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HENRY JAMES

The Ambassadors

THE AMBASADORS

The Ambassadors

by Henry James (1843-1916)

Henry James considered *The Ambassadors* his best, or perhaps his best-wrought, novel. It plays on the great Jamesian theme of Americans abroad, who find themselves in an older, and some would say richer and more sophisticated, culture than that of the United States. The protagonist is Lambert Strether, a man in his fifties, editor of a small literary magazine in the manufacturing town of Woollett, Massachusetts, who arrives in Europe on a mission undertaken at the urging of his patron, Mrs. Newsome, to bring home her son Chadwick. That young man appears to be enjoying his time in Paris rather more than seems good for him, at least to those older and wiser. The novel, however, is really about Strether's education in this old world. One of his teachers is the city of Paris and its society, in which Chad Newsome has become so immersed. Yet for all its beauties and attractions, this is a real Paris, not an idealized one, a Paris with its own superficialities and dangers. From it Strether has much to learn, and its lessons are perhaps not always those that Chad himself has drawn, pleasant as they might at first seem. Had Strether his life to live over again, knowing what he has now learned, how different would it be?

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