Real Thing, p. 189

"He was tired enough when he reached it, and for a moment he was disappointed, he was better, of course, but better, after all, than what? He should never again, as at one or two great moments of the past, be better than himself. The infinite of life had gone, and what was left of the dose was a small glass engraved like a thermometer by the apothecary."
The Middle Years, p. 211

"The result produced in his little book was somehow a result beyond his conscious intention: it was as if he had planted his genius, had trusted his method, and they had grown up and flowered with this sweetness. If the achievement had been real, however, the process had been manful enough. What he saw so intensely to-day, what he felt as a nail driver in, was that only now, at the very last, had he come into possession. His development had been abnormally slow, almost grotesquely gradual."
The Middle Years, p. 214

"She pushed in three bescribbled forms which the girl's hand was quick to appropriate. Mr. Buckton having so frequent a perverse instinct for catching first any eye that promised the sort of entertainment with which she had her peculiar affinity. the amusements of captives are full of a desperate contrivance, and one ofour young friend's ha'pennyworths had been the charming tale of Picciola."
In the Cage,p. 233

"To Cissy, to Mary, whichever it was, she found her curiosity going out with a rush, a mute effusion that floated back to her, like a returning tide, the living colour and splendour of the beautiful head, the light of eyes that seemed to reflect such utterly other things than the mean things actually before them; and, above all, the high, curt consideration of a manner that, even at bad moments, was a magnificent habit and of the very essence of the innumerable things — her beauty, her birth, her father and mother, her cousins and all her ancestors — that its possessor couldn't have got rid of if she had wished."
In the Cage, p. 234

"If he had but stayed at home he would have anticipated the inventor of the sky-scraper. If he had but stayed at home he would have discovered his genius in time really to start some new variety of awful architectural hare and run it till it burrowed in a gold-mine."
The Jolly Corner, p. 344

"The only reason for an existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass."
The Art of Fiction, p. 377

"Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it — this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education."
The Art of Fiction, p. 383

Topics for Discussion

Is Daisy Miller innocent or morally corrupt?

Why does Winterbourne have trouble understanding Daisy Miller?

What are the Aspern papers and why does the unnamed young man, the main character, want them?

Does the young publisher use honesty to try to gain the Aspern papers, or deceit? How does that work for him?

The Aspern Papers is set in Venice, where the main streets are canals and most people travel by boat. What are the traditional boats of Venice called?

Every family has it's strengths and weaknesses. What are the strengths of the Moreen family in The Pupil? What are their weaknesses?

Why do Mr. and Mrs. Moreen suggest that their son Morgan go to live with his tutor in The Pupil?

In the Pupil, why does the tutor Pemberton eventually agree to tutor Morgan Moreen for free?

What job did Brooksmith hold?

In what way are Major and Mrs. Monarch "the real thing'? In what way are they not the real thing?

Why is Dencombe, author of The Middle Years at first disappointed to see a young man reading his newly published book?

Why does Dr. Hugh in The Middle Years abandon his professional commitment to the Countess to spend time with Dencombe?

How does John Marcher in the Beast in the Jungle feel he is different from other people?

In the Beast in the Jungle, John Marcher believes that something strange and terrible is bound to happen to him. What happens?

In Jolly Corner, where is the jolly corner and what building sits there?

Who is the ghost that Brydon fights in Jolly Corner?