

James (1)

Henry James, another veteran novelist, is said to have reverted to his original style in "The Ambassadors." It is still involved enough, however, for his most ardent admirers, and also as prodigal in "words, words, words" as in the past. It is a story of Americans abroad, with its scene chiefly in Paris. "The ambassadors" are messengers sent by a loving New England mother to rescue her boy from the perilous influence of French life and a *demi-mondaine*. All the men in succession succumb to the spell of the great Parisian metropolis.

"The Books of 1903," *Publishers' Weekly*, January 30, 1904: 137, HathiTrust.

Christian Science.—II. **MARK TWAIN**
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The Universities and Commercial Education,
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Sir GEORGE ARTHUR, Bt.
Shall We Reduce the Iron and Steel Tariff? . **ARCHER BROWN**
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THE AMBASSADORS.—I.

A Novel by

HENRY JAMES

With an Introduction by

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

North American Review (January, 1903), American Periodicals Series. "Much better here than in the Monthly [Harper's]"—James to his agent, James B. Pinker, January 5, 1903.

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end....

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike....

For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

Walter Pater, conclusion to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Adam Phillips (1868; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 152–53.

“Art”...is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration.... That, I think, represents the manner in which the latent thought of many people who read novels as an exercise in skipping would explain itself if it were to become articulate.

We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*; our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it.

Henry James, “The Art of Fiction” (1884), in *Partial Portraits* (New York: Macmillan, 1894), 381–82, 394–95, Internet Archive.

Ideas by themselves are neither attractive nor powerful in conversation; the appeal of civilized speech comes from our recognizing those detours—of wit, of tone, of shifting rhythms and of ideas—which “being civilized” imposes on the expression of a desire.... The surfaces of our thought and speech don’t merely cover up the depths behind thought and speech. They have appeals of their own, and as we compose our sublimations we can discover pleasures distinct from those for the sake of which we perhaps “began” to sublimate. Stendhal and James are open to those appeals precisely because they are skeptical about the intrinsic or absolute value of ideas. They are inclined to “reduce” mental abstractions to the concrete interests which people have in one another, but then they also see that a certain abstract play of the mind doesn’t simply reflect such interests but may inspire or re-create them.

Leo Bersani, “The Jamesian Lie,” in *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 129.