




COLLECTED STORIES

VOLUME II (1892–1910)

HENRY JAMES

A K N O P F  B O O K

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VOLUME II (1892-1910)

SELECTED AND INTRODUCED
BY JOHN BAILEY



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INTRODUCTION

Early in this selection from the second half of James's treasure trove of stories comes the unexpectedly memorable tale he wrote for the Christmas issue of an illustrated magazine. As I remarked in the introduction to the first volume, James drew a distinction between what he called 'potboilers', written to order and for money, and the stories with which he was pleased, and which later he wished to preserve. 'Owen Wingrave' started life as one of the former, but ended in the second category. James recognized this by putting it in the New York edition of his tales, some years after its composition in 1892.

It is a tale which harks back to his own memories of the American Civil War, in which James had taken the same path as his young hero, following his own destiny as an aspirant of literature instead of responding to the national call and becoming a soldier. I doubt James felt guilt about this choice, then or later, but it must have made him extremely aware of the issues and the pressures involved; and this awareness makes the tale so memorable.

Ghost stories were becoming fashionable in the 1890s, and James found them a source of profit with magazines that had a large circulation and paid well. In the middle years of the decade three of his stories appeared in the *Yellow Book*, the new aesthetic quarterly which also featured the notorious drawings of Aubrey Beardsley. James, who carefully guarded his own reputation and distrusted anything overtly *louche*, had mis-givings about this, but the *Yellow Book's* editor Henry Harland would publish what he wanted, and at any length, and this offered a strong inducement to an author who as time went by was feeling, as he remarked, increasingly 'out of it'. James's play, *Guy Domville*, by means of which he had hoped not merely for fortune but for a new era of fame, had failed on the West End stage; the fans of his lengthier fiction, though still devoted, were a dwindling band. Even the loyal *Atlantic Review*, which had published so many of his tales, had shocked him by turning down 'The Pupil', ironically enough one of his best stories.

As one would expect, James handled the ghost story very much in his own way. He ignored its more vulgar and sensational appeal – not for him the all too physical spectres of his namesake and contemporary M. R. James – but he perceived in the form new methods of exploring dramatic situation and character. In 'Owen Wingrave' the supernatural is, as it were, on the side of those powerful and threatening forces of family and tradition which seek to prevent the young man from following his own inclinations and leading his own life. Death is the price he pays for the victory over them. When discovered in the haunted room 'He looked like a young soldier on a battle-field.' It is of some interest that James changed the last sentence when he revised his stories for the New York edition of his works to read, 'He was all the young soldier on the gained field.' That makes an elegant ending, but it also blurs the quiet pathos of the original, whose tone is so much more in keeping with the character of the hero and the nature of the tale. It imparts a distancing touch of irony, as the elaboration of James's late style is apt to do. Such afterthoughts and changes for the New York edition are occasionally felicitous but not often, and the stories in these two selected volumes are based, rightly in my view, on the text of their original publication in book form.

A further interest in the history of 'Owen Wingrave' is Bernard Shaw's remonstrance with James after he had seen as a theatre critic a one-act play called *The Saloon*, based by James on his story. Like almost all James's modest theatrical undertakings the play was not a success, but as a Socialist, and a believer in the capacity of human beings to help themselves and make their own future, Shaw was struck by what he felt to be James's pessimistic determinism. He urged James to change the play into something like a satiric comedy, in which the young hero would defeat those ghostly forces of tradition and family authority which sapped his own will as an individual. James naturally declined. Although the twentieth century had begun when the play appeared, he believed from his own past experience in the strength old powers of darkness still had to evoke irrational obedience, and the Great War that was to come in a few years showed him to be by no means wrong.

'Daisy Miller', James's classic study of the All-American girl, had been by far the most successful story of his own earlier years. It is ironical that the one which became most well known after his death should be 'The Turn of the Screw', the long ghost story which, like 'Owen Wingrave', had been originally conceived as a potboiler for magazine publication. It acquired fame too in his own lifetime, although James himself always professed that he could not see why, or understand what all the fuss was about. To him it was just another exercise in what had become a profitable genre, but for baffled and yet fascinated admirers it was to become the most enigmatic of all his tales.

And so it remains today, after the literary critics and the psychoanalysts who came after James have done, as it were, their worst. There have been many explanations of what happens in the tale, and numerous theories about it, some questioning the governess's own veracity and suggesting the ghosts did not exist for the two children, but were only present in her own neurotic imagination. As Leon Edel, the definitive biographer who had written so well on James, wisely observed, the factor of key importance is that James has deliberately left the reader 'the widest margin' of speculation. The reader, in other words, can draw his own conclusions about what happens in the tale: James did not come to any himself. He teased one inquisitive critic who asked him why evil in the story seemed to take an obscure sexual form by saying that he himself had no notions in the story about either evil or sex. 'You have allowed yourself to get *ideas* about such things,' James is alleged to have said demurely, 'and I never do that'.

