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THE
TURN
OF THE
SCREW
AND OTHER SHORT NOVELS

HENRY JAMES
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION

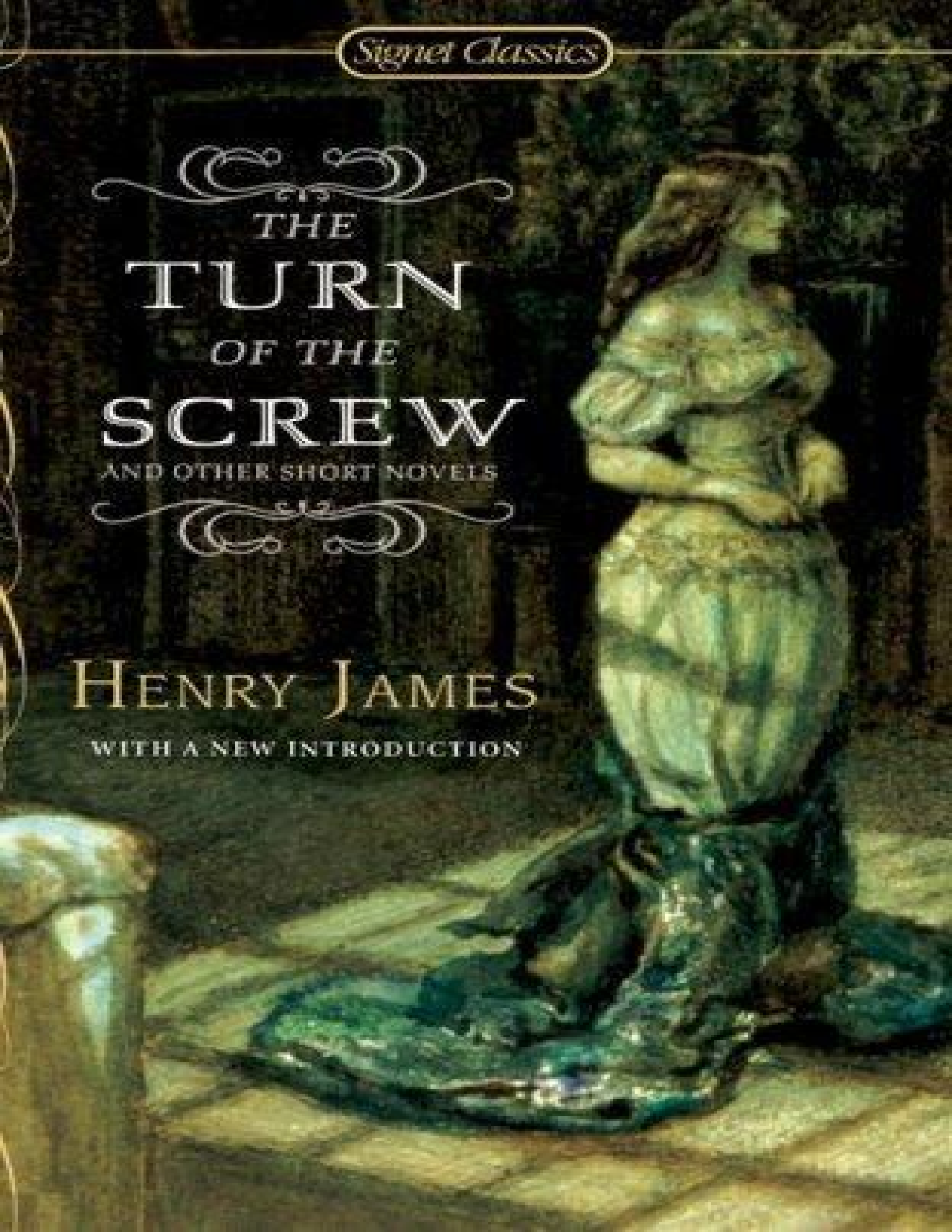


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Henry James (1843-1916) spent his early life in America, but often traveled with his celebrated family to Europe. After briefly attending Harvard, he began to contribute both criticism and tales to magazines. Later, he visited Europe and began *Roderick Hudson*. Late in 1875, he settled in Paris, where he met Turgenev, Flaubert, and Zola and wrote *The American*. In 1876, he moved to London, where two years later he achieved international fame with *Daisy Miller*. His other famous works include *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). In 1915, a few months before his death, he became a British subject.

