



George Eliot (1819-1880)

George Eliot was the pen-name of a woman, Mary Ann Evans. She was one of the leading novelists of the Victorian age. Her novels, mainly set in the English countryside or small towns are known for their realism and psychological depth. After her father died in 1849 she travelled around Europe before settling in London and working as assistant editor on a magazine. It was highly unusual for a woman both to travel and work in journalism, but this was nothing compared to the scandal when she went to live with George Henry Lewis. He was already married and

could not get a divorce, but even so they lived together for 24 years until his death. By Victorian standards this was extremely shocking. However, she was a deeply religious woman and very critical of hypocrisy in the Church and in society. Her novels are all written with a social conscience and tell the stories of the lives of ordinary people and their everyday problems.

Her first three novels deal with social outsiders and small-town village persecution:

Adam Bede
The Mill on the Floss
Silas Marner

Her later novels had more strongly political themes.

Felix Holt, the Radical
Middlemarch

Readers in the 19th Century particularly praised her books for their portraits of village life. Like Wordsworth, she believed there was much importance in the ordinary details of ordinary country lives.

Adam Bede (1859)

is the first of George Eliot's novels. It is the story of village life, a tight-knit community. It tells of a love triangle between Adam, the local carpenter, Arthur, the village squire, and a girl called Hetty. The story is one of the ruthless hand of Fate, lives ruined by pregnancy and death, and finally a happy ending when Adam marries his true love, Dinah.

The story is filled with descriptions of the natural beauty of the countryside and many scenes of village life. There are portraits of the local pastor and the surrounding families and a marvelous chapter on the excitement of the village fete provided by the rich manor house family.

This is a comfortable, safe, England – the old ways of the countryside. Readers liked to feel this way of life still existed in a world that was changing. George Eliot felt the same, but underneath she can see faults and hypocrisies in this very closed- in small world. She quotes the old prayer that villagers would recite each Sunday:

“Bless the Squire and his relations,
And keep us in our proper stations”

The Mill on the Floss (1860)

The novel tells the story of Tom and Maggie Tulliver, a brother and sister growing up on the River Floss near an English village in the 1820s. The novel covers a period of 15 years, from Tom's and Maggie's childhood up until their deaths in a flood on the Floss.



Tom and Maggie are overwhelmed by the waters of the Floss

Maggie Tulliver is the central character in the story, which is about her relationships with her older brother Tom, and her love for two men, Philip Wakem, a hunchbacked, but sensitive and intellectual friend, and with Stephen Guest, handsome young man that everyone thinks will marry Maggie's cousin, Lucy Deane. Maggie's behaviour leads to her being rejected by the people of her village and even by her own brother. Tom refuses to forgive her, but when the river floods, and Tom's life is in danger, she gets a boat and tries to rescue him. In a brief tender moment, the brother and sister are reconciled from all past differences. When their boat capsizes, the two drown in an embrace, thus giving the book its Biblical epigraph,

“In their death they were not divided.”

In some ways this novel is strongly influenced by the real-life disgrace that faced George Eliot herself because of her own relationship with a married man, George Henry Lewes.

Silas Marner (1861)

With her next novel George Eliot was a little more realistic about country life. This was a more honest portrait and not the false view of village life that many people still held. This was not a world of happy peasants singing and dancing in their old-fashioned and simple homes. This was a closed-in world where Silas is wrongly accused of theft and is forced to leave his home because of the behaviour of the villagers.

Silas becomes a sad, unhappy man, living only for his money, and counting his wealth each day. The story has a fairy-tale quality, because Silas is finally brought back to a happier world because of the love of a young girl. He changes from a sad, unhappy man with wrong values into a happy man with the traditional human values. This is in the same way that political, economic, and social changes were transforming England from a rural land of villages to an industrial land of smoky cities.

Silas is initially seen as a sympathetic character who suffers from a false accusation of theft in his small rural village. The portrait of this village is the kind of thing England's older population could remember with affection, especially those forced to live in the new industrial towns.