What is certain is that the story contains some of the author's best and most evocative writing. Whether or not we believe that the governess saw the ghosts, or whether there were in fact any ghosts to see, James's words etch the vision as sharply on the reader's mind as the vision itself did on that of the governess. The moment is so compelling that it suspends a disbelief.

I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky and the friendly hour lost, for the minute, all its voice. But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed there were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness. The gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame.

The dead valet Quint appears on the top of a tower, as if James were deliberately borrowing the Gothic trappings of his predecessors in the ghost story business, like Mrs Radcliffe or the Brontës. 'Was there a "secret" at Bly', wonders the appalled governess – 'a mystery of

Udolpho or an insane, unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?’ As if for his own secret amusement James even hints here that the governess herself has read too many ghost stories. Is he, in the discreetest way possible, ‘sending up’ the genre? He certainly begins the story in the most traditional way possible, with assembled guests listening to a ghost story, a ghost story, moreover, that concerns what is spoken of as the worst imaginable kind of haunting that of a young child – and not of one child only but two! Whether or not they are present in James’s approach to the tale, such elements of parody make a perfect contrast with the reality his prose imposes upon the setting. There is nothing Gothic about its hallucinatory detail – that is pure James down to the way in which the ghost’s hand, as the apparition moves round the tower and seems to keep its eye on the governess, passes from one crenellation of the battlement to another.

Indeed, James’s great strength as a writer of uncanny tales was precisely his sense of place in the same sense that had evoked for his reader London and Venice, the coast of New England and the English countryside. Bly, the gracious country home in ‘The Turn of the Screw’, is not a ‘haunted house’ – it is a tranquil place where dead persons have inexplicably come to appear – on the tower, at the edge of the wood across an ornamental water, outside the drawing-room window in the quiet of a calm afternoon. It is an incongruously peaceful setting for the two figures who have taken possession of it, as of the children who are its rightful inhabitants. The tale ends when little Miles’s own heart, dispossessed of the ghost’s pain, has stopped. Has the governess saved him? – or has her well-meaning persecution harassed him to death? The way James has handled the tale is so complete and so satisfying that at the end of it the query hardly seems to matter.

James contrives to make death itself a comforting topic and the solution in such stories. ‘The Altar of the Dead’ is one of his oddest yet most memorable tales. There are no ghosts in it, visible or invisible, but James himself archly classed it among his stories of a ‘gruesome variety, placing it in that category when he came to make a retrospective appraisal for the New York edition. Clearly the story meant much to him; the strange idea in it might appeal to an ageing man who has seen his friends drop off and die one by one, and who cherishes them in his memory as if he were lighting candles for them at an altar. Stransom actually does light such candles, and creates for himself a real chapel, unless the reader feels, as he may, that altar and chapel and candles seem so real in the cadences of James’s prose here particularly reverberant – just because they are symbolical. There is, by coincidence even an echo of a memorable little poem by Hardy, in which the poet sees his dead friend like a candle, burning lower and lower in the memory until it is no more than ‘a spark, dying amid the dark’. Both James and Hardy seem to take refuge in the metaphor, as if it were the source of comfort that the candles and ‘his dead’ were to Stransom.

As Edel points out, James’s imagination in the tale is purely secular: he does not connect his altar with any established religion, just as, in the different context of ‘The Turn of the Screw’, he does not connect what occurs with any conventional idea of ghosts, or with stories of the supernatural. Stransom’s worship of the dead is a wholly subjective one, just as the governess’s version of the things that happened at Bly may be. It is, so to speak, ‘deadness itself which is the inspiration of ‘The Altar of the Dead’, just as the unknowable secret world of the child is possibly what inspired James’s imagination in ‘The Turn of the Screw’. James himself – his own moderately secret sense of humour much in evidence – claimed the

the idea for 'The Altar of the Dead' came to him as he stopped in the street to watch a funeral procession with one of his French friends. Seeing the concourse 'bound merrily by' the friend remarked: *'Mourir à Londres, c'est être bien mort.'*

Edel is disposed to think, none the less, that there was something more deeply personal for James in the nature of the story, and he may well be right. James had never forgotten his friend Constance Fenimore Woolson, an American lady who had become very much attached to him, so much so indeed that James had taken fright and withdrawn himself from her 'renouncing', like Stransom in his story, 'the friendship that was once so charming and comforting'. Poor Fenimore, as James always referred to her, retired to a lonely flat in Venice and died there in circumstances that pointed to suicide. It was probably one of the most traumatic events in James's life, and the shadow of it, embedded deep in memory and consciousness, is to be found in more than one of the stories, most notably in 'The Aspern Papers'. All great artists are egoists in their own style, and it was second nature to James to make use of whatever experience came his way, however painful and deep-seated it might be.