A biographer and literary scholar, **Fred Kaplan** is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is the author of *The Singular Mark Twain, A Biography* (2003); *Gore Vidal, A Biography* (1999); *Henry James, The Imagination of Genius, A Biography* (1992); and *Charles Dickens, A Biography* (1988). His *Thomas Carlyle, A Biography* (1983), was a finalist for the National Book Critics' Circle Award and was a jury-nominated finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He has edited *Dickens' Book of Memoranda* (1981), the Norton Critical Editions of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1993) and *Hard Times* (2001), and *Traveling in Italy with Henry James* (1994). His other works include *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (1987), *Dickens and Mesmerism: the Hidden Springs of Fiction* (1975), and *Miracles of Rare Device: The Poet's Sense of Self in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (1972). He has held Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowships, and been a Fellow of the National Humanities Center, the Huntington Library, and the Rockefeller Study Center at Bellagio.

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FRED KEPLAN



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Introduction

The tales included in this edition are among Henry James's most powerful and cryptic stories, and they share the theme of an exploration of tombs, especially the dead spots locked within the heart. Written over a thirty-year period, they represent the flower of his career as a writer of short fiction, which began soon after the end of the Civil War. In the 1870s, James was looking for an artistically propitious venue; convinced that the United States lacked the cultural richness required to nurture serious literature, he turned his attention as a writer and traveler to Europe and to what became known as the "international theme." This phrase mainly referred to English-American interactions and attitudes, but it also meant an immersion in the Continental literary tradition, particularly the major French writers, such as Balzac and Maupassant. The synthesis of French literary influences, especially its short story and short novel tradition, with the rich distinctiveness of English culture and James's American sensibility provides the deep background to the tales in this volume and to all James's fiction.

"An International Episode" and "Daisy Miller: A Study" (both 1878) epitomize James's treatment of the international theme. They are also farewells to what had been his sociological treatment of the subject that dominated his first two novels, *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1877). In "An International Episode," James divides the focus of the story between two upper-class Englishmen in America and two upper-class but comparatively classless American women in England, cleverly providing for contrast within each pair. The emphasis is on cultural differences rather than on individual personalities; the characters are national types, chess pieces moved about on the authorial chessboard for the purpose of highlighting differences in values that are substantially determined by national identity. In the end, Bessie Alden, an exemplification of American probity and independence, rejects Lord Lambeth, whom she loves, because she will not submit to being condescended to by his family, who embody English adherence to social rank and hierarchical deference. The story is stingingly realistic in regard to social and class-based realities, and the author manages the story's best effects by limiting the depiction of the thoughts and feelings of its characters to external description and dialogue.

“Daisy Miller: A Study” has the advantage of having its focus narrowed even further. The point of view of this third-person narrative is restricted almost entirely to that of a single character, an American expatriate named Winterbourne. Its variation on the “international theme” provides a half turn away from the comparative focus of “An International Episode,” by emphasizing the dissonance between a naive American girl and a range of disapproving Americans who are, in order of importance to poor Daisy, ineffectual, censorious, and ambivalent. It is Winterbourne who is the latter, and the centrality of his sensibility to the story inches “Daisy Miller” toward the psychological realism of James’s later stories. It is Winterbourne, not Daisy, to whom the subtitle of the story refers. Aware that the innocent and fun-loving Daisy is committing dangerous improprieties that are acceptable neither to Europeans nor Americans, Winterbourne so fears commitment that he remains more an observer than a participant in her fate. In the end, it is Winterbourne himself who is the main character of the story: a sexually ambivalent, emotionally well-defended, deracinated American who most of all fears making a mistake. Inclined to believe in Daisy’s innocence, he nevertheless makes at best a low-risk effort to warn her against the likely disaster that will result from her conduct. Though he blames Daisy’s Italian suitor for her death, he inwardly recognizes his own failure. But he has his rationale: “I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts.” James’s ironic conclusion neatly pins Winterbourne wriggling to the wall: “Nevertheless, he went back to live in Geneva, whence there continue to come the most contradictory accounts of his motives of sojourn: a report that he is ‘studying’ hard—an intimation that he is much interested in a very clever foreign lady.”

