

Henry James



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Henry James



Henry James in 1890

Born: April 15, 1843
New York City

Died: February 28, 1916 (aged 72)
London

Occupation: Novelist

Genres: Novel, Novella, Short Story

Literary movement:	Realism, Psychological Realism
Influences:	Nathaniel Hawthorne Honoré de Balzac Ivan Turgenev Guy de Maupassant
Influenced:	Edith Wharton Louis Auchincloss Colm Tóibín Joyce Carol Oates Tom Stoppard
Website:	The Henry James Scholar's Guide to Web Sites

Henry James, OM (April 15, 1843 – February 28, 1916), son of theologian Henry James Sr. and brother of the philosopher and psychologist William James and diarist Alice James, was an American-born author and literary critic of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He spent much of his life in Europe and became a British subject shortly before his death. He is primarily known for novels, novellas and short stories based on themes of consciousness and morality.

James significantly contributed to the criticism of fiction, particularly in his insistence that writers be allowed the greatest freedom possible in presenting

their view of the world. His imaginative use of point of view, interior monologue and possibly unreliable narrators in his own novels and tales brought a new depth and interest to narrative fiction. An extraordinarily productive writer, he published substantive books of travel writing, biography, autobiography and visual arts criticism. [1]

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Life



Henry James at eight years old with his father, Henry James, Sr. — 1854 daguerreotype by Mathew Brady

Henry James was born in New York City into a wealthy, intellectually inclined family. His father, Henry James Sr., was interested in various religious and literary pursuits. In his youth, James traveled with his family back and forth between Europe and America. He studied with tutors in Geneva, London, Paris, and Bonn. At the age of 19, he

briefly and unsuccessfully attended Harvard Law School, but he much preferred reading and writing fiction to studying law.^[2]

From an early age James read, criticized, and learned from the classics of English, American, French, Italian, German and (in translation) Russian literature. In 1864, he anonymously published his first short story, *A Tragedy of Error*, and from then on devoted himself completely to literature. Throughout his career, he contributed extensively to magazines such as *The Nation*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's*. From 1875 to his death, he maintained a strenuous schedule of book publication in a variety of genres: novels, short story collections, literary criticism, travel writing, biography and autobiography.

In all, he wrote 22 novels, including two left unfinished at his death, and 112 tales of varying lengths, along with many plays and a large number of non-fiction essays and books. Among the writers most influential on James's fiction were Nathaniel Hawthorne, with his emphasis on the ambiguities of human choice and the universality of guilt, Honoré de Balzac, with his careful attention to detail and realistic presentation of

character, and Ivan Turgenev, with his dislike for over-elaborate plotting.^[3]

James never married, and it is an unresolved (and perhaps irresolvable) question as to whether he ever experienced a consummated sexual relationship. Many of his letters are filled with expressions of affection towards men and women, but it has never been shown conclusively that any of these expressions were acted out. To his effeminate friend Howard Overing Sturgis, for example, James could write: "I

repeat, almost to indiscretion, that I could live with you. Meanwhile I can only try to live without you."^[4] Similarly, James wrote to his longtime friend and fellow-novelist Lucy Clifford: "Dearest Lucy! What shall I say? when I love you so very,



Henry James at sixteen
years old

very much, and see you nine times for once that I see Others! Therefore I think that—if you want it made clear to the meanest intelligence—I love you more than I love Others."^[5] In another example of James's sometimes emotional epistolary style, he wrote to his New York friend Mary Cadwalader Jones:

“ Dearest Mary Cadwalader. I yearn over you, but I yearn in vain; & your long silence really breaks my heart, mystifies, depresses, almost alarms me, to the point even of making me wonder if poor unconscious & doting old Célimare [Jones' pet name for James] has "done" anything, in some dark somnambulism of the spirit, which has...given you a bad moment, or a wrong impression, or a "colourable pretext"...However these things may be, he loves you as tenderly as ever; nothing, to the end of time, will ever detach him from you, & he remembers those Eleventh St. matutinal *intimes* hours, those telephonic matinées, as the most romantic of his life...^[6] ”

James enjoyed socializing with his many friends and acquaintances, but he seems to have maintained a certain distance from other people.^[7] His long friendship with American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson—in whose house he lived for a number of weeks in Italy in 1887—and his shock and grief over her suicide in 1894, are discussed in detail in Leon Edel's biography and play a central role in the more recent biography by Lyndall Gordon. (See the footnotes for further details on all the published biographies of James.) Once again, the exact nature of the relationship is unclear and may never be clarified. Many modern critics and biographers have speculated that James was most likely a repressed homosexual, as author Terry Eagleton has stated: "...as gay critics debate exactly how repressed his (probable) homosexuality was..."^[8] But the sources listed in the footnotes illustrate that James's sexuality remains a contentious issue with no certainty on the subject among critics and biographers, which explains the qualifying "probable" in Eagleton's opinion.

After a brief attempt to live in Paris, James moved permanently to England in 1876. He settled first in a London apartment and then, from 1897 on, in

Lamb House, a historic residence in Rye, East Sussex. In 1899 when James was 56, he met in Rome the 27-year-old American sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen, with whom he appears to have fallen in love, resulting in letters to Andersen that are emotional and occasionally erotic: "I hold you, dearest boy, in my innermost love, & count on your feeling me—in every throb of your soul"; "I put, my dear boy, my arm around you, & feel the pulsation, thereby, as it were, of our excellent future & your admirable endowment."^[9] Again, the exact nature of James's relationship with Andersen may never be known with certainty.

