

# Henry James

1843-1916



# 1843

- **Henry James is born**

Henry James Jr. is born at 21 **Washington Place** in Manhattan on **April 15**, the second son of Henry and Mary James. His father is an eccentric, WEALTHY philosopher

## **The James family moves to Europe**

In October the James family makes their first move to Europe, living in both England and France. While in England, Henry Sr. suffers a nervous breakdown.



**Washington Square, New York**

- **1845 The James family returns to America**  
After a two-year stay in Europe, the Jameses move to Albany, New York. This year marks the beginning of a 10-year stay in America, Henry Jr.'s longest consecutive residence in his native land.
- **Two years later the James family moves to New York City**  
The family moves into a fashionable home on W. 14th Street which they hope will be their permanent residence. Henry will remember this home as the family's most settled. His education, on the other hand, is anything but.

- **1855: The James family returns to Europe**  
The family moves to Switzerland in August. After only two months of living in Geneva, the family resettles in Paris, then London, the move motivated by Henry Sr.'s disappointment in the Swiss schools. In London the children are instructed by tutors.
- **1856: The James family settles in Paris**  
Henry Sr. wants the children to improve their French, so the family returns to Paris. During the two-year stay, Henry Sr. idealizes his home country. Charles Dickens is the Jameses's neighbor on the Champs-Élysées, but they never meet him.



**Henry James as a young man**

- **1858: The Jameses move to Rhode Island**  
Attracted by its genteel wealth, Henry Sr. chooses Newport as his family's new home. William and Henry love Newport and do not want to return to Europe. For the first time Henry Jr. feels a sense of belonging.
- **1859: The James family returns to Geneva**  
Distressed by his sons' desire to attend college, and by the American "characteristics of extravagance and insubordination" which he fears they are adopting, Henry Sr. decides to move his family back to Europe. William is openly disgusted, Henry internally so.
- **James goes to a polytechnic school**  
Although previously dissatisfied by Swiss schools, Henry Sr. now enrolls Henry Jr. at the Institution Rochette, a polytechnic school for aspiring engineers. Henry hates it and longs to be back in Newport.



- **1860: Henry Sr. moves back to America for good**  
the Jameses return to Newport so that William can study painting under William Morris Hunt.
  - **James befriends Mary "Minnie" Temple**  
Reuniting with his six orphaned Temple cousins, Henry begins to spend time with his favorite, **17-year-old Minny.**
- "In a world in which women were predictably conditioned into narrow roles, Minny had managed by sheer force of personality to be exceptional."**

- **1862: James goes to law school**  
Henry is eager to do something during the Civil War other than be "just literary." Surprisingly, his father allows him to enroll in Harvard Law School. Law doesn't grip him, though, and he decides to become a full-time writer.
- **1864: First short story**  
'A tragedy of Error' published anonymously in the *Continental Monthly*

