

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
HENRY JAMES

*The Cambridge Companion to Henry James* is intended to provide a critical introduction to James's work. Throughout the major critical shifts of the last fifty years – and despite suspicions of the traditional high literary culture that was James's milieu – as a writer he has retained a powerful hold on readers and critics alike. All essays are newly commissioned for this volume, written at a level free from technical jargon, and designed to promote accessibility to the study of James and his work.

## Cambridge Companions to Literature

*The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*  
edited by Greg Clingham

*The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*  
edited by Eward Copeland

*The Cambridge Companion to Faulkner*  
edited by Philip Weinstein

*The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*  
edited by Scott Donaldson

*The Cambridge Companion to Wharton*  
edited by Millicent Bell

*The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*  
edited by Don Pizer

*The Cambridge Companion to Twain*  
edited by Forrest Robinson

*The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau*  
edited by Joel Myerson

*The Cambridge Companion to Whitman*  
edited by Ezra Greenspan

*The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*  
edited by A. David Moody

*The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*  
edited by J. H. Stape

*The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*  
edited by Derek Attridge

*The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*  
edited by James MacFarlane

*The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*  
edited by John Pilling

*The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*  
edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks

*The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*  
edited by John Richetti

*(Continued on page following the index)*

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
HENRY JAMES

EDITED BY  
JONATHAN FREEDMAN

*The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Cambridge University Press  
 0521499240 - The Cambridge Companion to Henry James - Edited by Jonathan Freedman  
 Frontmatter/Prelims  
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Cambridge University Press 1998

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without  
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998  
 Reprinted 1998, 2000

Typeset in Sabon

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

The Cambridge companion to Henry James / edited by Jonathan Freedman.

p. cm. – (Cambridge companions to literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 49584 9 hardback

ISBN 0 521 49924 0 paperback

I. James, Henry, 1843–1916 – Criticism and interpretation –  
 Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Freedman, Jonathan, 1954– .

II. Series.

PS2124.C23 1988  
 813'.4–dc21

97–18118  
 CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 49584 9 hardback  
 ISBN 0 521 49924 0 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

## CONTENTS

<i>List of Contributors</i>	page ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>A Henry James Chronology</i>	xvii
Introduction: The Moment of Henry James	I
JONATHAN FREEDMAN	
1 Men, Women, and the American Way	21
MARTHA BANTA	
2 The James Family Theatricals: Behind the Scenes	40
FRANCES WILSON	
3 Henry James at Work: The Question of Our Texts	63
PHILIP HORNE	
4 Henry James and the Invention of Novel Theory	79
DOROTHY J. HALE	
5 Henry James and the Idea of Evil	102
ROBERT WEISBUCH	
6 Queer Henry <i>In the Cage</i>	120
HUGH STEVENS	
7 The Unmentionable Subject in “The Pupil”	139
MILLICENT BELL	
8 Realism, Culture, and the Place of the Literary: Henry James and <i>The Bostonians</i>	151
SARA BLAIR	
9 Lambert Strether’s Excellent Adventure	169
ERIC HARALSON	
10 James’s Elusive <i>Wings</i>	187
WILLIAM STOWE	
11 Henry James’s American Dream in <i>The Golden Bowl</i>	204
MARGERY SABIN	

## CONTENTS

12	Affirming the Alien: The Pragmatist Pluralism of <i>The American Scene</i>	224
	ROSS POSNOCK	
	<i>Suggestions for Further Reading</i>	247
	<i>Index</i>	253

## CONTRIBUTORS

MARTHA BANTA is Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her publications include *Henry James and the Occult, Failure and Success in America, Imaging American Women*, and *Taylored Lives*, as well as many articles and contributions to essay collections in which Henry James makes his presence known.

MILLICENT BELL is Professor Emerita at Boston University. She has written extensively on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature. Most recently, she has published *Meaning in Henry James* (Harvard University Press, 1991) and is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*.

SARA BLAIR is an Associate Professor at the University of Virginia. She is the author of *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and is working on *The Place of the Literary*, a book about the construction of literary value in sites of urban modernity.

JONATHAN FREEDMAN is an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Professions of Taste: Henry James, Commodity Culture, and British Aestheticism*, editor of *Oscar Wilde: New Century Views*, and co-editor of *Hitchcock's America*. He is currently working on *The Temple of Culture*, a book about the relation between Jewish intellectuals and the construction of high culture.

DOROTHY J. HALE is an Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford University Press, 1997) and a number of articles in such journals as *Novel* and *ELH*.

ERIC HARALSON is an Assistant Professor at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Having received his Ph.D. from Columbia University, he is currently working on a book on James and fin-de-siècle masculinity.

PHILLIP HORNE is Reader in English Literature at University College, London. He is the author of *Henry James and Revision: The New York Edi-*

## CONTRIBUTORS

*tion* (Oxford University Press, 1990), and has edited Henry James's *A London Life & The Reverberator* for Oxford and *The Tragic Muse* for Penguin. He is presently completing a new selection of James's letters for Penguin.

ROSS POSNOCK is the Highland Professor of English at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Henry James and the Problem of Robert Browning* and *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity*. He is currently working on a book on African-American intellectuals and the pragmatist tradition.

MARGERIE SABIN is Lorraine Chiu Wang Professor of English at Wellesley College. She is the author of *English Romanticism and the French Tradition* and *The Dialect of the Tribe: Speech and Community in Modern Fiction*. Her recent essays and reviews about colonial and postcolonial narrative and about the identity of literary study have appeared in such journals as *Raritan Quarterly*, *Essays in Criticism*, *Victorian Studies*, and *College English*.