There is nothing, though, in “An International Episode” or “Daisy Miller,” fine as they are, that prepares us for the subtle psychological realism of James’s depictions of the elusiveness of self-knowledge and the terrors of confronting one’s concealed motivations in the three premier stories of this volume, “The Aspern Papers,” “The Turn of the Screw,” and “The Beast in the Jungle.” Beginning in the 1880s with *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), which literary historians tend to think of as James’s breakthrough novel, the fate of Americans in Europe and the interaction between European sophistication and American innocence became more a matter of the heart and psyche than one of manners, social relations, and cultural

differences. The narrator of the “The Aspern Papers” (1888), an American literary scholar and biographer, is also interested in a “very clever foreign lady,” so to speak: Julia Bordereau, an elderly American of great strength of character who has lived so long in Venice that she no longer has any national identity. Bordereau had been in her youth the lover and the adored lyric subject of the deceased world-famous English poet Jeffrey Aspern. A bachelor with no ties and no marital past, the biographer passionately desires to gain possession of a hidden cache of letters from Aspern to Bordereau, written when they were lovers. At first, Julia’s aim is to maintain the privacy of the papers. The narrator’s aim is to do everything in his power to wrest them from her, without illegality or violence, though his obsession with obtaining them eventually pushes him beyond the moral boundaries that are his normative standards, including manipulating Julia’s niece-caretaker to assist him, allowing her to fall in love with him without being scrupulous enough to consider what responsibilities such manipulation might entail. In order to provide for the financial security and marital protection of her niece, Julia is willing to give up the papers to prying and public eyes if the biographer will marry Tita Bordereau.

As with Winterbourne, though to a far greater extent since he is the narrator of his own story, the biographer’s heart and psyche become the focus: the subtle and self-deceiving patterns of feeling that expose to himself and others the deepest currents of his desire and self-definition. James creates a character whose self-exposure increasingly reveals an egomaniacally callous man whose machinations are eventually neutralized by his inability to take the final step. The price is too high. He cannot, in the end, marry Tita Bordereau because, as he explains to himself, she is elderly, unattractive, and inappropriate to his social status. The realism of this rationale appears unconvincing to the reader in relation to his intense desire to gain possession of the papers. It may best be understood as the cover that James provides for author and character. It allows James to dramatize without directly referencing the narrator’s homosexual panic, which explains his trauma and the flight he undertakes when he first learns of the stipulation under which he can have the papers. For someone who has revealed himself willing to go to almost any length to obtain them, his revulsion at taking that step speaks not of rational evaluation (such as consideration of an unconsummated marriage of mutual convenience) but of an affront so deep to his sexual identity that no alternative is possible but

withdrawal. After much hesitation, anguish, and self-criticism, he determines to have a second go at getting the papers, still on his own terms and still without paying the marital price. "I would not unite myself [to her] and yet I would have them." Before he can implement any new strategy, Tita burns the letters, an expression of her guilelessness and transparency. The needy and honest lady had taken him at his word and then done what Miss Julia requested.

James's homoeroticism has become a given in modern biographical and critical studies of the author and his work. As with authors in general, he is every place in his fiction, diffused and imaginatively re-created but nevertheless a real presence. For the biographer, aware of the wide reach of the accusation "publishing scoundrel" (Julia Bordereau's charge against the American biographer), the distance between James's own sexuality and that of the narrator of the novella is discernible enough to be noticed but not great enough to be emphasized. James works with indirection, hints that are often unmistakably clear without ever being verbally explicit. In that situation, we are all reading and writing "scoundrels," so to speak, compelled to follow our interpretative preoccupations, including the biographical, and gain possession of what we pursue.

James tempts us into close critical readings of and clever methodological approaches to his texts as much if not more than any other writer of his period. "The Turn of the Screw" has been turned and returned through a large number of critical approaches, perhaps only rivaled in this regard by *Hamlet*. The spectrum of critical approaches ranges from Freudian, to feminist, to gay, to materialist, partly because the complexity of the first-person narrative lends itself to analysis and partly because the tale also offers an engaging twist on the traditional genre of the ghost story. Its psychological and epistemological complexities have received the most attention, focusing on such questions as: What is "real" and what is "unreal" in this narrative and how are we to know? How reliable a narrator is the governess? Does she really see the dead servants who supposedly have corrupted the children or are they figments of her hysterical imagination? Is the governess a force for good or for evil in the lives of the children? Are her attraction to her employer and her own repressed sexuality triggers for her state of mind or has she actually seen wicked ghosts who desire to take full possession of her two young charges? There seems almost no end to the inquiries the narrative promotes, including why