Such seems to be the case in 'The Altar of the Dead', where Stransom's friend Acton Hagwood has betrayed the woman who loved him as the narrator of 'The Aspern Papers' deceives the two women he seeks to make use of, and as James must have felt in gloomier moments that he had himself let down poor Fenimore. The story, like 'The Turn of the Screw', depends on atmosphere – the hypnotic, cumulative effect of style – rather than explanation or solution of a mystery. Whatever is going on, it is the going-on itself that matters. Whatever is 'rum' in life, as James would say, or in the psychology of the individual, can be presented, ruminated, pondered, but never definitively explained. James's later tales are the exact opposite not only of the genre of ghost story that was in vogue at the time, but also, and more obviously, the detective mystery or adventure tale, as exemplified by the Conan Doyle series featuring Sherlock Holmes. There is never any simple solution to the puzzles in the James casebook.

Melodrama and adventure, as James ironically perceived, depend on the nature of the interest we take in life. In 'The Story in It' he reflects on the significance of an invisible event, on the thing that might have happened, or happened only in the mind: in what was dreamed of or wished for rather than what occurred. What are considered the proper ingredients of a 'story', things that are dramatic and sensational, are precisely the things that don't happen in the lives of ladies and gentlemen who have any respect for themselves. But what *does* happen is of no less importance. In fact to the discerning enquirer what *does* happen to such people in such a society is of much greater and more absorbing interest than mere vulgar adventure could be. The spectator who knows what to look for can always find 'the story in it'.

The same sort of message is conveyed in a different form through the narrative of the young searcher's quest for 'the Figure in the Carpet'. Irony here is contained in the suggestion that criticism, however well disposed, is looking the wrong way if it is looking for the key that explains a writer's work, and plucks out the heart of his mystery. The august author Hugh Vereker, who might be seen as having a good deal in common with James himself, frequently gives the impression, throughout the richness of his writings, that some recurring motif there will afford an explanation of the whole. But the quest is illusory: the idea itself provides an illusion of suspense, of waiting for some coming revelation. But such

revelation, for James as for his imaginary author, can only be in the mind of the beholder, as much as in the creator's art. When the two are, as James put it, 'wonderingly' in communion, the riches of the carpet have been fully displayed. What an author needs is the fullest sympathy from his reader with what his style presents, and his sentences construct: the effect of the whole less like the patterning of a carpet than it is like an Impressionist painting or a study by James's fellow-countryman Whistler.

Indeed, if there is a motif more or less common to James's later tales it may lie in his muffled insistence that clarity of explanation is not one of an author's duties or goals. What matters most is what happens in the mind and the imagination, the illusions and inner discoveries by which we live. 'We *know* nothing on earth', as the Colonel observes in *The Golden Bowl*, James's late, long and difficult masterpiece of a novel. This is 'the soldier's watchword at night'. The times he was living in now did feel like night to the elderly James; he felt neglected, ignored, and out of it. But he retained a tremendous innate confidence in his own chosen method and approach; and it is this approach itself which is explored, hinted at or meditated in so many of the stories which he continued always to write.

Imagination is common to us all, whatever our circumstances and walk of life. James is fully in sympathy with the inner life of the young telegraphist 'in the cage' as he is with the consciousness of a more privileged and liberated society. The girl of 'In the Cage' is nameless like the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw', and the story may turn, once again, not on what is banally 'going on' but on what the young woman's imagination hopes and fears, wishes for and feeds upon. The telegrams that flash to and fro in cryptic fashion between exotic persons who live in high society and pursue its intrigues are for the girl the stuff of reality, because they are the stuff of dreams, the true interest of life. It would be unthinkable for James to reveal at the close of his tale what has actually been going on between the ladies and gentlemen of the telegrams. He does not know it: any more than his heroine does as she prepares to abandon all these glimpses of romance for the tedium of real life and a humdrum marriage. The interest has been all in the situation, and its promptings to the life of a curious mind.

'The Beast in the Jungle' is James's most sensational rendering of this theme, pushing, as it were, the non-existent to the point of melodrama. John Marcher is a man who lives in a state of permanent suspense, sure that something dire and tremendous is one day to happen to him, to spring out on his life like a crouching beast from its jungle lair. The revelation, as full of hidden irony as anything in James, is that nothing can or will happen because Marcher's appropriate name – is not the sort of man to whom things do happen. He marches unawares and in vain, accompanied by the ghost of what might have happened, the uncomplaining presence of the woman he might have loved. But the denouement of the tale is in its own Jamesian way as sensational, by reason of style and effect, as any melodramatic climax of Edgar Allan Poe. James indeed transposed the same underlying idea into an American setting when he wrote 'The Jolly Corner', a story prompted by his dislike of the crude new America he found when he revisited his native land in the new century. It is the story of a double, a Jekyll and Hyde situation with the appropriately Jamesian twist that the other half of the double does not exist – only *might* have existed, as the dreadful person that the Jamesian Spencer Brydon might have become, had he stayed on and worked for vulgar advancement in New York. Such an outcome, given James's temperament and personality, was unlikely to save

the least of it: but once again such possibilities owe their truth, as art, to being 'all in the mind'.