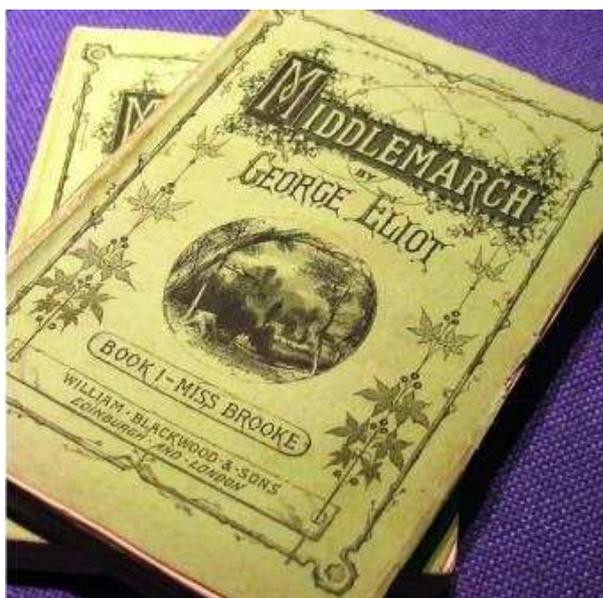
Felix Holt, the Radical (1866)

When Harold Transome, a young nobleman, returns to England with a fortune he has earned abroad, he causes a great scandal in his home town. He will be standing for election to Parliament as a “Radical”, to the shock of his family and the people of the town, who have always supported the traditional “Tory” Party.

Felix Holt also returns to the town, and he, too, has “Radical” political views. But he and Harold are

quite different: Harold sees good opportunities for himself in the forthcoming election, whereas Felix is seeking to serve and educate the working-class.

At first, Felix is viewed with suspicion by many, including the elegant but vain Esther Lyon, the daughter of the local clergyman. As she discovers, however, Felix is honest and genuine in his passion and deep integrity. Soon the romantic and over-refined Esther finds herself overwhelmed by a heart-wrenching decision: whether to choose the wealthy and selfish Harold as a husband, or the poor but honest Felix Holt.



Middlemarch (1871)

“Middlemarch” is George Eliot’s most important and successful novel. The story takes place in rural England in the 1830s. Its central theme is the connection between the rules of religion and the demands of the modern world, and how this affects the lives of the different characters.

This is a very long and very complicated story. In this book George Eliot has created an entire community called Middlemarch. She has populated this small town with people of every station, local squires and their families, tradespeople, the rising middle class, the poor and destitute, ruthless and honest.

She has crowded them together, with their ambitions and dreams and created a wonderful spider’s-web of plots and subplots. The novel

contains a lot of social commentary. The people in Middlemarch are getting rich because of modern changes. New machines and railway-travel are changing the world, the village economy and the small-town politics. Village life is giving way to city life. Society itself is changing .

The significance of George Eliot’s novels

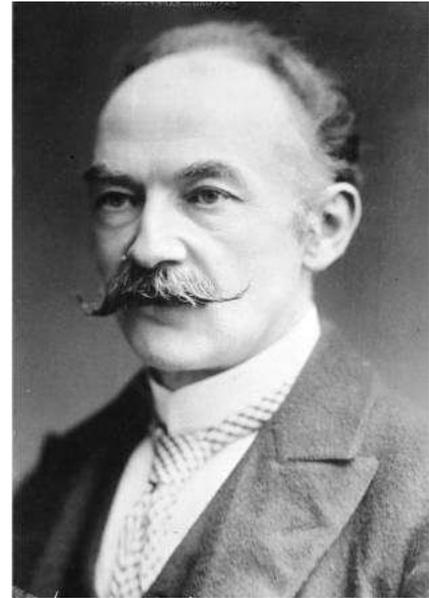
This was a time when the true impact of the Industrial Revolution was affecting many people’s lives, and a time when more and more people were being allowed to vote and play a part in shaping society. The old ways of agricultural society and village life were gradually giving way to a new social order.

George Eliot’s novels painted a wonderful portrait of the old village life. She wrote lovingly about the beauty of the surrounding countryside and the simple ways of the people. However, she recognized that village life was not all happiness and an ideal world. It could be full of hypocrisy and unfairness. She was honest in her descriptions. She also recognized, with regret, that village life was part of a changing world and was gradually disappearing.

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)

Thomas Hardy was born in a village in the south-west of England and originally trained to be an architect. For a short while he worked in an architect's office in London, but he hated city life and soon returned to the country. His first works were not published until he was 31 years old and from then on he quickly achieved fame and financial success.