James revisited America on several occasions, most notably in 1904–05. The outbreak of World War I was a profound shock for James, and in 1915, he became a British citizen to declare his loyalty to his adopted country as well as to protest America's refusal to enter the war on behalf of Britain. James suffered a stroke in London on December 2, 1915 and died three months later. When he suffered the stroke, he reportedly said: "So it has come at last – the distinguished thing."^[10]

Style and themes

James is one of the major figures of trans-Atlantic literature. His works frequently juxtapose characters from different worlds—the Old World (Europe), simultaneously artistic, corrupting, and alluring; and the New World (United States), where people are often brash, open, and assertive—and explore how this clash of personalities and cultures affects the two worlds.

He favored internal, psychological drama, and his work is often about conflicts between imaginative protagonists and their difficult environments. As his secretary Theodora Bosanquet remarked in her monograph *Henry James at Work*:

“ When he walked out of the refuge of his study and into the world and looked around him, he saw a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of doomed, defenseless children of light... His novels are a repeated exposure of this wickedness, a reiterated and passionate plea for the fullest freedom of development, unimperiled by reckless and

barbarous stupidity.^[11]

”

Critics have jokingly described three phases in the development of James's prose: "James the First, James the Second, and The Old Pretender."^[12] His earlier work is considered realist because of the carefully described details of his characters' physical surroundings. However, throughout his long career, James maintained a strong interest in a variety of artistic effects and movements. His work gradually became more metaphorical and symbolic as he entered more deeply into the minds of his characters. In its intense focus on the consciousness of his major characters, James's later work foreshadows extensive developments in 20th century fiction.^[13] The prose of the later works is marked by long, digressive sentences that defer the verb and include many qualifying adverbs, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses as James seeks to pin down the bifurcating streams of his characters' consciousnesses - H.G. Wells harshly criticized the process as "an elephant attempting to pick up a pea."^[14] Biographers have noted that the change from the fairly straightforward approach of his earlier writing to

the more elaborate manner in his later works occurred at approximately the time that James began dictating his fiction to a secretary.

Henry James was afflicted with a mild stutter; he overcame this by cultivating the habit of speaking very slowly and deliberately. Since he believed that good writing should resemble the conversation of an intelligent man, the process of dictating his works may perhaps account for a shift in style from direct to conversational sentences. The resulting prose style is at times baroque. His friend Edith Wharton, who admired him greatly, said that there were some passages in his works that were all but incomprehensible.^[15] His short fiction, such as *The Aspern Papers* and *The Turn of the Screw*, is often considered to be more readable than the longer novels, and his early works tend to be more accessible than his later ones.

The Turn of the Screw, however, is itself one of James's later works. Generalizations about the "accessibility" of James's fiction are difficult, at best. Many of his later short stories—"Europe", "Paste" and "Mrs. Medwin", for instance—are briefer and more straightforward in style than some tales of his earlier years.^[16]

For much of his life James was an expatriate, an outsider, living in Europe. Much of *The Portrait of a Lady* was written while he lived in Venice, a city whose beauty he found distracting; he was better pleased with the small town of Rye in England. This feeling of being an American in Europe came through as a recurring theme in his books, which contrasted American innocence (or lack of sophistication) with European sophistication (or decadence)—see, for example, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*.

He made only a modest living from his books, yet was often the houseguest of the wealthy. James had grown up in a well-to-do family, and he was able to enter into this world for many of the impressions and observations he would eventually include in his fiction. (He said he got some of his best story ideas from dinner table gossip.)^[17] He was a man whose sexuality was uncertain and whose tastes and interests were, according to the prevailing standards of Victorian era Anglo-American culture, rather feminine.^[18] William Faulkner once referred to James as "the nicest old lady I ever met." In a similar vein, Thomas Hardy called James and Robert Louis Stevenson "virtuous females" when he read their unfavorable comments

about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in Percy Lubbock's 1920 collection of James's letters.^[19] Theodore Roosevelt also criticized James for his supposed lack of masculinity. When James toured America in 1904–1905, he met Roosevelt—whom James dubbed "Theodore Rex" and called "a dangerous and ominous jingo"—at a White House dinner. Oddly, the two men chatted amicably and at length, as if they were the best of friends.^[20]

It is often asserted that James's being a permanent outsider in so many ways may have helped him in his detailed psychological analysis of situations—one of the strongest features of his writing. He was never a full member of any camp.^[21] (See *The Princess Casamassima*, especially the Princess's comment that Hyacinth is doomed to looking at the world through a sheet of glass.)^[22] In his review of Van Wyck Brooks' *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*, critic Edmund Wilson noted James's detached, objective viewpoint and made a startling comparison:

“ One would be in a position to appreciate James better if one compared him with the dramatists of the seventeenth century—Racine and Molière, whom he resembles in

form as well as in point of view, and even Shakespeare, when allowances are made for the most extreme differences in subject and form. These poets are not, like Dickens and Hardy, writers of melodrama — either humorous or pessimistic, nor secretaries of society like Balzac, nor prophets like Tolstoy: they are occupied simply with the presentation of conflicts of moral character, which they do not concern themselves about softening or averting. They do not indict society for these situations: they regard them as universal and inevitable. They do not even blame God for allowing them: they accept them as the conditions of life.^[23] ”

It is possible to see many of James's stories as psychological thought-experiments. *The Portrait of a Lady* may be an experiment to see what happens when an idealistic young woman suddenly becomes very rich; alternatively, it has been suggested that the storyline was inspired by Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection. The

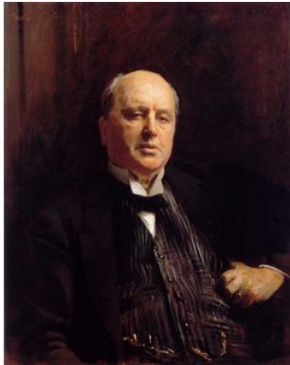
novella *The Turn of the Screw* describes the psychological history of an unmarried (and, some critics suggest, sexually repressed and possibly unbalanced) young governess. The unnamed governess stumbles into a terrifying, ambiguous situation involving her perceptions of the ghosts of a lately deceased couple—her predecessor, Miss Jessel, and Miss Jessel's lover, Peter Quint.^[24]

