

OUCH! HENRY JAMES



Henry James

Dear Reader,

To the few kids at my English high school who had read any Henry James, his pretentious long-windedness was a joke, made better by always calling him Harry James, the rather villainous-looking band leader and husband of sexpot, Betty Grable, whose legs we 16-year olds read lasciviously were insured for a million dollars. How I envied the examiner who had to calculate the details of that policy.

When I grew up and actually read a book by James (the Henry one) and saw the subtlety of it I felt ashamed at having mocked him so ignorantly. Nevertheless, a warm surge went through me when I read recently an essay on his early life in which a neighbor had complained that 'young Harry James' was putting on European airs. We young swine had been right after all!

The same thrill of peeling off the layers came when I read a

letter from a contemporary of the forbidding T. S. Eliot, whose name has always seemed to me as solemn as a cathedral. In the letter he was called Tom Eliot. So the man who wrote, "I am an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature and a royalist in politics," was deep down also a small boy from St. Louis.

An informal first name is an improvement for both of them, I think. It shows they aren't the stiffs they sound – or as authoritative as they would like the rest of us to believe.

Yours sincerely,

R.F.D. Green.