His novels mainly are stories set in the old, dark landscapes of Wessex (the south-west of England). They tell of lonely individuals with human weaknesses struggling against a fate that always defeats them. Some of his novels (especially "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" and "Jude the Obscure") remind critics of the old Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, where problems and curses are passed down the family line. However, the ancient Greek playwrights wrote about gods and royal families; Hardy's heroes and heroines are ordinary people like farmers and dairy-maids.



His important works were the novels:

Under the Greenwood Tree (1873)
 Far From the Madding Crowd (1874)
 The Return of the Native (1878)
 The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886)
 Tess of the Durbervilles (1891)
 Jude the Obscure (1895)

When "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" appeared in 1891, Thomas Hardy was already one of England's most successful writers. But "Tess" caused a huge fuss. It was criticized for being scandalous and shocking. He was deeply wounded by some of the very personal attacks he received from critics and reviewers of the book. Naturally, with all the publicity, the book earned him a great deal of money, but in 1892, he wrote in one of his notebooks "Well, if this sort of thing continues, no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at."

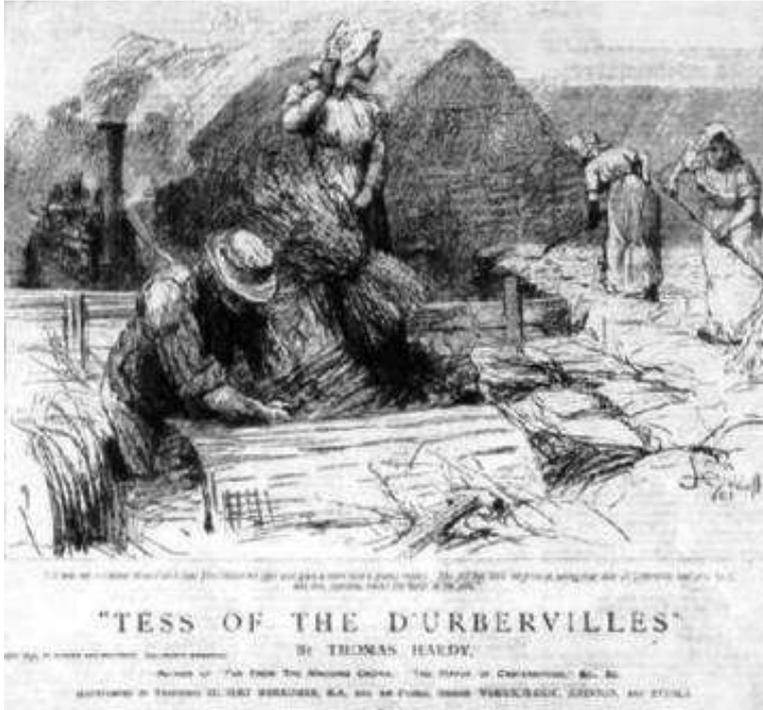
He wrote only more novel after "Tess of the d'Urbervilles", even though he lived another 37 years. He then turned to poetry and finally an epic blank verse drama called "The Dynasts". However, his most important novel is:

Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891)

The story:

Tess Durbeyfield is the daughter of a poor farmer. Their family was once rich and known as D'Urberville. Tess is seduced by a rich young man called Alec, and she gives birth to his child which dies shortly afterwards. Later she is working as a dairymaid and falls in love with Angel Clare – the son of a clergyman. On her wedding night she confesses her previous liaison with Alec. This is a mistake, and an angry Angel Clare throws her out of his home.

Now very poor and in a desperate situation she once more meets Alec and goes to live with him. Time passes. Angel Clare returns from Brazil and decides to forgive Tess, but Alec refuses to let Tess return to her husband. Tess kills Alec and she and Angel Clare live in hiding in the New Forest. But Tess is discovered at Stonehenge and is sentenced to death. She is hanged.



The critics:

Even though he was a famous writer, at first no publisher would accept the novel "Tess of the D'Urbervilles". The story - a milkmaid who is seduced by one man, married and rejected by another, and who eventually murders the first one - was much too shocking.

Eventually it was printed. And the critics attacked Hardy for the novel's subtitle, "A Pure Woman". They said Tess could not possibly be considered pure. They attacked him for the writing about sex, for criticizing religion, and for writing such a dark and pessimistic story.