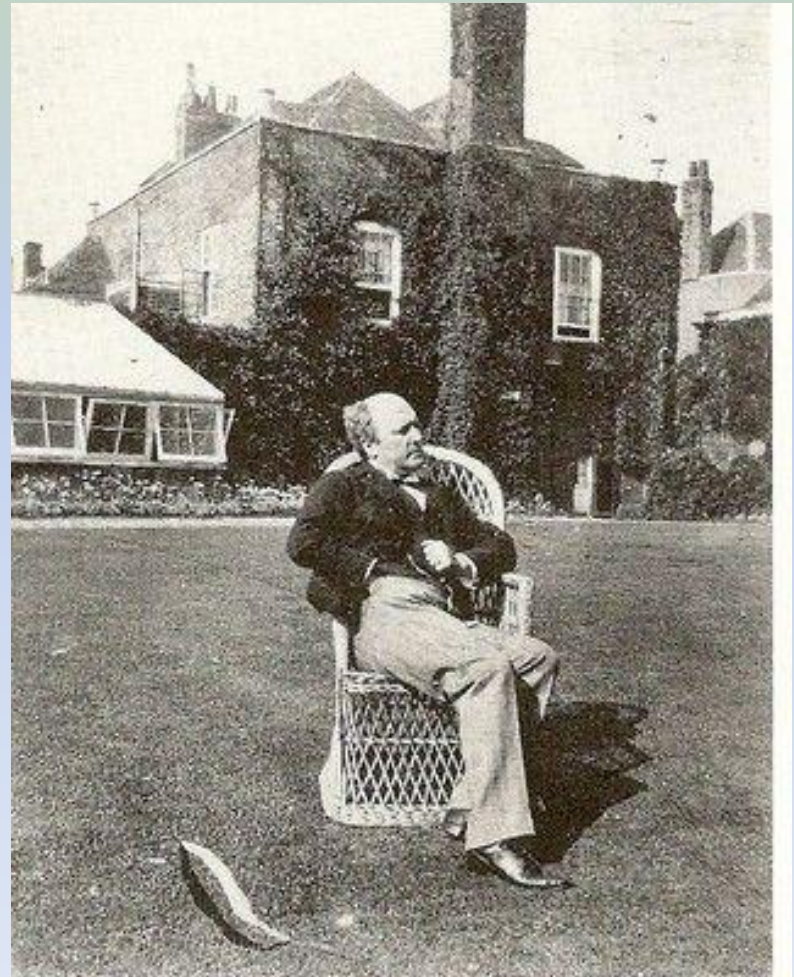
- **1869: James goes to Europe alone**  
After William returns from his 18-month stay abroad, Henry travels to Europe, also to cure his "elusive ills." In London he gains entry into artistic circles, socializing with Leslie Stephen (Virginia Woolf's father), the socialist artist William Morris, and the painter Gabriele Rossetti.  
  
**James meets George Eliot**  
In May Henry meets his revered George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). He considers her the only English novelist "to have powers of thought at all commensurate with [her] powers of imagination." George Eliot is also a favorite of Minny Temple's.



- **1870: Minny Temple dies of tuberculosis**  
On March 8 Minny Temple dies of tuberculosis. She will serve as the model for many of Henry's fictional heroines, most notably Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*.
- **1882: Death of his mother** (January), and death of his father in December.

- **1886 James takes a permanent home**  
After an adulthood of wandering, Henry signs a 21-year lease on a large flat at 34 De Vere Gardens, Kensington, London. "It is an anchorage for life," he says.
- **1894:** James visits **Venice**, where his dear friend **Constance Fenimore Woolson** has just killed herself

- **James moves to Rye**  
Weary of constant travel, but not wanting to stay in London year round, Henry leases and then buys Lamb House in quiet Rye, England. This will be his home for the rest of his life.



