

Fiction in henry james paste

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



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1. Introduction
In my term paper I will primarily discuss Henry James and his short story Paste. Firstly, I will focus on the time he wrote the story and then I will describe his life and his three major writing phases.

Next, I will go on with giving the most important of the story touching the most important point of its sources and who influenced James to such a work. The next section in the term paper is one of the most important ones because it touches all the most important things connected with fiction in James' short story which will be a guide towards the analysis of Paste. In the analysis I will examine the narrative techniques and I will connect the discourse with the story. Finally, the term paper ends with a conclusion summing up all the relative points.

2. American Modernism
The large cultural wave of Modernism, which gradually emerged in Europe and the United States in the early years of the 20th century, expressed a sense of modern life through art as a sharp break from the past, as well as from Western civilization's classical traditions. Modern life seemed radically different from traditional life -- more scientific, faster, more technological, and more mechanized. Modernism embraced these changes. Technological innovation in the world of factories and machines inspired new attentiveness to technique in the arts.

To take one example: Light, particularly electrical light, fascinated modern artists and writers. Posters and advertisements of the period are full of

images of floodlit skyscrapers and light rays shooting out from automobile headlights, moviehouses, and watchtowers to illumine a forbidding outer darkness suggesting ignorance and old-fashioned tradition. The way the story was told became as important as the story itself. Form and structure became more important than content. Henry James, William Faulkner, and many other American writers experimented with fictional points of view.

Vision and viewpoint became an essential aspect of the modernist novel as well. No longer was it sufficient to write a straightforward third-person narrative or (worse yet) use a pointlessly intrusive narrator. The way the story was told became as important as the story itself.

3. Henry James (1843-1916) [pic] Life: Henry James was born in New York City into a wealthy family. His father, Henry James Sr. , was one of the best-known intellectuals in mid-nineteenth-century America, whose friends included Thoreau, Emerson and Hawthorne. In his youth James traveled back and forth between Europe and America.

From an early age James had read the classics of English, American, French and German literature, and Russian classics in translation. He studied with tutors in Geneva, London, Paris, Bologna and Bonn. At the age of nineteen he briefly attended Harvard Law School, but was more interested in literature than studying law. James published his first short story, *A Tragedy of Errors* two years later, and then devoted himself to literature. In 1866-69 and 1871-72 he was contributor to the *Nation* and *Atlantic Monthly* where his first novel, *Watch and Ward* (1871) was published. James wrote it while he was traveling through Venice and Paris.

After living in Paris, where James was contributor to the New York Tribune, he moved to England, living first in London and then in Rye, Sussex. During his first years in Europe James wrote novels that portrayed Americans living abroad. James's years in England were uneventful. In 1905 he visited America for the first time in twenty-five years, and wrote 'Jolly Corner'. It was based on his observations of New York, but also a nightmare of a man, who is haunted by a doppelgänger. Between 1906 and 1910 James revised many of his tales and novels for the so-called New York Edition of his complete works. It was published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

His autobiography, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) was continued in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914). The third volume, *The Middle Years*, appeared posthumously in 1917. The outbreak of World War I was a shock for James and in 1915 he became a British citizen as a loyalty to his adopted country and in protest against the US's refusal to enter the war. James suffered a stroke on December 2, 1915. He expected to die and exclaimed: "So this is it at last, the distinguished thing!" However, James died three months later in Rye on February 28, 1916. Two novels, *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past* (1917), were left unfinished at his death.

James's three writing phases after his biographer Leon Edel: James's first, or "international," phase encompassed such works as *Transatlantic Sketches* (travel pieces, 1875), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879), and a masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). James's second period was experimental. He exploited new subject matters --feminism and social reform in *The Bostonians* (1886) and political intrigue in *The Princess Casamassima*

(1885). He also attempted to write for the theater, but failed embarrassingly when his play *Guy Domville* (1895) was booed on the first night. In his third, or "major," phase James returned to international subjects, but treated them with increasing sophistication and psychological penetration. The complex and almost mythical *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) (which James felt was his best novel), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) date from this major period. In James, only self-awareness and clear perception of others yields wisdom and self-sacrificing love. Characteristic for James novels are understanding and sensitively drawn lady portraits; James himself was a homosexual, but sensitive to basic sexual differences and the fact that he was a male.