Today, the novel is praised as an honest portrait of many of the wrong things in Victorian society, and a link between late 19th Century literature and the start of the modern era.

A brief portrait of Tess

In the novel Hardy sometimes describes Tess as more than an individual woman. Sometimes she is portrayed as closer to a "universal" portrait of all womanhood. Tess's story is not just the story of one woman in a particular place at a particular time. It also represents a deeper and larger experience that affects all women.

There are two important elements in the character of Tess. The first of these portrays "Tess" as a "real" individual person. She is

- Intelligent
- Very good looking
- She has a deep moral sensitivity
- She has depths of passion

The second of these elements portrays her as a kind of mythical, universal heroine, reminding us her formal name is "Theresa"

- St Teresa of Avila was another martyr
- Angel Clare calls her a "Daughter of Nature"
- She is referred to by the Greek mythological names of "Artemis" and "Demeter"

In Chapter 14 Hardy says her eyes are "neither black nor blue nor grey nor violet; rather all these shades together," like "an almost standard woman."

“Tess” : a novel of character and environment

The changing world of class distinctions

Tess represents the changing role of farm- workers in England in the late 19th century.

- She has some education and can read and write. Her parents had no education.
- She does not quite fit into the “old” folk culture of the earlier generation, but poverty stops her from moving to a higher position in life.
- There is aristocracy in Tess’s blood, visible in her graceful beauty—yet she is forced to work as a farmhand and milkmaid. But her speech – more polished than her mother’s – is still not as good as Alec’s or Angel’s.
- She is “in- between”, both socially and culturally.
- Tess is a symbol of the changing ideas and positions of social class in 19th Century England.
- She is also an example of how the old nobility kept its earlier glamour, but gradually money and wealth were becoming more important than inner nobility.

Most of Hardy’s novels dealt with social class. Hardy was connected to both the working and the upper class, but felt that he belonged to neither. This can be seen in the pessimism of the novel. There is no hope of Tess rising in society, for that is the way things are in Victorian society.

The changing world of religious attitudes

As well as representing the social environment, Tess also stands as a symbol for the religious changes happening in society. In a religious sense she is a symbol of the Fall of Man. There are many Bible references in the novel to confirm this.

- Tess’s family was once glorious and powerful but has now lost it all. Just like Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise.
- Tess is a symbol of “original sin” – where all mankind is suffering from Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Tess giving in to Alec or killing Angel Prince is not entirely responsible for her sins.
- She is a symbol of mankind suffering for crimes that are not her own. Like so many poor people, she lives a life more wretched than she deserves.

Thomas Hardy and 19th Century England itself had to face a clash between orthodox Christian faith and writers like Charles Darwin and “The Origin of Species”. Darwin claimed man was descended from the apes. Orthodox religion said God created Man as a special case. This clash can be seen in the character of Angel Clare , who fights the older religious ideas of his parents and follows the more modern ideas.

“Tess of the D’Urbervilles” works on two levels.

It is a story of the characters and the environment of Hardy’s favourite part of the world – the farmlands of Wessex.

It is also a story of the character and environment of the whole of English society towards the end of the 19th Century.

Henry James (1843 – 1916)

Henry James is said to be the master of the psychological novel. He had a great influence on 20th century English literature. He was an American who lived in London and became a British citizen.

He wrote 22 novels, many short stories and some plays – mainly about the relationship between Europeans and Americans and between men and women. His writing style was sophisticated and complex.



Henry James was born in 1843 in New York City to a wealthy family, and as a young man traveled many times between Europe and America, studying in Geneva, London, Paris, Bologna and Bonn. At the age of 21 he published his first short story, and at the age of 28 published his first novel, "A Tragedy of Errors"

He moved to Paris and worked as a journalist for the "New York Tribune" newspaper, and then moved permanently to London by the time he was in his mid-30s. His novels during this time were chiefly about Americans living in Europe. He did not return to America for another 25 years – by which time he felt more like an Englishman visiting New York than an American returning home.

He soon returned to England and adapted some of his existing writing so that it would be more suitable for the American market. He was deeply saddened by the outbreak of World War I. In 1915 he became a British citizen as a declaration of loyalty to his adopted country and in protest against America's original refusal to enter the war. He suffered a stroke in December 1915, and died three months later.

The Novels of Henry James

His most important works are:

“ **Washington Square**” (1880) and
“**The Ambassadors**” (1903).

