

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Office hours: Murray 019, Mondays, 2:00, or by appointment

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James, "The Middle Years."
New student sign-up: forms.gle/F2nmUNICqyttz41t9

grading notes

- ▶ 10% participation
 - ▶ 0–2 absences, up to 4.0
 - ▶ 3 absences, up to 3.0
 - ▶ 4 absences, up to 2.0
 - ▶ 5 or more: can't pass
- ▶ 5% commonplace book entries
 - ▶ 0–2 missing or late, 4.0
 - ▶ 3 missing or late, 2.0
 - ▶ 4 or more missing or late, 0

commonplacing

- ▶ use pseudonyms
- ▶ keep eyes open for **language** as well as plot

review: what happened? (1)

Answer 1: modernism

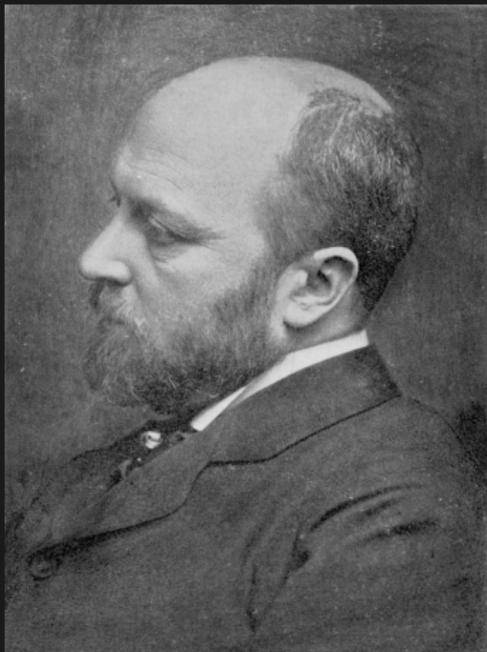
- ▶ break with traditions (narrative, moral, ...)
- ▶ aesthetic disruptions and shock effects
- ▶ interpretive difficulty

review: what happened? (2)

Answer 2: literary modernity

- ▶ quantitative explosion in novel production 1880–
- ▶ new reading publics (“reading culture”)
- ▶ diversity of writers
- ▶ multiple transformations, not just one

Stuck in the middle with Henry James



Henry James in 1898. [loc.gov](#).

delay

He held his packet, which had come by book-post, unopened on his knee. (335)

The gentleman had his head bent over a book and was occasionally brought to a stop by the charm of this volume, which, as Dencombe could perceive even at a distance, had a cover alluringly red. (335–36)

The young man had gold spectacles, through which, with his finger still in his red-covered book, he glanced at the volume, bound in the same shade of the same colour, lying on the lap of the original occupant of the bench. (339)

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the charm of this volume, which, as Dencombe could perceive **even at a distance**, had a cover intensely red (336)

seeing without knowing

Equally innocent and infinite are the pleasures of observation and the resources engendered by the habit of analyzing life. (340; qtd. by “ENM98”)

He sat and stared at the sea, which appeared all surface and twinkle, far shallower than the spirit of man. It was the abyss of human illusion that was the real, the tideless deep. (335; qtd. by “elj”)

It served his purpose to have a theory which should not be exposed to refutation. (340)

What, moreover, was the use of being an approved novelist if one couldn't establish a relation between such figures; the clever theory, for instance, that the young man was the son of the opulent matron, and that the humble dependant, the daughter of a clergyman or an officer, nourished a secret passion for him? (336; qtd. by Matthew L.)

style

It amused poor Dencombe, as he dawdled in his tepid air-bath, to think that he was waiting for a revelation of something at the back of a fine young mind. (340)

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The April day was soft and bright... (335)

He had forgotten what his book was about. (337)

“the infinite of life had gone”

1843 born New York in wealthy family

raised Paris, London, Geneva

1862–63 goes to law school, doesn't finish

invalid, doesn't fight in Civil War

1875 in Paris, crucial year

1876 moves permanently to London (UK citizen 1915)

1878 “Daisy Miller” makes him famous in US and UK

1893 “The Middle Years”

1895 disastrous attempt at drama

1900– “Major Phase” (so called by F.O. Matthiessen)

1907–9 deluxe revised “New York Edition” of his work

1916 dies

centers of consciousness

The idea of the help he needed was very present to him that night, which he spent in a lucid stillness, an intensity of thought that constituted a reaction from his hours of stupor. He was lost, he was lost—he was lost if he couldn't be saved. He was not afraid of suffering, of death; he was not even in love with life; but he had had a deep demonstration of desire. (345)

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- ▶ character-bound focalization (“third person limited”)

Discussion

Find another moment in which Dencombe seems to inflect the third-person narration. Explain why, and what difference his perspective makes.

giving things up: plot

“And Miss Vernham’s an *intrigante*.”

“How do you know that?”

“I know everything. One *has* to, to write decently!” (346)

giving things up: Doctor Hugh

“You chose to let a fortune go?” (354)

next: making fiction modern

- ▶ Bring back “The Middle Years”
- ▶ James, “The Art of Fiction” (Sakai; print out)
- ▶ Woolf, “Modern Fiction” (Sakai; print out)