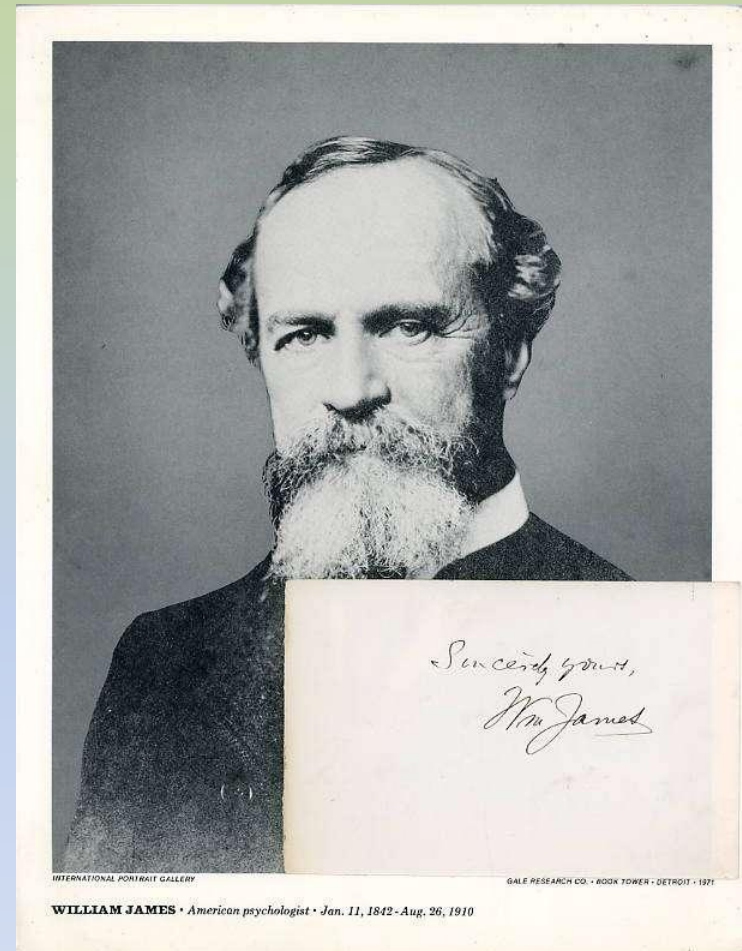
# America, again

- **1904**
- **James returns to America**

For the first time in 20 years, Henry sails to America for a lecture tour with much trepidation. He finds America nearly unrecognizable, a new, technological world. He spends most of his time visiting Edith Wharton and William.
- **James visits the family graves**

In November, Henry visits the graves of his parents and sister for the first time. This is what he considers the mission of his trip.

- **1910:** depression
- Death of his beloved brother, the philosopher and psychologist **William James** ['Stream of Consciousness']



• **1913:**

**James sits for Sargent**

To commemorate Henry's 70th birthday, longtime friend **John Singer Sargent** paints a large-scale oil portrait of him. Henry is delighted by the tribute.





- **1915: James becomes a British citizen**  
On July 28, disgusted that the United States hasn't joined the Anglo-French cause, Henry James becomes a British citizen.
- **1916:** After suffering some strokes, on February 28, Henry James dies.

‘One might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left.. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools--no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class--no Epsom nor Ascot! Some such list as that might be drawn up of the absent things in American life--especially in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which, upon an English or a French imagination, would probably as a general thing be appalling. The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains--that is his secret, his joke, as one may say. It would be cruel, in this terrible denudation, to deny him the consolation of his national gift, that "American humour" of which of late years we have heard so much’.

(Henry James, *Hawthorne*, 1879)

# Erik Larsen: *'Identity and Otherness in Two Texts by Henry James'*

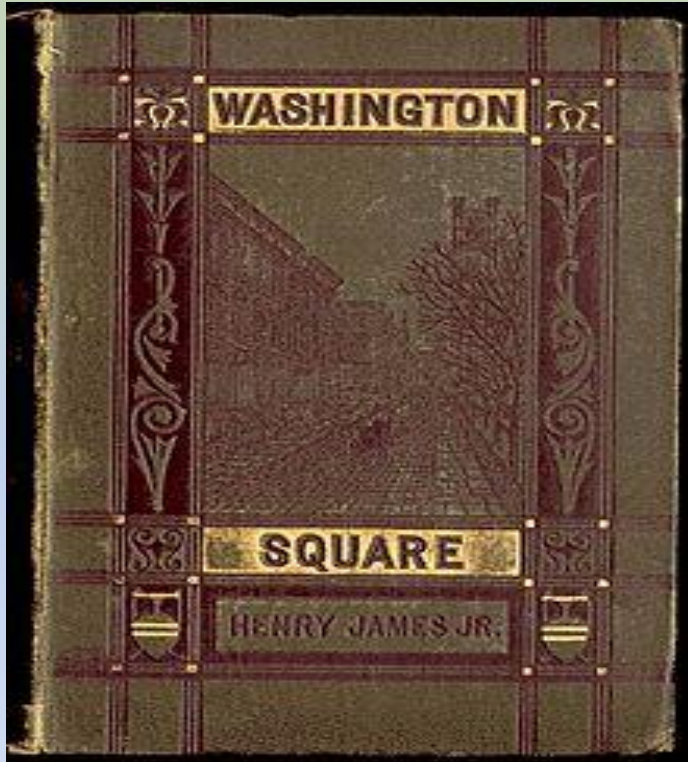
- 'The American going to Europe and experiencing the clash between the American identity and the European origin, the American materialism and the European culturalism, the American vulgarity and the European sophistication and, also, the American dynamics and the European petrification' (1)

# **The American** v. **the European**

- **Innocence**
- **Spontaneity**

- **Knowledge**
- **Experience**
- **Form/Rituals**
- **Ceremony**

# *Washington Square*



- Published in **1880**:  
June-Nov: Serial run in London's *Cornhill Magazine (UK)*  
July-Dec: *Serial run in Harper's New Monthly (USA)*
- Henry James: **'the only good thing in the story was the girl'**

