



The Portrait of a Lady

Henry James (April 15, 1843 – February 28, 1916)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Portrait of a Lady is one of the most popular of Henry James' novels and considered a masterpiece. Set mainly in Italy and England, its heroine Isabel Archer, a young American heiress, seeks her future among the upper classes in European society. Her maternal aunt, Lydia Touchette, invites Isabel to visit at the family estate near London after the death of her father. Lord Warburton, neighbor to the Touchettes, proposes marriage, as does Caspar Goodwood, heir to a Boston fortune. Her invalid uncle dies and leaves her a portion of his fortune. Savoring independence, she rejects both, and travels the Continent. In Florence she meets and marries American expatriate and widower Gilbert Osmond, a match that proves to be troubled.

Isabel bonds with Ormond's daughter, Pansy, and supports her marriage plans, which conflict with the wishes of her father. Isabel leaves for England to comfort her dying cousin Ralph despite the objections of Ormond. Goodwood again courts her, but she chooses instead to return to Italy. The reader is left to wonder whether she will suffer her tragic marriage or eventually make other plans. The book was first serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* in America and *Macmillan's Magazine* in England in 1880-1881 before released as a book in 1881. It was acclaimed for its deep analysis of human consciousness and motivation, and did much to raise the awareness of the limited range of options available to Victorian women as they dealt with the lure of freedom and the tug of responsibility.

Henry James (April 15, 1843 – February 28, 1916) was an American novelist and critic and a key figure in the development of literary realism in the 19th century. He was born in New York to a well-to-do and celebrated family: his father was a lecturer and philosopher noted for his ties to Swedenborg; his older brother William was a leading philosopher and psychologist; and his sister Alice found fame as a diarist. The family traveled abroad extensively during his youth, settling in Newport, RI and then Boston. After a brief term at Harvard Law School he began to write in earnest, publishing reviews and stories for magazines. In 1869 he toured Europe and settled in London, where he remained for much of the rest of life. Much of his work addresses the cultural differences between Europe and America, often writing from the point of view of the character and adding depth with the use of interior monologue, shifting points of view, and a keen awareness of consciousness and perception. His style shows the influence of Balzac, Maupassant, and Zola, and has been likened to impressionist painting. His work can be grouped into three periods, the first concluding with *The Portrait of a Lady* 1881, the second with *The Turn of the Screw* in 1890, and the late years characterized by the trilogy of masterpieces, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1911, 1912, and 1916.