His main themes were the innocence of the New World in conflict with corruption and wisdom of the Old. In James's later works, the most important events are all psychological -- usually moments of intense illumination that show characters their previous blindness. Apart from writing fiction, James made important contributions to the genre of literary theories, especially through his famous essay, *The Art of Fiction*, 1884. In his early criticism James considered British and American novels dull and formless and French fiction "intolerably unclean".

Zola is magnificent, but he strikes an English reader as ignorant; he has an air of working in the dark; if he had as much light as energy, his results would be of the highest value. (from *The Art of Fiction*)

4. Paste Two weeks after his father's death Arthur Prime lost also his stepmother, an former actress Miss Bradshaw. After his stepmother's funeral Arthur told his cousin

Charlotte to select and take some of the jewelry her aunt left. Charlotte selected a pearl necklace which seemed to her as real. Arthur felt deeply insulted with the thought that they were real and the way his stepmother as an actress could get such pearls.

Charlotte apologizes and agrees with Arthur that they are paste and takes them back to Bleet where she worked as governess. Once at a party, Mrs. Guy noticed the pearls, recognizes them as genuine and with Charlotte's approval wears the string at the party. When Charlotte noticed that everybody at the party assumed they were real she insisted at the idea to return them to her cousin Arthur who still pretends to believe that they were real and later writes to her that he smashed them to destroy any false slur upon his family.

Later however, Charlotte sees Mrs. Guz wearing a beautiful pearl string. She explained to Charlotte she bought it from a dealer to whom Arthur sold them. Charlotte was disappointed how her cousin could be so deceitful. The origin of "*Paste*" is rather more expressible, since it was to consist but of the ingenious thought of transposing the terms of one of Guy de Maupassant's admirable stories.

The story originated from the idea of reversing the situation of de Maupassant's *La Parure*, in which a supposedly genuine necklace is found to be false, by centering the action on a string of pearls, thought to worthless but proved to be real. In "*La Parure*" a poor young woman, under "social" stress, the need of making an appearance on an important occasion, borrows from an old school friend, not much richer than herself, a pearl necklace

which she has the appalling misfortune to lose by some mischance never afterwards cleared up.

Her life and her pride, as well as her husband's with them, become subject, from the hour of the awful accident, to the redemption of their debt; which, effort by effort, sacrifice by sacrifice, excuses, a rage of desperate explanation of their failure to restore the missing object, they finally obliterate--all to find that their whole consciousness and life have been convulsed, that the pearls were an "imitation" and that their passionate apology has ruined them for nothing.

According to Henry James and his theory of fiction Guy de Maupassant holds that we have no universal measure of the truth and that there are many different classes of fiction which help us to understand that the particular way we see the world is our particular illusion about it. 5. Fiction in *Paste* and Henry James Henry James's conception of writing fiction is defined in these words: "A novel is, in its broadest definition, a personal, a direct impression of life, that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.

But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore, no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say." In his treatment of subject matter, James felt that no aspect of life should be excluded. He said that "the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision ... it is all experience. That is a sufficient answer to those who maintain that it must not touch the sad things of life ..." James's style of writing is magnificent and his canvas is broad - encompassing both Europe and America.

He is a master of character portrayal and has extensively used the "stream of consciousness" method in his fictional writing. Julie Rivkin explains the term as a radiating luminous intelligence which integrated the "felt life" into fiction. Perhaps more than any previous writer, James refined the technique of narrating a novel from the point of view of a character, thereby laying the foundations of modern stream of consciousness fiction. Henry James produced one hundred and twelve stories and majority of them have been ignored or dismissed as a tributary to the mainstream of his novels.