And the mind can haunt itself to more than sufficient effect, just as memory may produce the most enduring of ghostly visitations. 'The Beast in the Jungle' has been hailed as a forerunner of Kafka and of his story *The Trial*, where the hero is accused of some crime he can hardly have committed, because it is not even specified. James's hero lives in the modern condition of *angst* and has been called an early example of Existential Man. James himself was certainly familiar with the loneliness which produces not only unmotivated guilt feelings but indefinite cravings for the life never lived. Leon Edel was no doubt right to sense yet again, in 'The Beast in the Jungle', the haunting presence of poor Constance Fenimore, who like May Bartram in the story may have loved a man with no love to give her in return. James, like Marcher, had, as Edel says, 'never allowed himself to know her feelings'; he was incapable of imagining in the woman to whom his own selfishness was attached a feeling that went beyond friendship.

In his declining years he had begun to see such things with penitential clarity, and as usual they went into his art. In 'The Bench of Desolation' it is the man who has been wronged rather than the woman; but by coming together they are joined not so much in reconciliation and forgiveness as in a mutual recognition of their weakness and need. They are at least in that state together, a state that produces its own supportive feelings. These are the feelings, and, ironically, the sense of living, that John Marcher can only have by clinging at the end to his own pain and bereavement, and to the shedding of his own tears – tears that at least however 'belated and bitter, had something of the taste of life'.

As these examples indicate, there is a note of desperation in James's last stories, even though it is a desperation overcome by the protagonists in a full and bitter knowledge of their plight; and for the author, as one may also feel, in the comfort of his mastery of the medium and the sombre joy of his own prose. As a critic observed of the earliest of James's stories in the *Atlantic Monthly*, it was a pleasure in itself, irrespective of plot, to read sentences so satisfying in themselves, 'so redolent of the completest shades of meaning'. Nevertheless there is an overwhelming sense of disillusionment – with society, with personal relationships, with his own self and its destiny – which was unknown among the enthusiasms and the abounding zeal for life and experience to be found in earlier James. Many characters have become vessels full of hatred and revenge, like Mrs Grantham in 'The Two Faces', who makes a doll of her poor all-unknowing young rival in order to get her own back on the man who has jilted her. In 'The Beldonald Holbein' the cruelty that women in a high social position can wreak on other women makes a small intense and secret drama. As Edel observes, there now exist for James the most dully ferocious of beasts in the once for him alluring and intriguing social jungle, and he is all too horribly aware of them.

When he went to America things seemed even worse. The once cosy provincial town of New York dazed him with its savage glitter: its new skyscrapers, as James despondently remarked, looking like a lot of pins casually stuck into a pin cushion. And its denizens were made to match. Like the hero of a very late story, who has his money embezzled by a once-trusted friend, James experiences here a sense of personal betrayal. His loneliness in the crowd and the big city desolates him and robs him of identity. And there is a new and meaningless malice and cruelty, on an appropriately grand scale. 'Crapy Cornelia' is a savage

tale, full of James's rage against the brutal and fatuous vulgarity of the new smart class. James detests in particular the stifling *knowingness* of this new class. When he was younger he himself had loved in his own unique way to be in the know; but the leading theme in his last stories – and his last novels too, *The Golden Bowl* in particular – is the real stupidity of those who are sure they belong, as it were, to the 'knowing' élite, who can do no wrong.

This was clearly going to be the music of the future – that if people were ... made 'knowing' enough ... all they had to do to show civility was to take the amused ironic view of those who might be less initiated. In *his* time, when he was young or even when he was only but a little less middle-aged, the best manners had been the best kindness ... concealing ... for common humanity, if not for common decency, a part at least of the intensity and ferocity with which one might be 'in the know'.

Poor 'crapy Cornelia' is the victim of this new knowing and heartless unmannerliness, and James too increasingly felt himself to be.

But his work was done, and a great work it was. Even more than the majestic bulk of his novels his stories afford us a uniquely living record. They follow him throughout his life; they illustrate its purposes and its progress – where he lived, what he thought and experienced, what countries and towns he visited, what he tasted or rejected, what he hated and loved. The stories reveal the man, and in their own fascinating way demonstrate how he changed. Just as he was a sensitive instrument, far more sensitive even than other writers when it came to registering what was happening to him, so James continues to surprise and delight the reader of his stories with a sense of his own continuous growth and development. He is never a static being – always the same James – far from it. The stories are like a continuous frieze, almost a tapestry story, graphically displaying the author in the full emotional spectrum of his life and work, from youth to age.

John Bayle

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biographically, the five-volume *Life* by Leon Edel, Hart-Davis, 1953–72, is unchallenged in its comprehensiveness. F. W. Dupee's *Henry James: His Life and Writings*, Methuen, 1951, rev. ed. 1965, remains an excellent short biography. Miranda Seymour's *A Ring of Foreign Correspondents: Henry James and his English Circle 1897–1916*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, offers a charming account of the writer's domestic life and friendships.

There are various collections of letters, including four volumes edited by Edel and published by Harvard University Press in the US and Macmillan in the UK, 1974–84. James's *Complete Notebooks*, edited by Edel and L. H. Powers, Oxford University Press, 1987, throw light on the fiction, including many of the longer tales.