Other novels include

Daisy Miller (1879)

The young and innocent American, Daisy, finds her American values in conflict with European sophistication and manners

The Portrait Of A Lady (1881)

A young American woman becomes a victim of her provincialism during her travels in Europe.

The Bostonians (1886)

This takes place in an age of the growing movement for equal rights for Women.

What Maisie Knew (1897)

A very young girl must choose between her parents and a motherly old governess.

The Wings Of The Dove (1902)

a heritage destroys the love of a young couple.

He also wrote a number of short stories, the most famous of which is

"The Turn of the Screw"

a ghost story in which the question of childhood corruption obsesses a governess. (This work was adapted into a very famous opera by the English composer, Benjamin Britten)

Washington Square (1880)

The Story:

Dr. Austin Sloper, a rich widower, lives in Washington Square, New York with his daughter, Catherine, good natured, but neither pretty nor clever. Also sharing the house is Dr Sloper's sister, Lavinia, who is a silly busybody. One day, Catherine meets Morris Townsend and falls in love. They want to get married, but Dr Sloper discovers that Morris has no money at all and has a reputation for living off other people.

He forbids the marriage, and Catherine must choose between her father and Morris. The doctor says he will not leave any money to Catherine if she marries Morris, and he takes her on a six-month tour of Europe, hoping this will make her forget Morris. After the tour Catherine still wants to marry Morris, but he has learnt she will not get any of her father's money, so he has disappeared.

Many years pass. Catherine becomes an unmarried middle-aged lady. Dr. Sloper finally dies but because he is still afraid Morris will come back, he leaves Catherine only a little money – just enough for her to live on. Morris **does** come back – now bald and fat - and wants to marry her. Catherine refuses. She picks up her needlework and settles down for the rest of her life.

The Characters:

The four characters of Catherine, Dr. Sloper, Morris Townsend, and Lavinia Penniman take up the largest part of the novel. They are all characterized in strong, memorable, and somewhat one-dimensional terms.

Lavinia Penniman is used mostly for the comic relief which comes from her silly, romantic scheming and her crazy ideas. She is infatuated with Morris and takes the greatest interest in his love affairs.

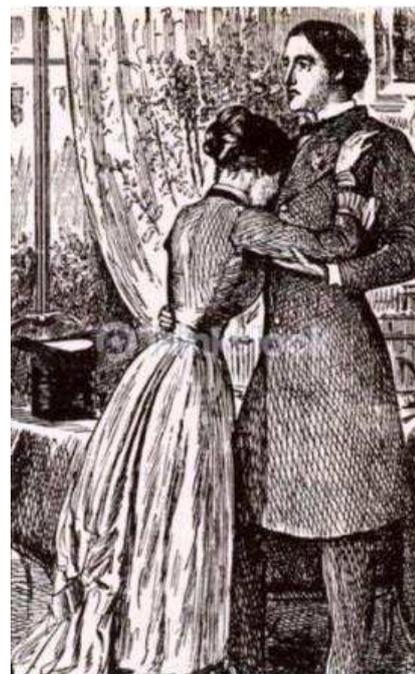
Morris Townsend is a typical fortune-hunter, but Henry James makes him attractive enough for the reader to believe that Catherine would want to marry him.

Dr. Sloper, a brilliant and successful doctor, is exactly right about Morris Townsend. At the same time he is very wrong in the way he treats Catherine. It is ironical that this good and clever man should be so heartless and unkind to his daughter. His head works perfectly but his heart has grown cold.

Catherine: in the same way, it is ironical that Catherine gradually changes through the novel from being wrong in her judgment of Morris to being right in her self-judgment.

Structure:

This is a simple, clear, short novel. It is a tragicomedy about the conflict between a dull but sweet daughter and her brilliant, domineering father. "Washington Square" is often compared to Jane Austen's work for the clarity and grace of its writing and its intense focus on family relationships.



Morris Townsend and Catherine Sloper in an illustration from the first edition of "Washington Square"

The Ambassadors (1903)

The Story:

Lambert Strether is engaged to be married to a widow, Mrs Newsome, who has a son called Chad living in Paris. Chad seems to have fallen under the spell of a wicked woman and Mrs Newsome asks Lambert to go to Paris and “rescue” Chad. On his way to Paris, Lambert stops briefly in London and meets Maria Gostrey, an American who has lived in Paris for many years. Her opinions make Lambert think again. Perhaps the story of Chad and his lady friend are not all they seem.