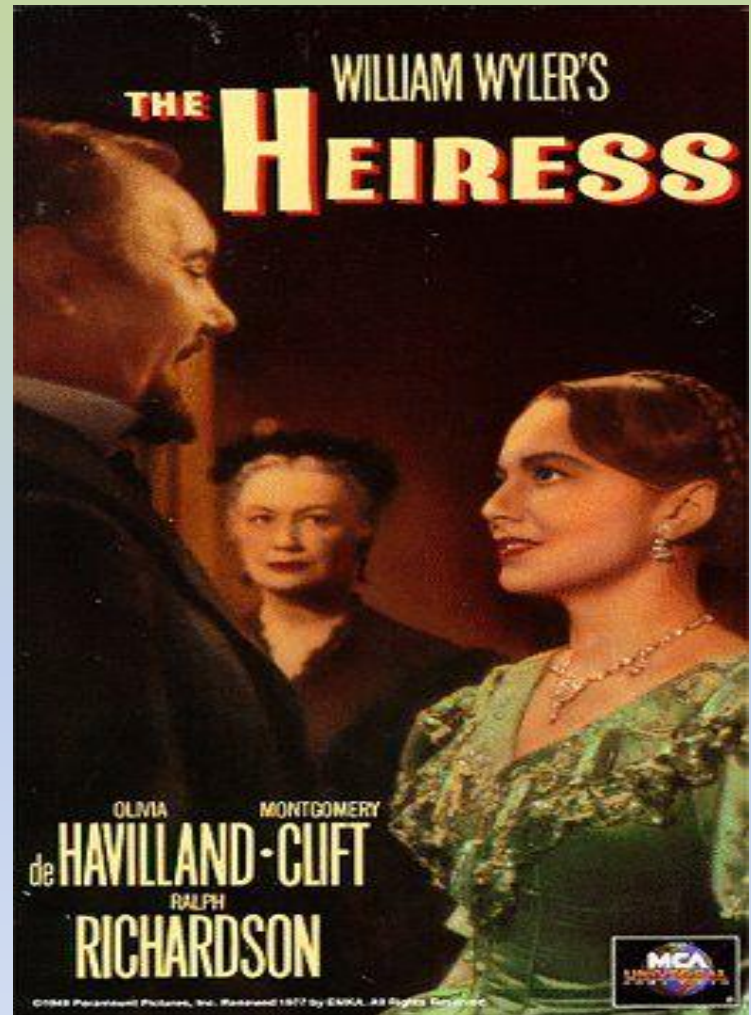
(letter to William James of 27 November 1880)

Only Your Heart  
Can Grasp The Full Greatness Of These Stars...This Story!



Paramount presents  
Olivia de Havilland · Montgomery Clift  
Ralph Richardson  
WILLIAM WYLER'S  
*"The Heiress"*

MIRIAM HOPKINS  
MONA FREEMAN · VANESSA BROWN · SELENA ROYLE  
Produced and Directed by WILLIAM WYLER · Screenplay by Ruth and Augustin Coetz  
Based upon their stage-play



# Many renditions

- Stage play ***The Heiress*** by Ruth and Augustus Goetz (1946)
- Film ***The Heiress*** directed by William Wyler, screenplay by the Goetz (1949)
- Film ***Washington Square*** directed by Agnieszka Holland (1997)
- Ballets by Ashley Killar (1975), James Kudelka (1976), Nureyev and Carrière (1985)
- Operas by Damse (1974), Pasatieri (1976) Hollier (1988)

## The source: an **anedocte** told to James by the actress Frances Kemble

Mrs. Kemble told me last evening the history of her brother H.' s engagement to Miss T. H.K. was a young ensign in a marching regiment, very handsome ("beautiful") said Mrs K., but very luxurious and selfish, and without a penny to his name. Miss T. was a dull, plain, common-place girl, only daughter of the Master of King's Coll., Cambridge, who had a handsome private fortune (£ 4000 a year). She was very much in love with H.K., and was of that slow, sober, dutiful nature that an impression once made upon her, was made for ever. Her father disapproved strongly (and justly) of the engagement and informed her that if she married young K. he would not leave her a penny of his money. It was only in her money that H. was interested; he wanted a rich wife who would enable him to live at his ease and pursue his pleasures. Miss T. was in much tribulation and she asked Mrs K. what she would advise her to do— Henry K. having taken the ground that if she would hold on and marry him the old Doctor would after a while relent and they should get the money. (It was in this belief that he was holding on to her.) Mrs K. advised the young girl by no means to marry her brother. ("If your father does relent and you are well off, he will make you a kindly enough husband, so long as all goes well. But if he should not, and you were to be poor, your lot would be miserable. Then my brother would be a very uncomfortable companion— then he would visit upon you his disappointment and discontent." )



THE  
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

JUNE, 1880.