Major novels

Although any selection of James's novels as "major" must inevitably depend to some extent on personal preference, the following books have achieved prominence among his works in the views of many critics.^[25]

The first period of James's fiction, usually considered to have culminated in *The Portrait of a Lady*, concentrated on the contrast between Europe and America. The style of these novels is generally straightforward and, though personally characteristic, well within the norms of 19th century fiction. *Roderick Hudson* (1875) is a Künstlerroman that traces the development of the

title



"Portrait of Henry James," oil painting by
John Singer Sargent (1913)

character, an extremely talented sculptor. Although the book shows some signs of immaturity—this was James's first serious attempt at a full-length novel — it has attracted favorable comment due to the vivid realization of the three major characters: Roderick Hudson, superbly gifted but unstable and unreliable; Rowland Mallet, Roderick's limited but

much more mature friend and patron; and Christina Light, one of James's most enchanting and maddening femmes fatales. The pair of Hudson and Mallet has been seen as representing the two sides of James's own nature: the wildly imaginative artist and the brooding conscientious mentor.

Although *Roderick Hudson* featured mostly American characters in a European setting, James made the Europe–America contrast even more explicit in his next novel. In fact, the contrast could be considered the leading theme of *The American* (1877). This book is a combination of social comedy and melodrama concerning the adventures and misadventures of Christopher Newman, an essentially good-hearted but rather gauche American businessman on his first tour of Europe. Newman is looking for a world different from the simple, harsh realities of 19th century American business. He encounters both the beauty and the ugliness of Europe, and learns not to take either for granted.

James did not set all of his novels in Europe or focus exclusively on the contrast between the New World and the Old. Set in New York City, *Washington Square* (1880) is a deceptively simple tragicomedy that recounts the conflict between a

dull but sweet daughter and her brilliant, domineering father. The book is often compared to Jane Austen's work for the clarity and grace of its prose and its intense focus on family relationships. James was not particularly enthusiastic about Jane Austen, so he might not have regarded the comparison as flattering. In fact, James was not enthusiastic about *Washington Square* itself. He tried to read it over for inclusion in the *New York Edition* of his fiction (1907–09) but found that he could not. So he excluded the novel from the edition. But other readers have enjoyed the book enough to make it one of the more popular works in the entire Jamesian canon.

In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) James concluded the first phase of his career with a novel that remains to this day his most popular long fiction, if the Amazon sales rankings are any indication. This impressive achievement is the story of a spirited young American woman, Isabel Archer, who "affronts her destiny" and finds it overwhelming. She inherits a large amount of money and subsequently becomes the victim of Machiavellian scheming by two American expatriates. The narrative is set mainly in Europe, especially in England and Italy. Generally regarded as the masterpiece of his early phase, *The Portrait of a*

Lady is not just a reflection of James's absorbing interest in the differences between the New World and the Old, but a profound meditation on the themes of personal freedom, responsibility, betrayal, and sexuality.

In the 1880s James began to explore new areas of interest besides the Europe–America contrast and the "American girl". In particular, he began writing on explicitly political themes. *The Bostonians* (1886) is a bittersweet tragicomedy that centers on an odd triangle of characters: Basil Ransom, an unbending political conservative from Mississippi; Olive Chancellor, Ransom's cousin and a zealous Boston feminist; and Verena Tarrant, a pretty protegee of Olive's in the feminist movement. The story line concerns the contest between Ransom and Olive for Verena's allegiance and affection, though the novel also includes a wide panorama of political activists, newspaper people, and quirky eccentrics.

The political theme turned darker in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), the story of an intelligent but confused young London bookbinder, Hyacinth Robinson, who becomes involved in far left politics and a terrorist assassination plot. The book is something of a lone sport in the Jamesian canon

for dealing with such a violent political subject. But it is often paired with *The Bostonians*, which is concerned with political issues in a less tragic manner.

Just as James was beginning his ultimately disastrous attempt to conquer the stage, he wrote *The Tragic Muse* (1890). This novel offers a wide, cheerful panorama of English life and follows the fortunes of two would-be artists: Nick Dormer, who vacillates between a political career and his efforts to become a painter, and Miriam Rooth, an actress striving for artistic and commercial success. A huge cast of supporting characters help and hinder their pursuits. The book reflects James's consuming interest in the theater and is often considered to mark the close of the second or middle phase of his career in the novel.

After the failure of his "dramatic experiment" James returned to his fiction with a deeper, more incisive approach. He began to probe his characters' consciousness in a more insightful manner, which had been foreshadowed in such passages as Chapter 42 of *The Portrait of a Lady*. His style also started to grow in complexity to reflect the greater depth of his analysis. *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), considered the first example of

this final phase, is a half-length novel that describes the struggle between Mrs. Gereth, a widow of impeccable taste and iron will, and her son Owen over a houseful of precious antique furniture. The story is largely told from the viewpoint of Fleda Vetch, a young woman in love with Owen but sympathetic to Mrs Gereth's anguish over losing the antiques she patiently collected.

James continued the more involved, psychological approach to his fiction with *What Maisie Knew* (1897), the story of the sensitive daughter of divorced and irresponsible parents. The novel has great contemporary relevance as an unflinching account of a wildly dysfunctional family. The book is also a notable technical achievement by James, as it follows the title character from earliest childhood to precocious maturity.