In Paris, Lambert meets Chad, who has changed a lot since he left America. He is more grown-up and sophisticated. Chad takes Lambert to a garden party where he meets the “wicked women”, Marie de Vionnet, and her daughter Jeanne. Marie has separated from her unpleasant husband, but Lambert is not sure whether Chad is in love with the mother or the daughter.

Lambert soon discovers life in Paris is much better than America, and when Chad thinks he should go back to see his mother in America, Lambert stops him from going.

Back in America, Mrs Newsome is worried and sends her "ambassadors" to Paris to instruct Chad and Lambert to return immediately. These “ambassadors” include Chad’s sister, Sarah Pocock. When she gets to Paris, Sarah thinks Chad has changed for the worse, and believes Marie de Vionnet is an indecent woman. She says both men should return immediately to America. Lambert goes into the French countryside to escape from Sarah, and accidentally meets Chad and Marie. He realises now that they are really in love, and Lambert tells Chad NOT to return to America – but to stay in France with Marie and to be happy.

However, Lambert himself decides to leave Paris. And, even though Maria Gostrey in London would like to marry him, he decides to return to Mrs Newsome in America.

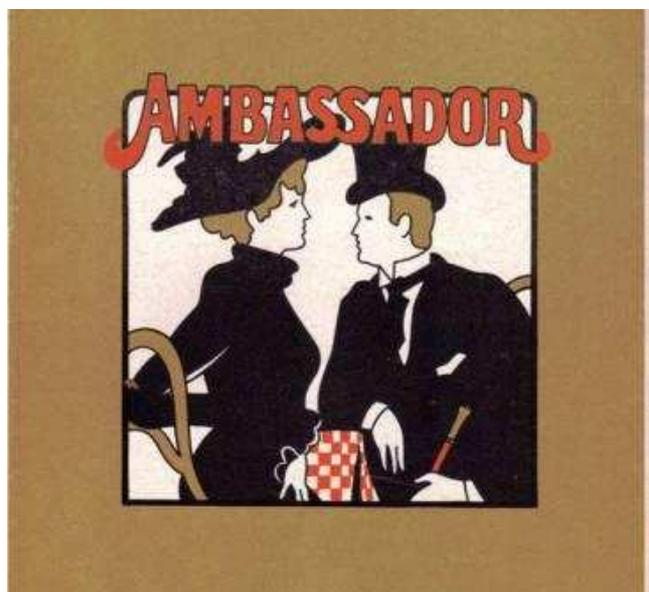
The Major Themes:

The theme is one of escape - escape from a stiff, formal, non-emotional life in America to a far more relaxed, generous and gracious existence in Europe, though it is important to note that Henry James does not describe Paris as a kind of perfect paradise for emotionally starved Americans.

Lambert Strether learns about the “other” side of the European life when he sees how Marie desperately fears losing Chad after all she has done for him.

Lambert Strether does not escape from his American straightjacket only to be fitted with a more elegant European model. Instead, he learns to value every situation on its merits, without prejudices of any kind. The final lesson of his life in Europe is not to trust other people’s ideas and beliefs – but to rely on his own observation, experience and judgment

In 1955 “The Ambassadors” was used as the stylistic and thematic basis for Patricia Highsmith’s novel “The Talented Mr Ripley”, later adapted into a Hollywood film with Matt Damon, Gwyneth Paltrow and Jude Law. It was also adapted into a stage musical in 1971.

