



The Pupil

Henry James

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The poor young man hesitated and procrastinated: it cost him such an effort to broach the subject of terms, to speak of money to a person who spoke only of feelings and, as it were, of the aristocracy. Yet he was unwilling to take leave, treating his engagement as settled, without some more conventional glance in that direction than he could find an opening for in the manner of the large affable lady who sat there drawing a pair of soiled *gants de Suede* through a fat jeweled hand and, at once pressing and gliding, repeated over and over everything but the thing he would have liked to hear. He would have liked to hear the figure of his salary; but just as he was nervously about to sound that note the little boy came back - the little boy Mrs. Moreen had sent out of the room to fetch her fan. He came back without the fan, only with the casual observation that he couldn't find it. As he dropped this cynical confession he looked straight and hard at the candidate for the honour of taking his education in hand. This personage reflected somewhat grimly that the thing he should have to teach his little charge would be to appear to address himself to his mother when he spoke to her - especially not to make her such an improper answer as that.

The Pupil Details

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From Reader Review The Pupil for online ebook

Rita says

1892

Very well done description of 'adventurers' - an American couple doing a scam in Europe; that is, living above their means by circulating among the higher classes and living in a high-class way without having the financial means. [When they got too deeply into debt in one city, they would move to another country...]

Very well done how the young Englishman, taken in by this couple as a tutor for their son and consequently not paid, is shown as feeling too embarrassed to confront his employers and demand his wages.

I was unable find the 12-year-old son credible.

Andrew says

How cruel

Tamar Nagel says

I generally do not enjoy Henry James as his writing is a bit bland for my tastes, but this short novel was excellent. The family reminded me of the Melmotte family in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (p. 1875, before this book), so if you like reading about awful people that you are drawn to despite their awfulness, you should read that book. Honestly, this book was basically a (very, very) condensed version of Trollope's but without the humor. The tutor, Pemberton, seemed to be a solid fellow though also a little foolish. I couldn't really get a good sense of the "wunder kind." He seemed all right but a bit fuzzy all the time, and (spoiler) he does die at the end, which I suppose makes his ethereal description fitting.

Graychin says

When does an investment in another person doubly compensate as an investment in oneself, and when does it not? This is one of my favorite middle-period James novellas. A penniless young tutor is hired by a family of eccentric ex-patriot Americans to educate their prodigy son while they move from hotel to hotel to stay ahead of creditors. The education happens in both directions, and its final results are complicated and incomprehensible to characters outside the tutor and pupil relationship.

“When he tried to figure to himself the morning twilight of childhood, so as to deal with it safely, he perceived that it was never fixed, never arrested, that ignorance, at the instance one touched it, was already flushing faintly into knowledge, that there was nothing that at a given moment you could say a clever child didn’t know.”

Jakob Brønnum says

I'm only now beginning to understand that not only is there a lot of emotion under the surface of Henry James, but also a lot of illegal dealings and feelings. This also applies to the novella *The Marriages*

Avital says

Elegance and insight in the description of a teacher with his young pupil and his dishonest parents.

Violeta says

No está mal, Henry James sabía escribir, por muy pedante y marujo que fuese. Pero, desde luego, tiene cosas mejores. No es indispensable, pero ahí está.

John Nielsen Boyack says

of course the kid dies!

Andrei Tama? says

Ilustrarea rela?iei dintre mentor ?i înv???cel, dublat? de surprinderea moravurilor aristocratice de la sfâr?it de secol XIX.

Domin? sobrietatea specific? lui Henry James, ceea ce face ca textul s? fie extrem de greu de digerat.

Manuel Alfonseca says

Surprising story about the special relation between a child and his teacher, although the family of the boy make the real abnormal situation, including the fact that the teacher is almost never paid.

Lourdes says

En esta novela corta, James nos presenta un triángulo formado por Morgan, un niño con una excepcional inteligencia; su familia, formada por unos miembros muy peculiares entre bohemios y vividores y su nuevo profesor, Pemberton, un joven que se siente desde un principio afortunado por tener semejante alumno.

Si bien, todos parecen interesados en el bienestar y la educación del pequeño Morgan, poco a poco el autor nos va mostrando la verdadera naturaleza de todos sus protagonistas y como sus relaciones personales no son lo que parecen, ni sus sentimientos tan sinceros y desinteresados.