The third period of James's career reached its most significant achievement in three novels published just after the turn of the century. Critic F. O. Matthiessen called this "trilogy" James's major phase, and these novels have certainly received intense critical study. Although it was the second-written of the books, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) was the first published. This novel tells the story of

Milly Theale, an American heiress stricken with a serious disease, and her impact on the people around her. Some of these people befriend Milly with honorable motives, while others are more self-interested. James stated in his autobiographical books that Milly was based on Minny Temple, his beloved cousin who died at an early age of tuberculosis. He said that he attempted in the novel to wrap her memory in the "beauty and dignity of art".

The next published of the three novels, *The Ambassadors* (1903), is a dark comedy that follows the trip of protagonist Lewis Lambert Strether to Europe in pursuit of his widowed fiancée's supposedly wayward son. Strether is to bring the young man back to the family business, but he encounters unexpected complications. The third-person narrative is told exclusively from Strether's point of view. In his preface to the *New York Edition* text of the novel, James placed this book at the top of his achievements, which has occasioned some critical disagreement. *The Golden Bowl* (1904) is a complex, intense study of marriage and adultery that completes the "major phase" and, essentially, James's career in the novel. The book explores the tangle of interrelationships between a father and daughter and their respective spouses.

The novel focuses deeply and almost exclusively on the consciousness of the central characters, with sometimes obsessive detail and powerful insight.

Shorter narratives



Lamb House in Rye, East Sussex, where
James lived from 1897

James
was

particularly interested in what he called the "beautiful and blest *nouvelle*", or the longer form of short narrative. Still, he produced a number of very short stories in which he achieved notable compression of sometimes complex subjects. The following narratives are representative of James's achievement in the shorter forms of fiction.^[26]

Just as the contrast between Europe and America was a predominant theme in James's early novels, many of his first tales also explored the clash between the Old World and the New. In "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), the earliest fiction that James included in the *New York Edition*, the difference between America and Europe erupts into open conflict, which leads to a sadly ironic ending. The story's technique still seems somewhat inexpert, with passages of local color description occasionally interrupting the flow of the narrative. But James manages to craft an interesting and believable example of what he would call the "Americano-European legend".

James published many stories before what would prove to be his greatest success with the readers of his time, "Daisy Miller" (1878). This story portrays the confused courtship of the title character, a free-spirited American girl, by Winterbourne, a compatriot of hers with much more sophistication. His pursuit of Daisy is hampered by her own flirtatiousness, which is frowned upon by the other expatriates they meet in Switzerland and Italy. Her lack of understanding of the social mores of the society she so desperately wishes to enter ultimately leads to tragedy.

As James moved on from studies of the Europe-America clash and the American girl in his novels, his shorter works also explored new subjects in the 1880s. "The Aspern Papers" (1888) is one of James's best-known and most acclaimed longer tales. The storyline is based on an anecdote that James heard about a Shelley devotee who tried to obtain some valuable letters written by the poet. Set in a brilliantly described Venice, the story demonstrates James's ability to generate almost unbearable suspense while never neglecting the development of his characters. Another fine example of the middle phase of James's career in short narrative is "The Pupil" (1891), the story of a precocious young boy growing up in a mendacious and dishonorable family. He befriends his tutor, who is the only adult in his life that he can trust. James presents their relationship with sympathy and insight, and the story reaches what some have considered the status of classical tragedy.

"The Altar of the Dead", first published in James's collection *Terminations* in 1895 after the story failed of magazine publication, is a fable of literally life and death significance. The story explores how the protagonist tries to keep the remembrance of his dead friends, to save them

from being forgotten entirely in the rush of everyday events. He meets a woman who shares his ideals, only to find that the past places what seems to be an impassable barrier between them. Although James was not religious in any conventional sense, the story shows a deep spirituality in its treatment of mortality and the transcendent power of unselfish love.

The final phase of James's short narratives shows the same characteristics as the final phase of his novels: a more involved style, a deeper psychological approach, and a sharper focus on his central characters. Probably his most popular short narrative among today's readers, "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) is a ghost story that has lent itself well to operatic and film adaptation. With its possibly ambiguous content and powerful narrative technique, the story challenges the reader to determine if the protagonist, an unnamed governess, is correctly reporting events or is instead an unreliable neurotic with an overheated imagination. To further muddy the waters, her written account of the experience—a frame tale—is being read many years later at a Christmas house party by someone who claims to have known her.

"The Beast in the Jungle" (1903) is almost

universally considered one of James's finest short narratives, and has often been compared with *The Ambassadors* in its meditation on experience or the lack of it. The story also treats other universal themes: loneliness, fate, love and death. The parable of John Marcher and his peculiar destiny speaks to anyone who has speculated on the worth and meaning of human life. Among his last efforts in short narrative, "The Jolly Corner" (1908) is usually held to be one of James's best ghost stories. The tale describes the adventures of Spencer Brydon as he prowls the now-empty New York house where he grew up. Brydon encounters a "sensation more complex than had ever before found itself consistent with sanity."

Nonfiction

Beyond
his fiction, James was one of the more important literary critics in the history of the novel. In his classic essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884), he argued against rigid proscriptions on the novelist's choice of subject and method of treatment. He maintained that the widest possible freedom in content and approach would help ensure narrative fiction's



Photograph of Henry James (1897)

continued vitality. James wrote many valuable critical articles on other novelists; typical is his insightful book-length study of his American predecessor Nathaniel Hawthorne. When he assembled the *New York Edition* of his fiction in his final years, James wrote a series of prefaces that subjected his own work to the same searching, occasionally harsh criticism.^[27]

For most of his life James harbored ambitions for success as a playwright. He converted his novel *The American* into a play that enjoyed modest returns in the early 1890s. In all he wrote about a dozen plays, most of which went unproduced. His costume drama *Guy Domville* failed disastrously on its opening night in 1895. James then largely abandoned his efforts to conquer the stage and returned to his fiction. In his *Notebooks* he maintained that his theatrical experiment benefited his novels and tales by helping him dramatize his characters' thoughts and emotions. James produced a small but valuable amount of theatrical criticism, including perceptive appreciations of Henrik Ibsen. [28]