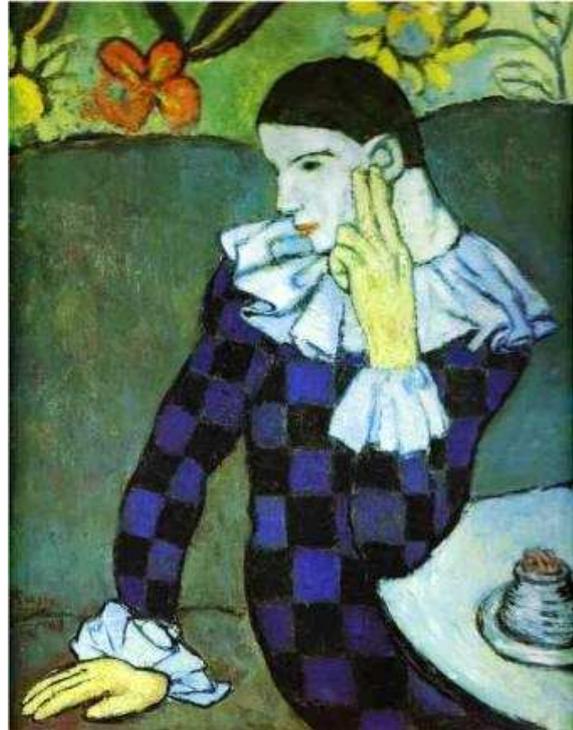


Henry James and “Modernism”

“Modernism” is the name given to a style of literature and artistic development that appeared in the first quarter of the 20th Century. Its most obvious forms were in painting (with Picasso’s “blue” and “cubist” paintings) and in music (with rioting in the theatre for the first night of Stravinsky’s ballet “The Rite of Spring”)

Modernism appeared gradually in literature. It did not happen overnight. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins was experimenting with a new, different and “modern” style in the 1880s, as were the novelists, Henry James and Joseph Conrad in the 1890s.

But the works of Picasso and Stravinsky were completely new. They were revolutionary. It would be another decade (and the upheaval of a World War) before poets like T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound or novelists like James Joyce (“Ulysses”) would create works of literature quite so revolutionary.



Picasso : Leaning Harlequin, 1901

Henry James is sometimes considered to be one of the very early “modernists”. His novels were written at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th Century. In many ways he represents the change from the old ways to the new ways in novel writing and literary thought. His novels offered some modern approaches in themes and techniques.

1) Modern approaches in themes

The psychological novel

Many of his characters are created in considerable depth. The author spends a lot of time examining the way people think and the way they react to the pressures of society. (In “Daisy Miller” [1879] the American heroine does not fit in with European culture. In “The Turn of the Screw” [1898] the governess is obsessed with childhood corruption.)

The clash of culture between the New World (America) and the Old World (Europe)

His early novels were about Americans living in Europe. He is one of the first authors to write about the different psychological characters of different nations. (In “The Portrait Of A Lady” [1881] a young American woman becomes a victim of her provincialism during her travels in Europe. In “The Ambassadors” [1903] he explores the psychological need to escape from a stiff, formal, American life to a more relaxed existence in Europe.)

The growing movement for equal rights for Women

In “The Bostonians” (1886) he deals with the growing movement for equal rights for Women. He is using the novel to explore important contemporary, “modern” politics.

A modern approach to independent values

The character of Lambert Strether (in “The Ambassadors”) learns to value every situation on its merits, without prejudices of any kind. Henry James’s philosophy is not to trust other people’s ideas and beliefs – but to rely on your own observation, experience and judgment. (This is a very “modern” point of view. Up to then people were expected to trust and obey the ideas, beliefs and rules of the Church, the Government and Society)

In his themes, Henry James was a “modernist” who is said to be the master of the psychological novel. The themes and characterization of his novels had a great influence on 20th century English literature and especially the “modernists” who followed him.

2) Modern approaches in technique

For many critics, however, it is his writing style and technique that mark him as one of the leading “modernists”.

- His prose style is sophisticated and complex.
- His novels frequently are written from the point of view of the writer
- He uses a “stream of consciousness” technique.
- He says writers must be allowed the greatest freedom possible in presenting their view of the world.
- His characters frequently use the “interior monologue” as a means of letting the reader know their thoughts
- Sometimes he uses unreliable narrators in his novels. This means his characters are not telling the truth about themselves. This gives more depth and interest to his stories.

3) The Modernist who hated modernity

Henry James has been described as the “Modernist who hated modernity”. For all his experimenting with psychological depth and with new ways of telling the story , he remained a detailed craftsman.

In a newspaper article he wrote during his time in Paris, Henry James reviewed the paintings at the



famous Second Impressionist Exhibition. He hated the paintings of Monet, Renoir and Degas, and attacked them for their ugliness. He said of these painters “none of them show signs of possessing first-rate talent”.

And these words came from the writer we now associate with creating “impressionism” in the modern novel. He truly was a “modernist who hated modernity”.