HENRY JAMES IN CONTEXT

Long misread as a novelist conspicuously lacking in historical consciousness, Henry James has often been viewed as detached from, and uninterested in, the social, political and material realities of his time. As this volume demonstrates, however, James was acutely responsive not only to his era’s changing attitudes toward gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity, but also to changing conditions of literary production and reception, the rise of consumerism and mass culture, and the emergence of new technologies and media, of new apprehensions of time and space. These essays portray the author and his works in the context of the modernity that determined, formed, interested, appalled and/or provoked his always curious mind. With contributions from an international cast of distinguished scholars, Henry James in Context provides a map of leading-edge work in contemporary James studies, an invaluable reference work for students and scholars, and a blueprint for possible future directions.

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5 Max Beerbohm, ‘Mr Henry James (in America)’, *A Book of Caricatures* (London: Methuen, 1907), plate 48.
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Preface

This volume presents a collection of concise, original scholarly essays focused broadly on apprehending Henry James in the context of the history, sociology and aesthetic and material culture of an emerging and consolidating modernity – a modernity James lived, and was uniquely positioned to observe, in various phases of its development; which he represented, analyzed and critiqued throughout a long career straddling two continents and two centuries; and which has continued to shape the reception of his work during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Long misread as a novelist conspicuously lacking in historical consciousness, James has often been viewed – sometimes attacked – as detached from, and uninterested in, the social, political and material realities of his time. But as recent criticism has increasingly discerned, and as I hope this volume will help to demonstrate, James is an essential modern novelist precisely insofar as he was acutely, if anxiously, responsive not only to his era’s changing attitudes toward gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity, but also to changing conditions of literary production and reception, to the rise of consumerism and mass culture, and to the emergence of new technologies and media, of new apprehensions of time and space – responsive, that is, in the fullest sense to the material and historical conditions that in his own time determined new, specifically modern forms of experience, desire and subjectivity.

*Henry James in Context* thus aspires to be both a consolidation and an extension of key trends in contemporary James studies and modernist studies that have shifted attention from long-standing assumptions about James’s status as an inaugurator of aesthetic modernism (a predecessor, for instance, of Eliot and Pound), toward a reading of James as a writer and cultural analyst confronting and representing, in Ross Posnock’s phrase, ‘the challenge of modernity’ (more a contemporary, as Posnock has argued, of Weber, Simmel and Benjamin: see *The Trial of Curiosity* [Oxford University Press, 1991]). James and his characters are modern not only because they live in cities, ride the subway, send telegrams, read the tabloids or Symonds’s *A Problem in
Greek Ethics, shop in department stores, view art in modern museums, get divorced, travel in Pullman cars or cross the Atlantic in fast-moving steamships, but also because their consciousnesses are produced and shaped by such historical, social and material developments. This volume works to illuminate James’s modern subjects (in both senses of the word) by locating the author and his works in the context of the modernity that determined, formed, interested, appalled and/or provoked his always curious mind.

Part One, ‘Life and career, times and places’, engages the unique multiplicities of James’s career as an American and English novelist (arguably even a French novelist); as someone who lived through and responded to both the American Civil War and the European Great War; who knew Emerson and Flaubert as well as Oscar Wilde; who as a child was exposed to culture both at Barnum’s in New York and at the Louvre; and whose greatest direct influences were arguably Hawthorne, George Eliot and Balzac. The volume thus begins with a series of overviews of James’s life and writing during various phases of his career that also aim to provoke speculative reconsiderations of the multiple social, cultural and literary contexts (nineteenth-century America; nineteenth-century Europe; Victorian England; fin-de-siècle London; the cosmopolitan twentieth-century world) within which he operated, and to which he so richly responded. These biographically oriented surveys are supplemented by chapters on one additional, peculiarly Jamesian milieu (the James family, once described by his brother William as a country unto itself), and on the primary textual avenues (James’s memoirs and existing biographical studies; his letters and notebooks) through which we gain access, archivally speaking, to this complex writing life.