With his wide-ranging artistic interests, James occasionally wrote on the visual arts. Perhaps his most valuable contribution was his favorable assessment of fellow expatriate John Singer Sargent, a painter whose critical status has improved markedly in recent decades. James also wrote sometimes charming, sometimes brooding articles about various places he visited and lived in. His most famous books of travel writing include *Italian Hours* (an example of the charming approach) and *The American Scene* (most

definitely on the brooding side).[29]

James was one of the great letter-writers of any era. More than ten thousand of his personal letters are extant, and over three thousand have been published in a large number of collections. A complete edition of James's letters began publication in 2006 with two volumes covering the 1855–1872 period, edited by Pierre Walker and Greg Zacharias. James's correspondents included celebrated contemporaries like Robert Louis Stevenson, Edith Wharton and Joseph Conrad, along with many others in his wide circle of friends and acquaintances. The letters range from the "mere twaddle of graciousness"^[30] to serious discussions of artistic, social and personal issues. Very late in life James began a series of autobiographical works: *A Small Boy and Others*, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, and the unfinished *The Middle Years*. These books portray the development of a classic observer who was passionately interested in artistic creation but was somewhat reticent about participating fully in the life around him.^[31]

Criticism, biographies and fictional treatments

James's critical reputation fell to its lowest point in the decades immediately after his death. Some American critics, such as Van Wyck Brooks, expressed hostility towards James's long expatriation and eventual naturalization as a British citizen.^[32] Other critics like E.M. Forster complained about what they saw as James's squeamishness in the treatment of sex and other possibly controversial material, or dismissed his style as difficult and obscure, relying heavily on extremely long sentences and excessively latinate language.^[33]

Although these criticisms have by no means abated completely, James is now widely valued for his masterful creation of situations and storylines that reveal his characters' deepest motivations, his low-key but playful humor, and his assured command of the language. In his 1983 book, *The Novels of Henry James*, critic Edward Wagenknecht offers a strongly positive assessment in words that echo Theodora Bosanquet's:

"To be completely great," Henry James wrote in an early review, "a work of art must lift up the heart," and his own novels do this to an outstanding degree... More than sixty

years after his death, the great novelist who sometimes professed to have no opinions stands foursquare in the great Christian humanistic and democratic tradition. The men and women who, at the height of World War II, raided the secondhand shops for his out-of-print books knew what they were about. For no writer ever raised a braver banner to which all who love freedom might adhere.^[34]

The standard biography of James is Leon Edel's massive five-volume work published from 1953 to 1972. Edel produced a number of updated and abridged versions of the biography before his death in 1997. Other writers such as Sheldon Novick, Lyndall Gordon, Fred Kaplan and Philip Horne have also published biographies that occasionally disagree sharply with Edel's interpretations and conclusions. Colm Tóibín used an extensive list of biographies of Henry James and his family for his 2004 novel, *The Master*, which is a third person narrative with James as the central character, and deals with specific episodes from his life during the period between 1895 and 1899. *Author, Author*, a novel by David Lodge published in the same year, was based on James's efforts to conquer the stage in the 1890s. In 2002 Emma Tennant

published *Felony: The Private History of The Aspern Papers*, a novel that fictionalized the relationship between James and American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson and the possible effects of that relationship on *The Aspern Papers*.

The published criticism of James's work has reached enormous proportions. The volume of criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* alone has become extremely large for such a brief work. *The Henry James Review*, published three times a year, offers criticism of James's entire range of writings, and many other articles and book-length studies appear regularly. Some guides to this extensive literature can be found on the external sites listed below.

Legacy

Perhaps the most prominent examples of James's legacy in recent years have been the film versions of several of his novels and stories. Three of James's novels were filmed by the team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory: *The Europeans* (1978), *The Bostonians* (1984) and *The Golden Bowl* (2000). The Iain Softley-directed version of *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) was successful with both

critics and audiences. Helena Bonham Carter received an Academy Award nomination as Best Actress for her memorable portrayal of Kate Croy. Jane Campion tried her hand with *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996) but with much less success. In earlier times Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) brought "The Turn of the Screw" to vivid life on film, and William Wyler's *The Heiress* (1949) did the same for *Washington Square*.

James has also influenced his fellow novelists. In fact, there has been a recent spate of "James books", as mentioned above. Such disparate writers as Joyce Carol Oates with *Accursed Inhabitants of the House of Bly* (1994), Louis Auchincloss with *The Ambassadors* (1950), and Tom Stoppard with *The Real Thing* (1982) were explicitly influenced by James's works. James was definitely out of his element when it came to music, but Benjamin Britten's operatic version of "The Turn of the Screw" (1954) has become one of the composer's most popular works. William Tuckett converted the story into a ballet in 1999.

Even when the influence is not so obvious, James can cast a powerful spell. In 1954, when the shades of depression were thickening fast, Ernest Hemingway wrote an emotional letter where he

tried to steady himself as he thought James would: "Pretty soon I will have to throw this away so I better try to be calm like Henry James. Did you ever read Henry James? He was a great writer who came to Venice and looked out the window and smoked his cigar and thought." The odd, perhaps subconscious or accidental allusion to "The Aspern Papers" is striking. And there are the real oddities, like the Rolls-Royce ad which used Strether's famous words: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." That's more than a little ironic, considering *The Ambassadors'* sardonic treatment of the "great new force" of advertising.^[35]

Notes

1. ^ See the referenced bibliography by Edel, Laurence and Rambeau for a complete account of James's large volume of writings.
2. ^ In an unpublished note, "The Turning Point of My Life," James ruefully notes how he wrote fiction instead of law at Harvard: "It so happened that I had in the deepest depths of the past spent a year at that admirable institution the Harvard Law School, and that, withdrawing from it prematurely—though under no precipitation that I may not now comfortably refer to—I brought away with me certain rolls of manuscript that were quite shamelessly not so many bundles of

notes on the perusal of so many calfskin volumes. These were notes of quite another sort, small sickly seed enough, no doubt, but to be sown and to sprout up into such flowers as they might, in a much less trimmed and ordered garden than that of the law." *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* edited by Leon Edel and Lyall Powers (2005) p.437–438. James also discusses his very unsuccessful time at Harvard Law School in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, especially chapters nine and ten.