There is a vast quantity of James criticism, much of it excellent. Complete listings can be found in the *Bibliography of Henry James* by Edel and D. H. Laurence, Hart-Davis, 1968, though this is probably only of use to the advanced student. Among accessible short surveys of James's fictions are Dupee (see above), D. W. Jefferson, *Henry James*, Oliver and Boyd, 1960, and Tony Tanner, *Henry James: The Writer and his Work*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1985, which includes a helpful brief bibliography and a chronological listing of James's books. While there are no good studies devoted specifically to the short stories, John Bayley's *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*, Harvester Press, 1988, is a useful starting point.

CHRONOLOGY

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
1842	Birth of William James.	
1843	Henry James born in New York City.	
1848		
1851		Melville: <i>Moby-Dick</i> .
1852		
1854–6		
1855–9	Extensive travels and education abroad.	
1856		Flaubert: <i>Madame Bovary</i> . Turgenev: <i>Rudin</i> .
1857		
1859		Eliot: <i>Adam Bede</i> . Eliot: <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> .
1860	Return to America.	Turgenev: <i>On the Eve</i> . Hawthorne: <i>The Marble Faun</i> .
1861		Dickens: <i>Great Expectations</i> .
1861–5		Turgenev: <i>Fathers and Children</i> .
1862–3	Harvard Law School.	Flaubert: <i>Salammbô</i> .
1864	First story ('A Tragedy of Error') published anonymously.	Trollope: <i>Can You Forgive Her?</i>
1865	First signed story ('The Story of a Year') published in <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> .	Dickens: <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> .

1867		Zola: <i>Thérèse Raquin</i> .
		Flaubert: <i>L'Education sentimentale</i> .
1869	First adult travels in Europe (to 1870).	Tolstoy: <i>War and Peace</i> .
1870	Death of Minny Temple. <i>Watch and Ward</i> – first novel – serialized in <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> .	
1871		Eliot: <i>Middlemarch</i> (to 1872). Zola: <i>La Fortune des Rougon</i> .
1872–4	Further travels in Europe.	
1874–5	Returns to America on completion of his first large novel, <i>Roderick Hudson</i> .	Hardy: <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> .
1875	<i>Transatlantic Sketches, A Passionate Pilgrim</i> (first collection of stories) and <i>Roderick Hudson</i> published.	Trollope: <i>The Way We Live Now</i> .

HISTORICAL EVENTS

European revolutions. Californian Gold Rush.
Great Exhibition.
Louis Napoleon proclaimed Emperor of France.
Crimean War.

Indian Mutiny.
Darwin: *The Origin of Species*.

Ten states secede from Union. American Civil war begins.

Presidency of Lincoln.

End of Civil War. Assassination of Lincoln.

Marx: *Das Kapital* I.

Franco-Prussian War.

First Impressionist exhibition in Paris (1874).

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
1875-6	Visits Paris, where he meets Turgenev, Zola and Flaubert. Settles in London.	Eliot: <i>Daniel Deronda</i> . Twain: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> .
1877	<i>The American</i> .	
1878	'Daisy Miller' establishes his international reputation. Publishes first volume of essays (<i>French Poets and Novelists</i>).	Hardy: <i>The Return of the Native</i> .
1879	<i>Hawthorne</i> .	Ibsen: <i>A Doll's House</i> . Dostoevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> .
1880		Death of George Eliot and Flaubert.
1881	<i>Washington Square</i> . <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> .	
1882-3	Visits America. Death of his parents.	
1883		Maupassant: <i>Une Vie</i> . Mark Twain: <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> .
1884	Returns to London with his sister Alice.	Howells: <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> . Zola: <i>Germinal</i> . Maupassant: <i>Bel Ami</i> . Stevenson: <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> .
1885		Chekhov: 'The Kiss'.
1886	<i>The Bostonians</i> . <i>The Princess Casamassima</i> . Living in Italy. Friendship with Constance Fenimore	

1887	Woolson.	
1888	'The Aspern Papers'.	Kipling: <i>Plain Tales from the Hills</i> .
1890	<i>The Tragic Muse</i> . Dramatizes <i>The American</i> , which has a short run.	William James: <i>Principles of Psychology</i> . Kipling: <i>Soldiers Three</i> .
1891	Writing for the theatre.	Hardy: <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> . Gissing: <i>New Grub Street</i> .
1892	Death of Alice James.	Wilde: <i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i> . Crane: <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> .
1895	Booed off stage at première of <i>Guy Domville</i> . Gives up writing for theatre.	Hardy: <i>Jude the Obscure</i> . Wells: <i>The Time Machine</i> . Wilde: <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> .
1896		
1897	Settles at Lamb House, Rye. <i>The Spoils of Pynton</i> . <i>What Maisie Knew</i> .	Conrad: <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i> . Wells: <i>The Invisible Man</i> .
1898	'In the Cage'. 'The Turn of the Screw'.	Shaw: <i>Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant</i> .

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Invention of telephone (1876).

Gladstone becomes Prime Minister.

Irish Land Act.