Since 1984, when John Rowe announced his intention to question and destabilize ‘the myth of . . . the high modernist Henry James, whose destiny always seem[ed] to end in the intricacies of his late style and its retreat from life into the palace of art’ (The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James, p. 28), James studies have increasingly followed Rowe’s lead in working ‘to modernize James’ by reconnecting him not only to ‘our own recent history in the humanities’, but also to the historical context of the culture of modernity in which he lived and wrote. The chapters in Part Two, ‘Historical and cultural contexts’, are organized around topics and/or keywords that are arranged alphabetically, and work to place James in a matrix of interrelated contexts – aesthetic, economic, social, political, institutional, epistemological, spatial, temporal, material and technological – that together map the parameters of sociocultural modernity as it emerged and changed during his lifetime. The contexts addressed include specifically literary movements (aestheticism, realism, modernism), conceptual formations (authorship, time, social class), and technologies (language, media), as well as the institutional, economic and
social dimensions of print culture that shaped James’s writing and career. Contributors to Part Two consider how the specific materialities, institutions and structures of modernity to which they attend function to produce and shape specifically modern forms of experience, desire and subjectivity, even as they enable James’s rich imagination of alternative trajectories of experience and embodiment, of new possibilities for being in the world.

Part Three, ‘Reception’, focuses on responses to, writing about and cultural appropriations of James during and after his lifetime. Writing in 1931, William Troy commented that James, ‘like certain other great writers of the past, has come to mean something different to each of the successive literary generations that have taken up his work. What James meant to readers of Harper’s and the Atlantic in the Eighties and Nineties, what he meant to the generation of Mr H. G. Wells, or to the generation of Mr T. S. Eliot and Mr Ezra Pound, was probably not any of the things he means, or may come to mean, to the [present] generation’ (‘The Lesson of the Master’, in Selected Essays, ed. Stanley E. Hyman [Rutgers University Press, 1967], p. 45). The chapters in this section consider Henry James in the contexts provided by successive generations of readers and critics and their varied historical and cultural milieux. Examining the reputation, reception and construction of Henry James and his oeuvre from his own time to ours, and exploring the cultural work ‘Henry James’ has performed (or been made to perform) in different times and places, Part Three traces the shaping and reshaping of James’s figure and fiction in the history of reading practices and literary studies, in relation to the rise and fall of conflicting theories and methodologies, and in the context of the shifting aesthetic, social and political agendas of criticism.

I am grateful to the Department of English and the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research at Texas A&M University for their material and intellectual support of this volume. Mary Ann O’Farrell, always my best reader, helped me to shape this project from its conception onwards; Christopher Carmona, my graduate assistant, contributed to Henry James in Context in important ways too numerous to mention here. I also wish to thank Ray Ryan, Sarah Roberts and Maartje Scheltens of Cambridge University Press for their professional acumen, advice and support throughout the editing process; Hilary Hammond for her copyediting expertise; and each of the forty-three contributors for their cooperation, patience and splendid work.

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Abbreviations

No complete scholarly edition of James’s works has been published to date. The fourteen volumes published thus far by the Library of America – the most comprehensive and easily accessible (if still incomplete) collection of James’s fiction and non-fiction writings – are used throughout this book as standard sources for the texts they contain. Parenthetical references appear as abbreviations followed by page number. All the volumes listed below are published by Library Classics of the United States, New York, NY.

CS-3 Complete Stories, 1884–1891. 1999.
CS-4 Complete Stories, 1892–1898. 1996.
List of abbreviations


In addition, the following frequently referenced publications are also cited parenthetically, abbreviated as indicated.


HJR Henry James Review. Louisiana State University, 1979–95; University of Louisville, 1995–.

This chronology includes all of James’s major publications as well as his stories and essays discussed in this volume. Journal and magazine publication venues are provided only for James’s first listed publication therein, in order to suggest their range and variety.