Una novela en la que el autor nos muestra una cara de los personajes y cuando ya los tenemos calados, descubrimos su cruz y toda la percepción de la historia cambia. Una narración hecha con maestría sin duda.

Una novela que podría ser una crítica a la educación familiar y profesional y a las relaciones superficiales tanto en la familia como en la vida privada. Todo alrededor de un niño, Morgan, al que no se le escapa nada de lo que sucede a su alrededor. La realidad no es lo que parece.

Una historia que te deja un recuerdo muy especial. Una muy buena historia de la que desprenden muchos subtemas interesantes para pensar y debatir.

SeaBass says

A voluptuous miasma of human uncertainty, written with a tremendous degree of psychological warfare at the Forefront, yet wrapped in a narrative full of unknotted "plot laces" (I shall call them) made only perverse by the unspoken details of possible dysfunction that exists below the surface of these two people who are only troubled because of the complications of a society that values lines and boundaries over sophisticated thoughts and social challenges. This short story was given to me as a gift by a man who I, to this day, remind remember fondly as both a mentor and as a savior. The nearest of humor, as far as one like this can go, remains straightforwardly queer in a way that only a Henry James writing can be. The pupil here is a highly intelligent and thoughtful young boy without even a hint of malice, yet has every reason in the world to wield animosity due to his maddening depraved, dysfunctional family. His tutor is an impaired young gentleman who obviously holds disorders that remain undiagnosed...and yet...somehow...he remains the right person for this startling and difficult young lad. The fondness the two have for one another deepens, but the question that remains in the center is one of efficiency, integrity, and practicality rather than morality. A weird story, destined to spark some mixed feelings, yet it does not lack a certain type of noteworthy logic that one would be at home with in the realm of European coming-of-age fables.

Thom Swennes says

This novella written in 1891 provided a delightful two hour repast. Unlike other authors of his time, Henry James paints his characters in broad and bold strokes and in such a way as to leave the reader either loving or hating them. I grant you that the tutor may not have academically up to the task at hand, he did provide his ward with the love, consideration and understanding that he lacked from his parents, who were far too self absorbed. I think that it would have been better if James had spent more time, ink and paper and explored in greater detail the characters he so masterfully created. That might have added a few more stars by me in this review. But, alas, it is what it is and I liked it but it fell a few hundred pages short of awesome.

Nancy says

Pemberton is an American student in London who becomes a tutor to an English family's precocious young son, Morgan Moreen, to make money to continue his studies.

At first, he cannot grasp why the family is so nomadic, but Morgan knows and soon establishes a tight bond with Pemberton. The relationship of Pemberton to Morgan and vice versa and the sense of responsibility for his young pupil are the ingredients of this short novel.

As the family moves from place to place to escape creditors and Pemberton is hard pressed to receive payment and even reluctant to ask for what is due him, he finds compensation in learning from Morgan as the pupil learns from him.

It is the psychology and interworkings of the family that makes this James work so interesting and complex.

Ronald Wendling says

At the center of this longish short story (1891) is the relationship between Pemberton, a financially strapped Oxford student hired by a feckless American family to tutor its teenage son as it roams Europe, and Morgan Moreen, Pemberton's bright and receptive pupil. Pemberton so enjoys Morgan's company that he is far less insistent than he should be on receiving his agreed upon wages. Morgan, well aware that his mendacious, social climbing family lacks the means to support an aristocratic lifestyle, is as pleased with Pemberton's company as Pemberton is with his. Not only do they share a similar sense of humor, but the two of them gad about visiting museums and galleries and conversing like buddies. The tutor's curriculum is, as we might say now, without a core, much like that of the teenage Henry James as he traveled Europe with the his own family.

The James family was by no means as uncultivated and deceitful as Morgan's. And while other stories by James may have prepared us to have him glorify the broad European education young Morgan is receiving, that is hardly the case here. Rather Henry James poignantly recalls in the character of Morgan the sad inward effects of the rootless upbringing his father inflicted on him by setting him loose on the European continent when what he needed most at that time was geographical and psychological stability.

The choice confronting Morgan is between the continued delights of Pemberton's company and his need for family stability, and James does not simplify the results of having to make that choice at so young an age.
