

Henry James Passage
Student Sample

In "The funeral," Henry James' narrator conveys feelings of sarcastic amusement mingled with condescension toward the poor funeral attendees. The amused smugness of the man observing the spectacle leads readers to feel more sympathy for those participating in the funeral, and chagrin for the narrator who lacks compassion.

Diction captures the narrator's feelings of bemusement and haughtiness at the sheer foolishness of the funeral. The narrator categorizes the scene as "grotesque," calling it a "spectacle," and later, a "serious comedy." Instead of respecting the crowd's attempts to mourn, this narrator views and evaluates the event and people in terms of their entertainment value. However, rather than eliciting amusement, his mocking evokes sympathy for the masses, who in spite of their limited resources, still experience the pain of loss. As the passage concludes, the narrator focuses more upon the "shabbier types," the "dregs," and the "rabble," who participate in the event. Such labels reveal this man's insensitivity and superiority, revealing his judgment of the impoverished masses from start to finish. Staring blatantly, amused and entertained by the pathetic crowd, the observer fails to show any pity from his position as "above" them. Ironically, in attempting to describe what a more compassionate person would view as sad and pitiful, the narrator reveals mostly himself as arrogant and callous, capable only of patronizing, sarcastic comments.