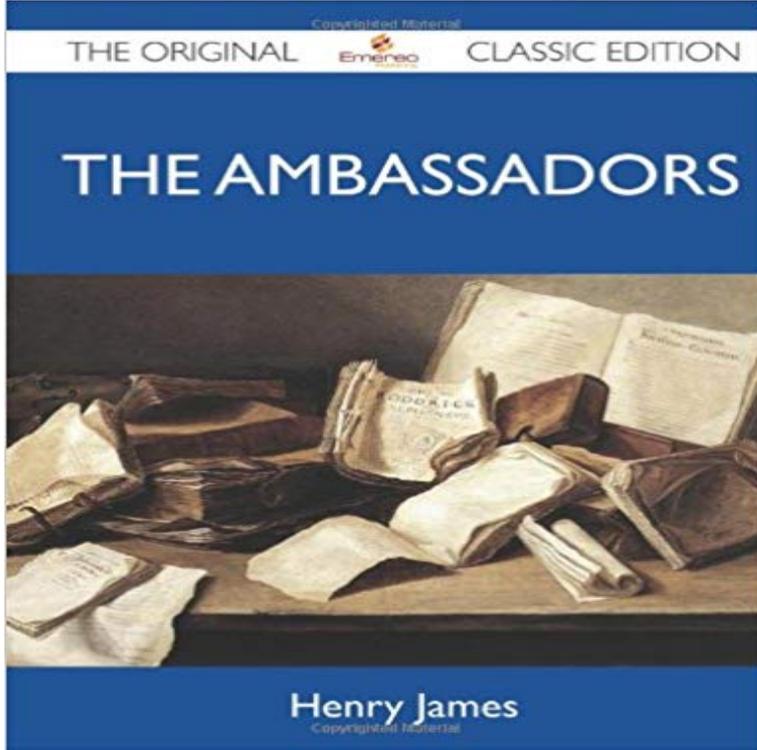


The Ambassadors - The Original Classic Edition



This is a novel about a man named Strether, who is as obviously an alter ego of Henry James as Ralph Touchett is of Mr. James in *Portrait of A Lady* or, to jump continents and switch authors, the main character in *Remembrance of Things Past* is of Proust. Strether is in Paris to retrieve his (hopefully?) future son-in-law Chad from the wiles of the City of Light and return him to New England so that Strether can marry, settle down and pass his waning years in Puritan New England (New England was still Puritan at the time.). At least, that's the plan. But once Strether arrives, something happens to him, and that mysterious something is what makes this work great. One could easily sum it up and say that Strether becomes enraptured by beauty, and one would be quite right. But to do so would be to miss the point... What is beauty? This is the question the novel essentially asks, all plotting and sub-plotting (and plenty of it) aside. Strether's paralysis because of his inability to grasp what is holding him there and why he becomes one of the greatest procrastinators in English literature (not excepting a certain Danish prince) is the great theme around which all else revolves. Strether is essentially a sensitive, cultured man with hyper-refined sensibilities. Alighting in Paris from the drab New England factory town awakens things in him that can only be perceived through the mind's eye of such a man. He is a sort of Geiger counter which registers things missed by others not so equipped (i.e., the rest of the characters.) Strether had not for years so rich a consciousness of time—a bag of gold into which he constantly dipped for a handful. Ch.6 The beginning of Ch. 16 has a beautifully succinct line of his predicament, How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright, clean, ordered water-side life came in at the open window? Reasons,

that is, to stay in beloved Paris.

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