1842  Older brother William James born.
1843  Henry James, Jr born 15 April at 21 Washington Place, New York City, the second child of Henry James, Sr and Mary Robertson Walsh.
      In October the family travels to England, meeting literary figures including John Stuart Mill, Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle.
1844  Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Experience’.
1845  Brother Garth Wilkinson (Wilky) born.
1846  Brother Robertson (Bob) born.
1847  Greenwich Mean Time adopted across Great Britain by the Railway Clearing House, synchronizing train schedules.
      Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.
1848  Sister Alice born.
1849  Seneca Falls Convention occurs, signalling the birth of the women’s suffrage movement in America.
      Margaret Fuller drowns, and Henry Jr overhears conversations about her death between Henry Sr and figures such as Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Thackeray and Henry David Thoreau.
      Thomas Cook organizes first ‘grand circular tour’ of Europe.
      Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*. 
1851  Frederick Scott Archer, English sculptor, invents the wet plate negative, leading to rapid advances in photography in the second half of the nineteenth century. Western Union Corporation founded. The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations opens in Hyde Park, London. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick, or The Whale*.

1852  Louis Napoleon III proclaimed Emperor of France; Henry Sr delays plans to move family to Europe for education until 1855. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

1853  Becomes an enthusiastic theatregoer and sees P. T. Barnum’s production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Begins attending Vergnés Institute for Young Gentlemen in New York.

1855  James family leaves for Europe with stops in London, Paris and Geneva, and then returns to London, where a private tutor is hired for the James boys. Sees Charles Kean’s production of *Henry VIII* in London. Walt Whitman, first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

1856  James family moves to Paris; boys are sent to a Fourierist school called the Institution Fezandié. Learns French while in Paris and frequently visits the Louvre.

1857  Attends the Collège Imperial and befriends Benoît Constant Conquelin (later a celebrated comic actor). Contracts typhus; bed-ridden for two months and reads voraciously. The Panic of 1857 hits the US, ending a period of prosperity following the Mexican American War and the California Gold Rush. Dred Scott decision by US Supreme Court rules that people born of African descent or their descendents cannot be citizens of the United States. Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (UK) grants right to secular divorce, establishing a model of marriage based on contract. *Atlantic Monthly* founded.

1858  The Jameses move back to the US, settling in Newport, Rhode Island, where Henry Jr enrolls in the Berkeley Institute, studying Latin and English literature. Begins friendship with Thomas Sergeant Perry.
1859  Disenchanted with the American education system, Henry Sr moves the family back to Geneva; Henry Jr enrols in the Institution Rochette. John Brown raids Harper’s Ferry, Virginia.


1861  James’s cousins, the Temples, come to live in Newport, and Henry Jr begins friendship with Minny Temple. Tags along with his brother William to study art with William Morris Hunt; quickly realizes he does not have the same talent as other students and begins to pursue literature. Hurts his back fighting a stable fire in Newport, leading to reoccurring back problems throughout his life. Civil war begins with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter. Rebecca Harding Davis, ‘Life in the Iron Mills’.

1862  Enters Harvard Law School. Wilky enlists in the Union Army, where he joins the 44th Massachusetts Regiment and later becomes part of the first African American 54th Regiment under Robert Gould Shaw.

1863  Leaves law school. Robertson enlists in the 55th Massachusetts Regiment; Wilky is wounded at Fort Wagner and returns to Newport to recover. The London Underground Railway System opens.


1867  Begins writing reviews for *The Nation*. 
Chronology

Publishes ‘Poor Richard’ in *Atlantic Monthly*.
Charles Dickens gives his first US readings in New York City. First commercially viable typewriter invented by Christopher Scholes.

1868 Publishes ‘A Most Extraordinary Case’.

1869 Sails for Europe searching for a back pain cure in Italy and France; tries a water cure and then tours London. First American transcontinental railroad completed. Suez Canal opens, enabling European imperial expansion. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*.


1872 Becomes occasional art reviewer for *Atlantic Monthly*. Travels with his Aunt Kate and sister Alice to Europe, where he continues to write travel narratives for *The Nation*. The National Society for Women’s Suffrage (US) is formed. The Army and Navy Stores opens flagship London department store. Howells’s first novel, *Their Wedding Journey*. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge*.

1873 Severe Wall Street crash. Walter Pater, ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance*.

1875

1876

1877

1878

1879

1880
Meets American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson in Italy and begins friendship. Washington Square published in Cornhill Magazine and Harper’s New Monthly Magazine; Confidence (Boston: Osgood); begins serializing The Portrait of a Lady in Macmillan’s Magazine.

1881
Travels to US due to mother’s illness.
President James Garfield assassinated.
Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Common Law.

