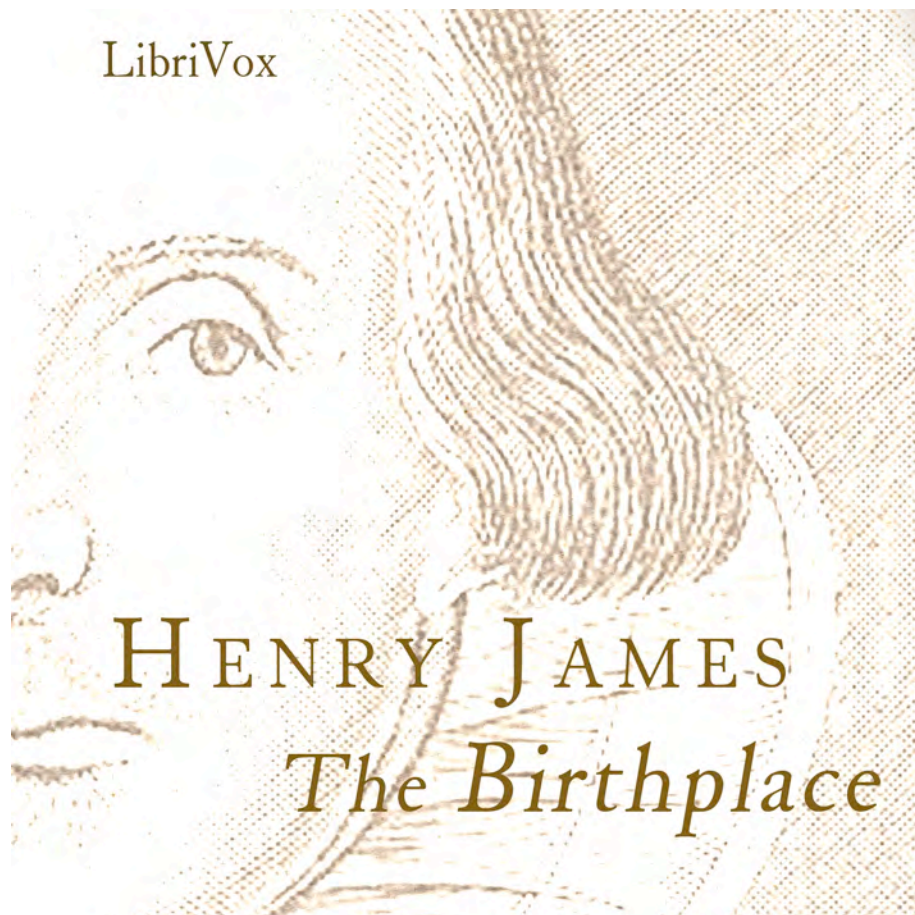


LibriVox



THE BIRTHPLACE

The Birthplace

by Henry James 1843-1916

Neither the name of Shakespeare nor that of Stratford appears directly in this short piece by James, and yet both are absolutely central to his plot. The story has to do with Mr. and Mrs. Gedge, tempted away from a dreary northern town library, which he runs, to become the caretakers and tour guides of the house where the greatest writer of the English language was born, and in which he grew up.

Or did he? There is, after all, a paucity of facts about His life (in James's text, that pronoun is always capitalized, as befits a deity) and only the slenderest of historical evidence about the existence of such a man. No matter; what is important is the myth of his life, and the myth needs to be cared for and fostered so that crowds upon crowds of tourists may come, and, with a proper reverence, worship at His Birthplace.

And yet it is only myth, and the more he thinks of it, the unhappier poor honest Gedge becomes. The story has to do with the making of a shrine, the selling of its wares and the priesthood needed to protect the myths necessary to its existence.

Henry James

Total running time: 2:16:22
Read by Nicholas Clifford

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History of the World, 1902



Henry James

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