3. ^ James himself acknowledged his debt to these writers. For instance, see the *New York Edition* preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* for a discussion of Turgenev's influence, and the *Lesson of Balzac* for the French novelist's. James wrote extensive critical essays on all three of these writers; see the referenced editions of his literary criticism. Later critics such as Cornelia Sharp and Edward Wagenknecht have noted specific influences on James's works, such as Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet* on *Washington Square*, Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* on *Roderick Hudson*, and Turgenev's *Virgin Soil* on *The Princess Casamassima*. See the referenced books of criticism for many more such examples.
4. ^ Gunter, Susan E; Jobe, Steven *Dearly Beloved Friends: Henry James's Letters to Younger Men* (2001) ISBN 0-472-11009-8
5. ^ *Bravest of Women and Finest of Friends: Henry James's Letters to Lucy Clifford*, edited by Marysa Demoor and Monty Chisholm, University of Victoria (1999), p.79 ISBN 0-920604-67-6

6. ^ *Dear Munificent Friends: Henry James's Letters to Four Women*, edited by Susan E. Gunter, The University of Michigan Press (1999), p.146 ISBN 0-472-11010-1
7. ^ In a letter of May 6, 1904 to his brother William, James refers to himself as "always your hopelessly celibate even though sexagenarian Henry." *The Correspondence of William James: Volume 3, William and Henry* edited by Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Bradley (1994) p. 271. How accurate that description might have been is the subject of contention among James's biographers. See volume four of Edel's referenced biography, p.306–316, for a particularly long and inconclusive discussion on the subject. See also *The Henry James Scholar's Guide to Web Sites* in the "External links" section for a lively debate among biographers Edel, Novick and Kaplan on the issue, along with links to other material on the controversy.
8. ^ "The asperity papers" (June 24, 2006) by Terry Eagleton, a review of *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* by David Lodge in *The Guardian*. The review mostly concerns the rivalry between Lodge and Colm Tóibín in their novels about James, both published in 2004. See the "Criticism, biographies and fictional treatments" section for more details about the two novels.
9. ^ Mamoli Zorzi, Rosella (Ed.) *Beloved Boy: Letters to Hendrik C. Andersen, 1899–1915* ISBN 0-8139-2270-4
10. ^ See the referenced biographies for further details of James's life. Edel's biography

thoroughly documents the known facts of James's day-to-day activities. Horne's epistolary biography focuses on James's professional career. The biographies by Kaplan, Novick, and Gordon explore issues about James's personal life with sometimes controversial speculations.

11. ^ *Henry James At Work* by Theodora Bosanquet, p.275–276 (1970) ISBN 0-8383-0009-X
12. ^ "But I come back, I come back, as I say, I all throbbingly and yearningly and passionately, oh, mon bon, come back to this way". MetaFilter. Retrieved on 2007-07-14.
13. ^ See such comprehensive and chronological treatments of James's works as Edward Wagenknecht's *The Novels of Henry James* (1983) for a discussion of the various changes in James's narrative technique and style over the course of his career.
14. ^ Anecdotes about Henry James. Retrieved on 2007-07-14.
15. ^ *The Writing of Fiction* by Edith Wharton, p.90–91 (1925)
16. ^ The referenced biographies, in particular volumes four (p.174–177) and five (p.91–95, 360–364) of Edel's work, discuss how James dictated his fiction later in his career and how this may have affected his style. The referenced editions of James's later works, such as *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, also discuss issues about his style. And see the complete monograph on James's work habits, *Henry James At Work* by his secretary Theodora Bosanquet, which was quoted above.

17. ^ James's prefaces to the *New York Edition* of his fiction often discuss such origins for his storylines. See, for instance, the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*.
18. ^ See Edel's biography, especially volume four, and the biographies by Novick and Gordon for extensive discussions of this controversial and unresolved issue.
19. ^ *Henry James: A Life in Letters* edited by Philip Horne, p.249 (1999) and *Henry James's Legacy: The Afterlife of His Figure and Fiction* by Adeline Tintner, p.154 (1998)
20. ^ *Henry James: The Master 1901–1916* by Leon Edel, p.265–266 (1972)
21. ^ James himself noted his "outsider" status. In a letter of October 2, 1901 to W. Morton Fullerton, James talked of the "essential loneliness of my life" as "the deepest thing" about him (*Henry James Letters* edited by Leon Edel, volume 4, p.170 (1984) ISBN 0-674-38780-5). The referenced biographies and critical works discuss how this outsider status may have helped James to a more objective viewpoint, as noted in the famous quotation from Edmund Wilson, which compares James's objectivity to that of Shakespeare's.
22. ^ *The Princess Casamassima*, chapter 24. The Princess' comment: "Fancy the strange, the bitter fate: to be constituted as you are constituted, to feel the capacity that you must feel, and yet to look at the good things of life only through the glass of the pastry-cook's window!"
23. ^ *The Portable Edmund Wilson* edited by Lewis