Washington Square.\*

I.



URING a portion of the first half of the present century, and more particularly during the latter part of it, there flourished and practised in the city of New York a physician who enjoyed perhaps an exceptional share of the consideration which, in the United States, has always been bestowed upon distinguished members of the medical profession. This profession in America has constantly been held in honour, and more successfully than elsewhere has put forward a claim to the epithet of "liberal." In a country in which, to play a social part, you must either earn your income or make believe that you earn it, the healing art has appeared in a high degree to

combine two recognised sources of credit. It belongs to the realm of the practical, which in the United States is a great recommendation; and it is touched by the light of science—a merit appreciated in a community in which the love of knowledge has not always been

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31.

- James jotted down this slight incident about a **Rich Girl, a Conniving Suitor, and a Disapproving Father,** then went about making *something* out of what might have seemed *next to nothing* to anyone lacking James's **magpie-like** imagination.'

(Martha Banta: Penguin Classics  
Introduction to *Washington Square*  
by Henry James, Penguin Classics)

# A review in *The Spectator* February 5, 1881

- ‘In short, Washington Square might be described as the story of how a **dull girl's nature was lit up by passion for a mock-hero**, how the **father tried to cut it out of her as he would have performed a surgical operation**, and only succeeded in cutting out of her all love for himself ; how the aunt fanned the flame with her fancy falsehoods, and made it burn brighter and brighter, till the object of the passion showed himself in his true colours ; and how after that, it smouldered away and went out, leaving the life in which it had been lit a little blunter, a little duller, and a little more tolerant of bare surroundings than it found it. The story is marvellously clever. To our minds, nothing more unique in the presenting of human nature than **Dr. Sloper's cold-hearted experiments** on his daughter's nature, and utter failure to do anything except rob her of her admiration for him, has ever been given us ‘

Now...



# And then...

**Washington Square:** located at the lower end of 5th Avenue between 4th and 7th street. It used to be a marsh, later a burial site and also a location for public hangings.

1827: creation of a city park

1830s/1840s: fashionable residential area, part of Greenwich village.



# Washington Square in the 19th century

James was born at 21  
Washington Place...  
(middle-class  
environment)



AllPosters



# The main characters...

- **Dr. Sloper** a 'clever' and wealthy physician
- **Catherine Sloper**, his daughter 'plain, dull, not clever'
- **Mrs. Penniman**, Catherine's aunt and Dr. Sloper's sister with a flair for melodrama and romances
- **Morris Townsend**, Catherine's suitor and a fortune hunter

# *Washington Square*

- A **transitional** work?
- Through the character of Catherine Sloper: the exploration and growth of a **consciousness**, which will be further developed in the character of Isabel Archer (*Portrait of a Lady*)
- ‘The characters’ **language** reflects who they are: Dr. Sloper’s irony/sarcasm; Mrs Penniman’s meddling and Morris’s manipulative charm. But Catherine’s silences and unaffected manner mirror her INTEGRITY and DECENCY ‘ (Prof. Buonomo)

‘Catherine Sloper is placed at the centre of a situation that appears to bind her to the conventions of a romance-plot. The general consensus that she is ‘not constituted to inspire a romantic passion’ suggests she has only one role to play: that of Victimized Heiress at the mercy of the stand-off between Fortune Hunter and Disapproving Father. But [...] she is no victim. She refuses to be the weak-willed female because she elects not to be enclosed within the banal story-line by which others, including her father, her aunt and her lover define her.’ (Martha Banta: Penguin Classics Introduction to *Washington Square* by Henry James, Penguin Classics)



# The meaning of 'CLEVER' in W.S.

(Millicent Bell)

