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**The Master**

Colm Tóibín

Picador, £7.99

As even a cursory reading of the private dramas of his notebooks and letters demonstrates, Henry James is a more fitting subject for novelistic treatment than his reputation allows. It is yet a brave move for any novelist to adopt as subject a forebear who is widely accepted as the very master of the genre. Tóibín concentrates on the five years (1895-99) during which James suffered a kind of mid-life personal-artistic crisis. Readers with no intimate interest in James may wonder what all the fuss is about with this Booker short-listed novel; readers with a knowledge of James may find that the research sometimes sits too obviously on the page and may deliberate whether the occasional flatness of James's interior life here is a due reflection of his famed emotional emaciation; readers who have followed the rise and rise of Tóibín's profile will immediately acknowledge that this deeply felt extended tribute is by far his most substantial novel to date.

**John Kenny**