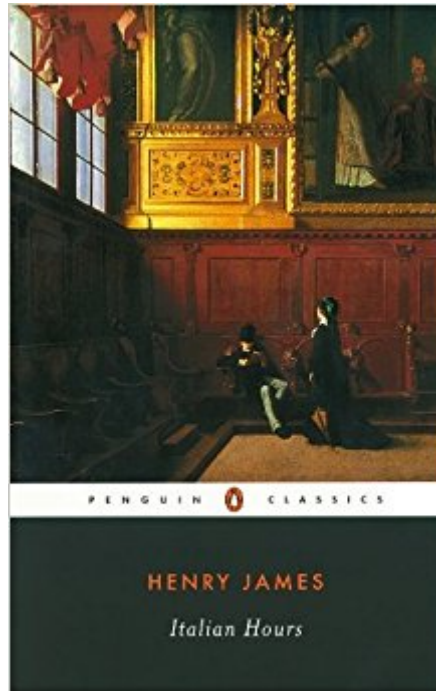




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# Italian Hours (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

"The charm of certain vacant grassy spaces, in Italy, overfrowned by masses of brickwork that are honeycombed by the suns of centuries, is something that I hereby renounce once for all the attempt to express; but you may be sure that whenever I mention such a spot enchantment lurks in it."

— Henry James

In these essays on travels in Italy written from 1872 to 1909, Henry James explores art and religion, political shifts and cultural revolutions, and the nature of travel itself. James's enthusiastic appreciation of the unparalleled aesthetic allure of Venice, the vitality of Rome, and the noisy, sensuous appeal of Naples is everywhere marked by pervasive regret for the disappearance of the past and by ambivalence concerning the transformation of nineteenth-century Europe. John Auchard's lively introduction and extensive notes illuminate the surprising differences between the historical, political, and artistic Italy of James's travels and the metaphoric Italy that became the setting of some of his best-known works of fiction. This edition includes an appendix of James's book reviews on Italian travel-writing. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

This annotated edition of *Italian Hours* offers us the precise differences between the world of Henry James saw in the Italy of his time and the one we see today. John Auchard's introduction and notes give the book a double function--the literary masterpiece is retained by acquires a practical function for the modern traveler. We learn, for example, where some of the paintings have been moved and what a century of wars has done to landscape and architecture. Above all, the eyes of the visiting American author and his prose voice turn the basic text into the poetry of travel, its visual and sensual delight, its mood, its atmosphere. --Leon Edel  
*Italian Hours* is Henry James's most endearing travel book and one of the best of its kind by any American. His travel writing is a superb and integral part of his total output. John Auchard's editorial work on *Italian Hours* provide a significant contribution to the literature on James. Auchard is a wizard. His introduction is wise and skillful, informative, beautiful,, stylish, and fun. The notes are helpful, unobtrusive, and richly detailed. The photographs and bibliography should combine to make this edition the 'definitive' one for a century of devoted readers. --Robert L. Gale  
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Henry James (1843-1916), born in New York City, was the son of noted religious philosopher Henry James, Sr., and brother of eminent psychologist and philosopher William James. He spent his early life in America and studied in Geneva, London and Paris during his adolescence to gain the worldly experience so prized by his father. He lived in Newport, went briefly to Harvard Law School, and in 1864 began to contribute both criticism and tales to magazines. In 1869, and then in 1872-74, he paid visits to Europe and began his first novel, *Roderick Hudson*. Late in 1875 he settled in Paris, where he met Turgenev, Flaubert, and Zola, and wrote *The American* (1877). In December 1876 he moved to London, where two years later he achieved international fame with *Daisy Miller*. Other famous works include *Washington Square* (1880), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and three large novels of the new century, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). In 1905 he revisited the United

States and wrote *The American Scene* (1907). During his career he also wrote many works of criticism and travel. Although old and ailing, he threw himself into war work in 1914, and in 1915, a few months before his death, he became a British subject. In 1916 King George V conferred the Order of Merit on him. He died in London in February 1916. John Auchard is a professor of English at the University of Maryland at College Park, and the editor of *The Portable Henry James*.

This is not a real book. It is a stack of bound photocopies. I cannot figure out how is selling this stuff. IO am sorry I got fooled by the low price. It is hard to know when the cover icon is so small. The typeface, the margins and the horrible totles make it practically un-readable. WATCH OUT!!!