1882
Death of mother, Mary Walsh James; returns to Europe.
Returns to US following death of father, Henry James, Sr.
Meets President Chester A. Arthur and Oscar Wilde in Washington.
Publishes ‘The Point of View’.
Adapts ‘Daisy Miller’ for theatrical production.
Married Women’s Property Act (UK) alters British law regarding women’s property and inheritance rights, turning husband and wife into separate legal entities.
W. D. Howells, ‘Henry James, Jr’ (Century Magazine).

1883
Returns to London after executing father’s will; brother Wilky dies.

1884
A Little Tour in France (Boston: Osgood).
Publishes ‘The Author of “Beltraffio”’ (English Illustrated Magazine), ‘Pandora’ (New York Sun) and ‘The Art of Fiction’ (Longman’s Magazine).
Walter Besant helps create the Society of Authors to protect authors’ rights and promote copyright reform.
Home Insurance Building in Chicago, first steel-framed skyscraper.
Banking Act (UK) centralizes banking in London, making it the international centre for finance.
Third Reform Bill (UK) extends franchise to qualified adult males in the boroughs and countryside, increasing the parliamentary electorate by 6 million.
Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

1885
The Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act (UK) criminalizes homosexual acts or ‘gross indecency’.

1886
Moves to 34 De Vere Gardens, London.
Publishes The Princess Casamassima and The Bostonians (London: Macmillan).
Cosmopolitan Magazine publishes its first issue.
The Infant Custody Act (UK) stipulates that the child’s welfare should be taken into account when deciding custody,
increasing women’s chances of gaining custody of their children after divorce.

‘Black Monday’ (UK) unemployment protest leads to rioting in Pall Mall, London.

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

1887 Dawes General Allotment Act (US) passes, designed to force assimilation of Native Americans.

1888 *The Reverberator* and *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan).


First volume of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (A–B) published.

*Collier’s Weekly* founded.

London match-girls employed by Bryant & May factory strike to protest poor working conditions.

In her article ‘Marriage’, Mona Caird asks ‘Is Marriage a Failure?’ eliciting 27,000 letters to the *Daily Telegraph*.

Mrs Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere*.

1889 Aunt Kate dies.

Visits the Exposition Universelle in Paris and sees the newly opened Eiffel Tower.

Begins work on a dramatization of *The American*; publishes ‘An Animated Conversation’.

First performances of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* on Broadway and in London.

Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*.


William James, *Principles of Psychology*.

1891 *The American: A Comedy in Four Acts* opens in Lancashire and then at the Opéra Comique Theatre in the Strand in London.


Passage of first International Copyright Law (US).

Edison invents the kinetoscope; the Lumière brothers stage first movie exhibition (*Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*).


1892 Sister Alice dies of breast cancer.

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Death of Constance Woolson in Venice; James travels to Italy to help settle her affairs. Publishes ‘The Death of the Lion’ in first issue of <em>The Yellow Book</em>.</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>Has De Vere Gardens flat wired for electric lighting. <em>Guy Domville</em> is staged at the St James’s Theatre in London, to mixed opening-night reception; replaced after five-week run by Oscar Wilde’s <em>The Importance of Being Earnest</em>. Publishes <em>Terminations</em> (New York: Harper; includes ‘The Altar of the Dead’ and ‘The Next Time’). Oscar Wilde convicted and imprisoned for two years for ‘gross indecency’. Friedrich Nietzsche, <em>The Antichrist</em>.</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>Moves to Lamb House in Rye, Sussex, which he buys in 1899. Publishes ‘In the Cage’ (London: Duckworth); serializes ‘The Turn of the Screw’ in <em>Collier’s Magazine</em> and then publishes it with ‘Covering End’ in <em>The Two Magics</em> (London: Heinemann); series on ‘American Letters’ appears in <em>Literature</em>. Views his first film, <em>The Corbett–Fitzsimmons World Championship Prizefight</em>.</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>Begins friendship with Edith Wharton. Publishes <em>The Wings of the Dove</em> (New York: Scribner’s) and ‘Flickerbridge’.</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>Travels back to the United States for an extended visit, lecturing on Balzac and other topics, a trip taking him from New England south to Florida and west to San Diego and Seattle.</td>
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