James' creative energies were devoted equally into his novels, essays and his short stories, which means that also the stories deserved critical research as his novels or essays. James wrote about Guy de Maupassant that he will be remembered because of his more than hundred tales he wrote and not on his half a dozen novels meaning probably that he wanted to state that his wish would be to remember him himself also because of his novels and his short stories. 6. Paste analysis Henry James is grappling with the idea of keeping the story under 7,000 words.

Part of this struggle develops from his idea seemingly having too much to say, but the notebook entry also leans towards the difficulty of being able to create a diverse enough idea to actually have a story within this space.

James seems to be attempting to begin answering what is the short story: "...but to do anything worth while with it I must ... be very clear as to what it is in it and what I wish to get out of it. ... It must be a picture; it must illustrate something." This also refers back to that that the writer needs to

avoid a simple summary of events and the reader must encounter a story within the sketch structure.

Within James' description of the story he intends to work on, he places a great deal of emphasis on contrast to relay his story. 'Paste' is one of the few tales in which James successfully approaches Maupassant's technique, allowing the objective action of the tale to reveal all its characters and values. The plot is swiftly set in motion, on the day of his stepmother's funeral, Arthur allows his cousin Charlotte to take one piece of stage jewelry, she picks out some paste pearls which she honorably returns to Arthur when she finds out they are real.

Arthur being a prudish stepson is greedy enough to sell the pearls, while he wrote her cousin he destroyed them. As so often in his tales, the professional virtuous are exposed as utterly fraudulent and the decent people as Charlotte as selfless fools. Only Mrs. Guy which with her name reminds us of Guy de Maupassant is one of James's innumerable versions of the Madame Merle-type competent worldly woman with an innocent look and a strong authority manages to a short while to win the reader's thoughts.

'Paste' is told by an omniscient third-person narrator, who refrains from judging the characters or their actions. The narrator does have access to the characters' thoughts, but for the most part, the narrator simply describes the events of the story, leaving it up to the reader to determine the nature of the characters through their actions. Most of all, the narrator is concerned with Charlotte Prime. The moral dimension is most obvious in what appears to be

James's confident insistence on the reality of moral evil, motivated by egoism and by self-sacrifice, especially sacrifice of own happiness.

Charlotte insisted on the problem of sacrifice and she does not act for her own good, she wants to be fair and returns the pearls to her greedy cousin and when she finds out that he sold them she asks herself why was she so moral and truthful. James's characters, especially Charlotte, are presented as they having a very difficult time to simply trying to understand what they most need to understand- their own and others intentions or motives. The major themes in the story are *Paste*, greed, losing moral values, truth vs. lie.

All the themes are connected with a symbol in the story. *Paste* meaning the farce which Arthur plays toward his cousin, implying that things are not always what they seem to be. All the themes are connected with transition from innocence and naivety to experience. Development of Charlotte Prime in *Paste* Charlotte Prime is a governess in a little town called Bleet and the role of a governess in Victorian times was not a popular figure in Victorian England. The governess did not have a social position worthy of attention.

The problem existed in them that aristocrats and middle-class Victorians were not sure how to treat the governess because she was in many cases also from the same class as they were, but her lack of financial stability made them view her as she were from the lower class. To work as a governess in Victorian times was justified by the society only if she found herself in financial distress or had no relatives to give her support. From the story it is noticeable that Charlotte Prime was also working as a governess because her bad financial situation.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of this research paper was to show how James dealt with fiction in his short stories, especially in *Paste*. James was fascinated to be challenged with writing short stories. He knew that had to take one single incident and his fiction does not generally lend itself to a close examination or its values are diffuse, the structure is often loose, its effects depend on stock devices and responses. That means that a plot need be no more than a string of stock devices for arousing stock responses of concern and excitement in the reader. The reader's interest may be captured at the outset by the promise of conflicts or mysteries or frustrations that will eventually be resolved, and he will gladly—so strong is his desire to be moved or entertained—suspend criticism of even the most trite modes of resolution. 7.

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