



The Portrait of a Lady (Centaur Classics) [The 100 greatest novels of all time - #20]

Henry James

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"As Napoleon annexed territories by waging wars, James annexed, in his imagination, the whole of Europe to the American novel." —Leon Edel

"James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas; a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it... He is the most intelligent man of his generation." —T. S. Eliot

"I read it all. And I wept too." —Robert Louis Stevenson

"'The Portrait of a Lady' is entirely successful in giving one the sense of having met somebody far too radiantly good for this world." —Rebecca West

"The greatest American novelist." —Harold Bloom

"The Portrait of a Lady" is the most stunning achievement of Henry James's early period — in the 1860s and '70s when he was transforming himself from a talented young American into a resident of Europe, a citizen of the world, and one of the greatest novelists of modern times. A kind of delight at the success of this transformation informs every page of this masterpiece. Isabel Archer, a beautiful, intelligent, and headstrong American girl newly endowed with wealth and embarked in Europe on a treacherous journey to self-knowledge, is delineated with a magnificence that is at once casual and tense with force and insight. The characters with whom she is entangled — the good man and the evil one, between whom she wavers, and the mysterious witchlike woman with whom she must do battle — are each rendered with a virtuosity that suggests dazzling imaginative powers. And the scene painting — in England and Italy — provides a continuous visual pleasure while always remaining crucial to the larger drama.

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