Married Women's Property Act (1882).

Year of the 'Great Upheaval' (USA): 700,000 on strike; demand for eight-hour day.

Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Klondike Gold Rush.

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
1899	<i>The Awkward Age</i> . Friendship with Conrad and Wells.	Chopin: <i>The Awakening</i> . Norris: <i>McTeague</i> .
1900		Dreiser: <i>Sister Carrie</i> . Conrad: <i>Lord Jim</i> .
1901	<i>The Sacred Fount</i> .	Kipling: <i>Kim</i> .
1901–9		
1902	<i>The Wings of the Dove</i> .	William James: <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i> . Butler: <i>The Way of All Flesh</i> .
1903	<i>The Ambassadors</i> . 'The Beast in the Jungle'. First meeting with Edith Wharton.	Chekhov: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> .
1904	<i>The Golden Bowl</i> .	Conrad: <i>Nostromo</i> . Wells: <i>Kipps</i> .
1905	Visits America for the first time in 20 years.	Wharton: <i>The House of Mirth</i> .
1906	<i>The American Scene</i> .	Sinclair: <i>The Jungle</i> .
1906–10	Prepares 'New York Edition' of his work in 24 volumes.	Adams: <i>The Education of Henry Adams</i> .
1907		Conrad: <i>The Secret Agent</i> . William James:

1908		Forster: <i>A Room with a View</i> . Bennett: <i>The Old Wives' Tale</i> .
1909		Wells: <i>Ann Veronica; Tono Bungay</i> .
1910	Last story, 'A Round of Visits', published. Death of brother, William.	Wells: <i>Mr Polly</i> . Forster: <i>Howards End</i> .
1911		Conrad: <i>Under Western Eyes</i> .
1912		Wharton: <i>Ethan Frome</i> . Mann: <i>Death in Venice</i> . Lawrence: <i>Sons and Lovers</i> .
1913	<i>A Small Boy and Others</i> (autobiography).	Wharton: <i>The Custom of the Country</i> . Proust: <i>Swann's Way</i> . Joyce: <i>Dubliners</i> .
1914	<i>Notes of a Son and Brother</i> (autobiography).	Conrad: <i>Chance</i> . Lawrence: <i>The Rainbow</i> .
1915	Becomes British subject.	Ford: <i>The Good Soldier</i> . Conrad: <i>Victory</i> . Woolf: <i>The Voyage Out</i> .
1916	Dies in London, 28 February.	Joyce: <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> .
1917	<i>The Ivory Tower</i> and <i>The Sense of the Past</i> (unfinished novels). <i>The Middle Years</i> (autobiography).	

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Boer War (to 1902).

Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Death of Queen Victoria. Marconi transmits messages across the Atlantic.

US Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt.

Wright brothers' powered flight. Emmeline Pankhurst founds Women's Social and Political Union.

First Russian Revolution.

Cubist exhibition in Paris.

First Ford Model T car.

Death of Edward VII. Strikes of dockers, miners, railwaymen, transport workers in Britain (to 1912). Suffragette riots.

Sinking of the *Titanic*. Woodrow Wilson wins US presidential election.

Outbreak of World War I.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The texts of the stories in this collection are taken from their original publications in various sources, and not from the amended versions James prepared for the New York edition of his works.

WE talked of London, face to face with a great bristling, primeval glacier. The hour and the scene were one of those impressions which make up a little, in Switzerland, for the modern indignity of travel – the promiscuities and vulgarities, the station and the hotel, the gregarious patience, the struggle for a scrappy attention, the reduction to a numbered state. The high valley was pink with the mountain rose, the cool air as fresh as if the world were young. There was a faint flush of afternoon on undiminished snows, and the fraternising tinkle of the unseen cattle came to us with a cropped and sun-warmed odour. The balcony inn stood on the very neck of the sweetest pass in the Oberland, and for a week we had had company and weather. This was felt to be great luck, for one would have made up for the other had either been bad.

The weather certainly would have made up for the company; but it was not subjected to this tax, for we had by a happy chance the *fleur des pois*: Lord and Lady Mellifont, Clara Vawdrey, the greatest (in the opinion of many) of our literary glories, and Blanche Adney, the greatest (in the opinion of all) of our theatrical. I mention these first, because they were just the people whom in London, at that time, people tried to ‘get’. People endeavoured to ‘book’ them six weeks ahead, yet on this occasion we had come in for them, we had all come in for each other, without the least wire-pulling. A turn of the game had pitched us together the last of August, and we recognised our luck by remaining so, under protection of the barometer. When the golden days were over – that would come soon enough – we should wind down opposite sides of the pass and disappear over the crest of surrounding heights. We were of the same general communion, we participated in the same miscellaneous publicity. We met, in London, with irregular frequency; we were more or less governed by the laws and the language, the traditions and the shibboleths of the same dense social state. I think all of us, even the ladies, ‘did’ something, though we pretended we didn’t when it was mentioned. Such things are not mentioned indeed in London, but it was our innocent pleasure to be different here. There had to be some way to show the difference, inasmuch as we were under the impression that this was our annual holiday. We felt at any rate that the conditions were more human than in London, or that at least we ourselves were. We were frank about this; we talked about it: it was what we were talking about as we looked at the flushing glacier, just as some one called attention to the prolonged absence of Lord Mellifont and Mrs Adney. We were seated on the terrace of the inn, where there were benches and little tables, and those of us who were most bent on proving that we had returned to nature were, in the queer Germanic fashion, having coffee before meat.

