

The Portrait of a Lady (Henry James Collection)



Dodo Classics brings you another classic from Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. *The Portrait of a Lady* is a novel by Henry James, first published as a serial in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Macmillans Magazine* in 1880/81 and then as a book in 1881. It is one of James's most popular long novels, and is regarded by critics as one of his finest. *The Portrait of a Lady* is the story of a spirited young American woman, Isabel Archer, who in affronting her destiny, finds it overwhelming. She inherits a large amount of money and subsequently becomes the victim of Machiavellian scheming by two American expatriates. Like many of James's novels, it is set in Europe, mostly England and Italy. Generally regarded as the masterpiece of James's early period, this novel reflects James's continuing interest in the differences between the New World and the Old, often to the detriment of the former. It also treats in a profound way the themes of personal freedom, responsibility, and betrayal. James's first idea for *The Portrait of a Lady* was simple: a young American woman affronting her destiny, whatever it might be. Only then did he begin to form a plot to bring out the character of his central figure. This was the uncompromising story of the free-spirited Isabel losing her freedom despite (or because of) suddenly coming into a great deal of money and getting ground in the very mill of the conventional. It is a rather existentialist novel, as Isabel is very committed to living with the consequences of her choice with integrity but also a sort of stubbornness. Henry James, OM (15 April 1843 – 28 February 1916) was an American writer who spent most of his writing career in Britain. He is regarded as one of the key figures of 19th-century literary realism. He was the son of Henry James, Sr. and the brother of philosopher and psychologist William James and diarist Alice James. He is best known for a number

of novels showing Americans encountering Europe and Europeans. His method of writing from a characters point of view allowed him to explore issues related to consciousness and perception, and his style in later works has been compared to impressionist painting. His imaginative use of point of view, interior monologue and unreliable narrators brought a new depth to narrative fiction. James contributed significantly to literary criticism, particularly in his insistence that writers be allowed the greatest possible freedom in presenting their view of the world. James claimed that a text must first and foremost be realistic and contain a representation of life that is recognizable to its readers. Good novels, to James, show life in action and are, most importantly, interesting. In addition to his voluminous works of fiction he published articles and books of travel, biography, autobiography, and criticism, and wrote plays. James alternated between America and Europe for the first twenty years of his life; eventually he settled in England, becoming a British subject in 1915, one year before his death. James was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911, 1912, and 1916.

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