- Dabney, p.128–129 (1983) ISBN 0-14-015098-6
24. ^ For a wide variety of critical opinions on *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Turn of the Screw*, see the "Criticism" sections of the referenced editions of these works. The referenced books of criticism also offer substantial discussions of these works. According to volume two of Edel's biography, James met Darwin in 1869 and read some of his work.
 25. ^ For extensive critical discussions of *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, see the referenced editions of these novels. For discussion of all of James's novels from a variety of critical viewpoints, see the referenced books of criticism.
 26. ^ For further critical analysis of these narratives, see the referenced editions of James's tales and *The Turn of the Screw*. The referenced books of criticism also discuss many of James's short narratives.
 27. ^ See the referenced editions of James's criticism and the related articles in the "Literary criticism" part of the "Notable works by James" section for further discussion of his critical essays.
 28. ^ *Henry James: The Scenic Art, Notes on Acting and the Drama 1872–1901* edited by Allan Wade, p.243–260 (1948). For a general discussion of James's efforts as a playwright, see Edel's referenced edition of his plays.
 29. ^ Further information about these works can be found in the related articles in the "Travel writings" and "Visual arts criticism" parts of the

- "Notable works by James" section and in the referenced editions of James's travel writings.
30. ^ *Henry James Letters* edited by Leon Edel, volume 4 p.208 (1983). Further information on James's letters can be found at The Online Calendar of Henry James's Letters. For more information on the complete edition of James's letters, see *The Henry James Scholar's Guide to Web Sites* in the "External links" section.
 31. ^ See the referenced edition of James's autobiographical books by F.W. Dupee, which includes a critical introduction, an extensive index, and notes.
 32. ^ *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* by Van Wyck Brooks (1925) develops this thesis at length.
 33. ^ *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M. Forster p.153–163, (1956) ISBN 0-674-38780-5
 34. ^ *The Novels of Henry James* by Edward Wagenknecht, p.261–262 (1983) ISBN 0-8044-2959-6
 35. ^ Many of these examples are drawn from *Henry James's Legacy: The Afterlife of His Figure and Fiction* by Adeline Tintner (1998) ISBN 0-8071-2157-6. Specific references from the book: Joyce Carol Oates p.378–380, Louis Auchincloss p.350–353, Tom Stoppard p.251–253, Benjamin Britten p.247, Ernest Hemingway p.176–188, and Rolls-Royce p.2–4.

Notable works by James

Novels

- *Watch and Ward* (1871)
- *Roderick Hudson* (1875)
- *The American* (1877)
- *The Europeans* (1878)
- *Confidence* (1879)
- *Washington Square* (1880)
- *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)
- *The Bostonians* (1886)
- *The Princess Casamassima* (1886)
- *The Reverberator* (1888)
- *The Tragic Muse* (1890)
- *The Other House* (1896)
- *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897)
- *What Maisie Knew* (1897)
- *The Awkward Age* (1899)
- *The Sacred Fount* (1901)
- *The Vortex* (1902)
- *The Ambassadors* (1903)
- *The Circle* (1905)
- *The Vortex* (colla novel, eleven autho, 1908)
- *The Circle* (1911)
- *The Immortal Hour* (unfin, publi, posth, 1917)
- *The Sinister* (unfin)

publi:
posth
1917,

Novellas and tales

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ■ <i>A
Passionate
Pilgrim</i>
(1871) | ■ <i>The
Pupil</i>
(1891) | ■ <i>Paste</i>
(1899) |
| ■ <i>Madame de
Mauves</i>
(1874) | ■ <i>The
Real
Thing</i>
(1892) | ■ <i>The Great
Good
Place</i>
(1900) |
| ■ <i>Daisy
Miller</i>
(1878) | ■ <i>The
Middle
Years</i>
(1893) | ■ <i>Mrs.
Medwin</i>
(1900) |
| ■ <i>A Bundle of
Letters</i>
(1879) | ■ <i>The
Altar of
the
Dead</i>
(1895) | ■ <i>The
Birthplace</i>
(1903) |
| ■ <i>The Author
of
Beltraffio</i>
(1884) | ■ <i>The
Turn of
the
Screw</i>
(1898) | ■ <i>The Beast
in the
Jungle</i>
(1903) |
| ■ <i>The Aspern
Papers</i>
(1888) | ■ <i>In the</i> | ■ <i>The Jolly
Corner</i>
(1908) |
| ■ <i>A London
Life</i> (1888) | | |

- Cage*
(1898)
■ *Europe*
(1899)

Travel writings

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| ■ <i>A Little Tour in France</i> (1884) | ■ <i>The American Scene</i> (1907) |
| ■ <i>English Hours</i> (1905) | ■ <i>Italian Hours</i> (1909) |

Literary criticism

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ■ <i>French Poets and Novelists</i> (1878) | ■ <i>New York Edition</i> (1907–1909) |
| ■ <i>Hawthorne</i> (1879) | ■ <i>Notes on Novelists</i> (1914) |
| ■ <i>Partial Portraits</i> (1888) | ■ <i>Notebooks</i> (various) |
| ■ <i>Essays in London and Elsewhere</i> (1893) | |

Autobiography

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ■ <i>A Small Boy and Others</i> | ■ <i>The Middle Years</i> (unfinished, published) |
|---------------------------------|---|

- (1913)

posthumously 1917)
- *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914)

Plays

- *Theatricals* (1894)
- *Theatricals: Second Series* (1895)
- *Guy Domville* (1895)

Biography

- *William Wetmore Story and His Friends* (1903)

Visual arts criticism

- *Picture and Text* (1893)

References

Biography

- *Henry James: The Untried Years 1843–1870* by Leon Edel (1953)