The remark about the absence of our two companions was not taken up, not even by Lady Mellifont, not even by little Adney, the fond composer; for it had been dropped only in the briefest intermission of Clara Vawdrey’s talk. (This celebrity was ‘Clarence’ only on the title page.) It was just that revelation of our being after all human that was his theme. He asked the company whether, candidly, every one hadn’t been tempted to say to every one else: ‘I had no idea you were really so nice.’ I had had, for my part, an idea that he was, and even a good deal nicer, but that was too complicated to go into then; besides it is exactly my story. There was a general understanding among us that when Vawdrey talked we should be silent.

and not, oddly enough, because he at all expected it. He didn't, for of all abundant talkers he was the most unconscious, the least greedy and professional. It was rather the religion of the host, of the hostess, that prevailed among us: it was their own idea, but they always looked for a listening circle when the great novelist dined with them. On the occasion I allude to there was probably no one present with whom, in London, he had not dined, and we felt the force of this habit. He had dined even with me; and on the evening of that dinner, as on the Alpine afternoon, I had been at no pains to hold my tongue, absorbed as I inveterately was in a study of the question which always rose before me, to such a height, in his fair, square strong stature.

This question was all the more tormenting that he never suspected himself (I am sure) in imposing it, any more than he had ever observed that every day of his life every one listened to him at dinner. He used to be called 'subjective' in the weekly papers, but in society no distinguished man could have been less so. He never talked about himself; and this was a topic on which, though it would have been tremendously worthy of him, he apparently never even reflected. He had his hours and his habits, his tailor and his hatter, his hygiene and his particular wine, but all these things together never made up an attitude. Yet they constituted the only attitude he ever adopted, and it was easy for him to refer to our being 'nicer' abroad than at home. *He* was exempt from variations, and not a shade either less or more nice in one place than in another. He differed from other people, but never from himself (save in the extraordinary sense which I will presently explain), and struck me as having neither moods nor sensibilities nor preferences. He might have been always in the same company, so far as he recognised any influence from age or condition or sex: he addressed himself to women exactly as he addressed himself to men, and gossiped with all men alike, talking no better to clever folk than to dull. I used to feel a despair at his way of liking one subject – so far as I could tell – precisely as much as another: there were some I hated so myself. I never found him anything but loud and cheerful and copious, and I never heard him utter a paradox or express a shade or play with an idea. That fancy about our being 'human' was, in his conversation, quite an exceptional flight. His opinions were sound and second-rate, and of his perceptions it was too mystifying to think. I envied him his magnificent health.

Vawdrey had marched, with his even pace and his perfectly good conscience, into the flat country of anecdote, where stories are visible from afar like windmills and signposts; but I observed after a little that Lady Mellifont's attention wandered. I happened to be sitting near her. I noticed that her eyes rambled a little anxiously over the lower slopes of the mountain. At last, after looking at her watch, she said to me: 'Do you know where they went?'

'Do you mean Mrs Adney and Lord Mellifont?'

'Lord Mellifont and Mrs Adney.' Her ladyship's speech seemed – unconsciously indeed – to correct me, but it didn't occur to me that this was because she was jealous. I imputed to her no such vulgar sentiment: in the first place, because I liked her, and in the second because it would always occur to one quickly that it was right, in any connection, to put Lord Mellifont first. He was first – extraordinarily first. I don't say greatest or wisest or most renowned, but essentially at the top of the list and the head of the table. That is a position by itself, and his wife was naturally accustomed to see him in it. My phrase had sounded as if Mrs Adney had taken him; but it was not possible for him to be taken – he only took. No one, in the nature of things, could know this better than Lady Mellifont. I had originally been rather afraid of

her, thinking her, with her stiff silences and the extreme blackness of almost everything that made up her person, somewhat hard, even a little saturnine. Her paleness seemed slight grey, and her glossy black hair metallic, like the brooches and bands and combs with which she was inveterately adorned. She was in perpetual mourning, and wore numberless ornaments of jet and onyx, a thousand clicking chains and bugles and beads. I had heard Mrs Adney call her the queen of night, and the term was descriptive if you understood that the night was cloudy. She had a secret, and if you didn't find it out as you knew her better you at least perceived that she was gentle and unaffected and limited, and also rather submissively sad. She was like a woman with a painless malady. I told her that I had merely seen her husband and his companion stroll down the glen together about an hour before, and suggested that Mr Adney would perhaps know something of their intentions.