I wanted to balance this as one earlier review is on a Kindle version and does not address this fine Penguin Classic. This proved livelier than my past attempts to tackle Henry James. The essay format helps. Even as editor John Auchard notes in his introduction that the arrangement of the accounts skip around from time and place over a third of a century, James' reports from 1872 to 1909 do delve deeply into Italy's aesthetics and scenes. They may leap from Subiaco to Ostia, or glance up the lines of mountain ranges towards Perugia to compare their sides to feminine figures. They look at the quiet, telling moment, as when a lone, sourish priest piously insists on prayer in a church, while outside the Roman Carnival runs rampant. They also take in the fact that much of the peninsula is not sunny and carefree, not "meridional." He introduces art, and Auchard slips in a couple of footnotes pointing to Goethe and Stendhal's journals. However, outside of James' snide and enjoyable asides on Ruskin, he relies more on his own observation to convey the joys and occasional disappointments. He writes more directly than you may expect. This book flow smoothly, up to when as he concludes, one goes to see "nothing," just to share intimacy with the adventure taken with companions: "the familiar tax on the luxury of loving Italy." (320) In Berne, he reflects: "I take us Americans for the only people who, in travelling, judge things on the first impulse—when we do judge them at all—not from the standpoint of simple comfort. Most of us, strolling forth into these bustling basements, are, I imagine, too much amused, too much diverted from the sense of an alienable right to public ease, to be conscious of heat or cold, of thick air, or even of the universal smell of strong charcuterie. If the visible romantic were banished from the face of the earth I am sure the idea of it would still survive in some typical American heart...." (89) James contrasts Genoan exertion to satisfaction. "I hadn't for a long time seen people elbowing each other so closely or swarming so thickly out of populous hives. A traveller is often moved to ask himself whether it has been worth while to leave his home--whatever his

home may have been--only to encounter new forms of human suffering, only to be reminded that toil and privation, hunger and sorrow and sordid effort, are the portion of the mass of mankind. To travel is, as it were, to go to the play, to attend a spectacle; and there is something heartless in stepping forth into foreign streets to feast on 'character' when character consists simply of the slightly different costume in which labour and want present themselves. These reflections were forced upon me as I strolled as through a twilight patched with colour and charged with stale smells; but after a time they ceased to bear me company. The reason of this, I think, is because--at least to foreign eyes--the sum of Italian misery is, on the whole, less than the sum of the Italian knowledge of life. That people should thank you, with a smile of striking sweetness, for the gift of twopence, is a proof, certainly, of extreme and constant destitution; but (keeping in mind the sweetness) it also attests an enviable ability not to be depressed by circumstances. I know that this may possibly be great nonsense; that half the time we are acclaiming the fine quality of the Italian smile the creature so constituted for physiognomic radiance may be in a sullen frenzy of impatience and pain. Our observation in any foreign land is extremely superficial, and our remarks are happily not addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who would be sure to exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture."

The films 'Room With a View' and 'Wings of the Dove' make one wonder about the Italy reflected in classical paintings executed before the destruction of WWII. My curiosity was heightened in an art history class when the instructor showed a photo slide of the Ponte Vecchio and told the amazing story of the Nazi pilot who disobeyed orders to destroy the last bridge the allies could cross on their advance north. This beautiful book brings to mind the saying, "The Past is a Foreign Country." Italy of the 19th Century is a place none of us can know except through records left by one who witnessed it. The book consists of essays James wrote on his travels to various places in Italy including Venice, Rome, and Florence. He visited some places several times and the text reflects the changes he observed on revisits. He records an Italy whose poverty for a time prevented the intrusion of developers, who later made many changes perhaps for the worse. James was not a worshipper of old buildings, he appreciated them, but he was also aware of the suffering of the Italians, many of whom existed in dire poverty. His reflections on various cathedrals, churches and other objects of artistic interest are humanized by his comments about the individuals he encounters. He muses on the morality of travel, "whether it has been worthwhile to leave his home [and] encounter new forms of human suffering." His awareness of the Italians themselves makes his writing a bit like that of Paul Theroux, a traveler and writer in our times. James differs from Theroux

however. My sense is that James is a little less likely to criticize and a little more willing to overlook unpleasantness. Perhaps that makes him less of a realist, or perhaps Italy was a more pleasant place in the 19th Century.

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