- *Henry James: The Conquest of London 1870–1881* by Leon Edel (1962) ISBN 0-380-39651-3
- *Henry James: The Middle Years 1882–1895* by Leon Edel (1962) ISBN 0-380-39669-6
- *Henry James: The Treacherous Years 1895–1901* by Leon Edel (1969) ISBN 0-380-39677-7
- *Henry James: The Master 1901–1916* by Leon Edel (1972) ISBN 0-380-39677-7
- *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* by Fred Kaplan (1992) ISBN 0-688-09021-4
- *Henry James: The Young Master* by Sheldon Novick (1996) ISBN 0-394-58655-7
- *A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art* by Lyndall Gordon (1998) ISBN 0-393-04711-3
- *Henry James: A Life in Letters* edited by Philip Horne (1999) ISBN 0-670-88563-0

Editions

- *Henry James: Autobiography* edited by F.W. Dupee (1956)
- *The American: an Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism* edited by James Tuttleton (1978) ISBN 0-393-09091-4
- *The Notebooks of Henry James* edited by F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth Murdock (1981) ISBN 0-226-51104-9
- *Novels 1871–1880: Watch and Ward, Roderick Hudson, The American, The Europeans, Confidence* (William T. Stafford, ed.) (Library of

America, 1983) ISBN 978-0-94045013-4

- *Literary Criticism Volume One: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* edited by Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (Library of America, 1984) ISBN 978-0-94045022-6
- *Literary Criticism Volume Two: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition* edited by Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (Library of America, 1984) ISBN 978-0-94045023-3
- *Novels 1881–1886: Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, The Bostonians* (William T. Stafford, ed) (Library of America, 1985) ISBN 978-0-94045030-1
- *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* edited by Leon Edel and Lyall Powers (1987) ISBN 0-19-503782-0
- *Novels 1886–1890: The Princess Casamassina, The Reverberator, The Tragic Muse* (Daniel Mark Fogel, ed) (Library of America, 1989) ISBN 978-0-94045056-1
- *The Complete Plays of Henry James* edited by Leon Edel (1990) ISBN 0-19-504379-0
- *Collected Travel Writings, Great Britain and America: English Hours; The American Scene; Other Travels* edited by Richard Howard (Library of America, 1993) ISBN 978-0-94045076-9
- *Collected Travel Writings, The Continent: A Little Tour in France, Italian Hours, Other Travels* edited by Richard Howard (Library of America, 1993) ISBN 0-940450-77-1
- *The Ambassadors: An Authoritative Text, The*

Author on the Novel, Criticism edited by S.P. Rosenbaum (1994) ISBN 0-393-96314-4

- *Complete Stories 1892–1898* (John Hollander, David Bromwich, Denis Donoghue, eds) (Library of America, 1996) ISBN 978-1-88301109-3
- *Complete Stories 1898–1910* (John Hollander, David Bromwich, Denis Donoghue, eds) (Library of America, 1996) ISBN 978-1-88301110-9
- *Complete Stories 1864–1874* (Jean Strouse, ed) (Library of America, 1999) ISBN 978-1-88301170-3
- *Complete Stories 1874–1884* (William Vance, ed) (Library of America, 1999) ISBN 978-1-88301163-5
- *Complete Stories 1884–1891* (Edward Said, ed) (Library of America, 1999) ISBN 978-1-88301164-2
- *The Turn of the Screw: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism* edited by Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren (1999) ISBN 0-393-95904-X
- *Novels 1896–1899: The Other House, The Spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew, The Awkward Age* (Myra Jehlen, ed) (Library of America, 2003) ISBN 978-1-93108230-3
- *The Portrait of a Lady: An Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism* edited by Robert Bamberg (2003) ISBN 0-393-96646-1
- *The Wings of the Dove: Authoritative Text, The Author and the Novel, Criticism* edited by J. Donald Crowley and Richard Hocks (2003) ISBN 0-393-97881-8

- *Tales of Henry James: The Texts of the Tales, the Author on His Craft, Criticism* edited by Christof Wegelin and Henry Wonham (2003) ISBN 0-393-97710-2
- *The Portable Henry James*, New Edition edited by John Auchard (2004) ISBN 0-14-243767-0
- *Novels 1901–1902: The Sacred Fount, The Wings of the Dove* (Leo Bersani, ed) (Library of America, 2006) ISBN 978-1-93108288-4
- Henry James, et al., *The Classics of Style*. The American Academic Press, New Edition of writing advice (2006) ISBN 0-9787282-0-3

Criticism

- *The Novels of Henry James* by Oscar Cargill (1961)
- *The Tales of Henry James* by Edward Wagenknecht (1984) ISBN 0-8044-2957-X
- *Modern Critical Views: Henry James* edited by Harold Bloom (1987) ISBN 0-87754-696-7
- *A Companion to Henry James Studies* edited by Daniel Mark Fogel (1993) ISBN 0-313-25792-2
- *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Ruth Yeazell (1994) ISBN 0-13-380973-0
- *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James* edited by Jonathan Freedman (1998) ISBN 0-521-49924-0

General

- *A Bibliography of Henry James: Third Edition* by Leon Edel, Dan Laurence and James Rambeau (1982) ISBN 1-58456-005-3
- *A Henry James Encyclopedia* by Robert L. Gale (1989) ISBN 0-313-25846-5
- *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* by Robert B. Pippin (1999) ISBN 0-521-65230-8

External links

- Works by Henry James at Project Gutenberg (plain text and HTML editions)
- Works by Henry James at Internet Archive (scanned illustrated first editions etc..)
- The Henry James Scholar's Guide to Web Sites
- The Ladder — a Henry James Web Site
- Henry James at the Internet Movie Database
- Quotes
- Free Audiobook (An International Episode) from Librivox
- Henry James on Find-A-Grave
- Henry James Timeline
- *The Madonna of the Future* Free mp3 downloads Narrated by Michael Scott of ThoughtAudio.com
- Worldcat Identities page for 'James, Henry 1843–1916'

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