Vincent Adney, who, though he was fifty years old, looked like a good little boy on whom it had been impressed that children should not talk before company, acquitted himself with remarkable simplicity and taste of the position of husband of a great exponent of comedy. When all was said about her making it easy for him, one couldn't help admiring the charming affection with which he took everything for granted. It is difficult for a husband who is not on the stage, or at least in the theatre, to be graceful about a wife who is; but Adney was more than graceful – he was exquisite, he was inspired. He set his beloved to music; and you can remember how genuine his music could be – the only English compositions I ever saw a foreigner take an interest in. His wife was in them, somewhere, always; they were like a free, rich translation of the impression she produced. She seemed, as one listened, to be laughing, with loosened hair, across the scene. He had been only a little fiddler at her theatre, always in his place during the acts; but she had made him something rare and misunderstood. Their superiority had become a kind of partnership, and their happiness was a part of the happiness of their friends. Adney's one discomfort was that he couldn't write a play for his wife, and the only way he meddled with her affairs was by asking impossible people if *they* couldn't.

Lady Mellifont, after looking across at him a moment, remarked to me that she would rather not put any question to him. She added the next minute: 'I had rather people should not see I'm nervous.'

'Are you nervous?'

'I always become so if my husband is away from me for any time.'

'Do you imagine something has happened to him?'

'Yes, always. Of course I'm used to it.'

'Do you mean his tumbling over precipices – that sort of thing?'

'I don't know exactly what it is: it's the general sense that he'll never come back.'

She said so much and kept back so much that the only way to treat the condition she referred to seemed the jocular. 'Surely he'll never forsake you!' I laughed.

She looked at the ground a moment. 'Oh, at bottom I'm easy.'

'Nothing can ever happen to a man so accomplished, so infallible, so armed at all points,' I went on, encouragingly.

'Oh, you don't know how he's armed!' she exclaimed, with such an odd quaver that I could account for it only by her being nervous. This idea was confirmed by her moving just afterwards, changing her seat rather pointlessly, not as if to cut our conversation short, but

because she was in a fidget. I couldn't know what was the matter with her, but I was presently relieved to see Mrs Adney come toward us. She had in her hand a big bunch of wild flowers, but she was not closely attended by Lord Mellifont. I quickly saw, however, that she had no disaster to announce; yet as I knew there was a question Lady Mellifont would like to hear answered, but did not wish to ask, I expressed to her immediately the hope that her lordship had not remained in a crevasse.

'Oh, no; he left me but three minutes ago. He has gone into the house.' Blanche Adney rested her eyes on mine an instant a mode of intercourse to which no man, for himself, could ever object. The interest, on this occasion, was quickened by the particular thing the eyes happened to say. What they usually said was only: 'Oh, yes I'm charming, I know, but don't make a fuss about it. I only want a new part – I do, I do!' At present they added, dimly and surreptitiously, and of course sweetly – for that was the way they did everything: 'It's all right, but something did happen. Perhaps I'll tell you later.' She turned to Lady Mellifont, and the transition to simple gaiety suggested her mastery of her profession. 'I've brought him safe. We had a charming walk.'

'I'm so very glad,' returned Lady Mellifont, with her faint smile; continuing vaguely, as she got up: 'He must have gone to dress for dinner. Isn't it rather near?' She moved away, to the hotel, in her leave-taking, simplifying fashion, and the rest of us, at the mention of dinner, looked at each other's watches, as if to shift the responsibility of such grossness. The head-waiter, essentially, like all head-waiters, a man of the world, allowed us hours and places of our own, so that in the evening, apart under the lamp, we formed a compact, an indulgent little circle. But it was only the Mellifonts who 'dressed' and as to whom it was recognised that they naturally *would* dress: she in exactly the same manner as on any other evening of her ceremonious existence (she was not a woman whose habits could take account of anything so mutable as fitness); and he, on the other hand, with remarkable adjustment and suitability. He was almost as much a man of the world as the head-waiter, and spoke almost as many languages; but he abstained from courting a comparison of dress-coats and white waistcoats, analysing the occasion in a much finer way – into black velvet and blue velvet and brown velvet, for instance, into delicate harmonies of necktie and subtle informalities of shirt. He had a costume for every function and a moral for every costume; and his functions and costumes and morals were ever a part of the amusement of life – a part at any rate of its beauty and romance – for an immense circle of spectators. For his particular friends indeed these things were more than an amusement; they were a topic, a social support and of course in addition, a subject of perpetual suspense. If his wife had not been present before dinner they were what the rest of us probably would have been putting our heads together about.

Clare Vawdrey had a fund of anecdote on the whole question: he had known Lord Mellifont almost from the beginning. It was a peculiarity of this nobleman that there could be no conversation about him that didn't instantly take the form of anecdote, and a still further distinction that there could apparently be no anecdote that was not on the whole to his honour. If he had come into a room at any moment, people might have said frankly: 'Of course we were telling stories about you!' As consciences go, in London, the general conscience would have been good. Moreover it would have been impossible to imagine him taking such a tribute otherwise than amiably, for he was always as unperturbed as an actor with the right cue. He had never in his life needed the prompter – his very embarrassment

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