HUGH STEVENS teaches at the University of York. Author of a number of articles on James, he received his Ph.D. from Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and is currently working on a book on Henry James and queer performativity.

WILLIAM STOWE is a Professor of English at Wesleyan University. He is the author of *Balzac, James and the Realistic Novel* (1983) and *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (1994), both published by Princeton University Press.

ROBERT WEISBUCH is a Professor of English at the University of Michigan, and has served as chair of the English Department and Dean of the Graduate School. He is the author of *Emily Dickinson's Poetry* (1975) and *Atlantic Double Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (1983).

FRANCES WILSON studied at the Universities of Oxford, Southampton, and Sussex. She is currently teaching at the University of Reading. Her Ph.D. thesis was on Henry James and Freud; she is currently editing a collection of the myths of Byron.



## PREFACE

Henry James (1843–1916) is generally acknowledged to be one of America’s greatest novelists and critics, although he spent most of his career in England. He is the author of some of the best-known fictions of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century – novels like *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), stories like “Daisy Miller” (1876), tales like *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). His criticism, moreover, offers one of the most definitive accounts of what James called “the art of fiction” – all the more impressive because at the time he wrote, prose fiction was accorded a secondary place in literary judgment, well behind lyric and epic in critical esteem. And in his travel memoir, *The American Scene*, James gave a uniquely perceptive account of America at the turn of the century, forcefully registering the remarkable changes then underway in the racial, economic, and political terrain of his native land.

James is also, however, the author of some of the most mind-bogglingly obscure prose of his, or any, period. Although some of his works make easy claims on reader’s sensibilities – as I write, *Portrait of a Lady* is being prepared for Hollywood production – others set out quite consciously to challenge or even to offend them. James spent much of his life lamenting the results, and hoping that he would find readers able to appreciate his efforts. Although the mass audiences of his own time might have disappointed him, critics soon fulfilled his aspirations. Beginning in the 1920s, with a boost from Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot; accelerating in the 1940s, with a major push from F. O. Matthiessen; gathering further force in the 1950s and 1960s, with the work of a number of so-called “New Critics” (close formalist readers of literary texts), James got installed at the very center of the canon of literary value and esteem. Even as the premises of much of this criticism were thoroughly called into question by critics of the next generations, James remained crucial; some of the most important revisionary works of post-New Critical theorists and critics – those of Shoshona Felman, Leo Bersani, and Caroline Porter, to name three very different ones – were accomplished through re-readings of James.

## PREFACE

This volume seeks to measure both James's multiple achievements and his role in critical practice. It can hardly be inclusive of either – there are no essays on James's brilliant autobiographies, for example; and some critical positions are less well-represented than others. Nevertheless, the reader will find virtually all of James's major fictions discussed here, and from virtually every angle current in the last fifty years. Each of the contributors to the volume has been asked to survey a crucial aspect of James, whether a thematic issue, a critical conundrum, or a knotty text, in such a way as both to clarify James's procedures and vividly to put on display her or his own critical sensibility. In an introductory essay, for example, I attempt to account for James's unique contemporaneity – for the fact that, even as a new generation of readers and critics works to question the value or even the possibility of high literary culture itself, the work of that seemingly mandarin aesthete Henry James remains central to their endeavor. Martha Banta situates James in a different cultural politics, those of masculinity in his own era – and, by extension, our own. In *The Golden Bowl* and *The American Scene*, Banta shows, James articulated a rich and powerful critical response to the boisterous masculinity represented by his contemporary, Teddy Roosevelt, and to its role in constructing a uniquely American style of manliness. Frances Wilson places James in the context of his remarkable family, tracing the network of interconnections between the novelist and his philosopher brother and with his less public, but equally brilliant, sister Alice. Wilson shows how the three acted out common obsessions, inherited from their mystical millionaire of a father but taken well beyond his scope, with bodies, performance, utility, and waste.

Philip Horne turns our attention to the questions raised for the student by the multiple texts that exist for James's major works. Perhaps no writer since Shakespeare poses such knotty textual problems: James's habits of publication and revision present the reader with multiple options for experiencing virtually every one of his major fictions. Horne traces some of the conundrums that this proliferation creates for the unwary reader; showing, finally, how they throw into sharp relief such vexing questions as the nature of author and text themselves. Dorothy Hale continues this focus on the legacy of James's authorial practices by focusing on James's theory of the novel. As one of the first and certainly one of the most influential theorists of this perpetually re-invented form, James created an idiom for thinking about the ethical as well as the formal consequences of the fiction-making act. Hale shows how even successors who sought to distance themselves from James's

## PREFACE

example end up endorsing the Jamesian ethic even as they critique the Jamesian method.

The book then turns to essays that focus more specifically on individual works. Robert Weisbuch shows how powerfully engaged are some of James's most enduring fictions, like *Portrait*, *Daisy Miller*, and *Turn of the Screw*, in delineating a response to Emerson's blitheness in the face of evil. James does so, paradoxically but powerfully, by turning to the epic tradition (especially Milton) to help develop a vocabulary for thinking about the problem even – or especially – in a modern, secular world. Hugh Stevens places James in the context of current writing about “queer” or transgressive identity, suggesting through a reading of James's tale *In the Cage* how rich James's sense of queer transgressivity proves to be, and how fully it can supplement the more reductive side of current critical accounts. Millicent Bell gives a reading to James's tale “The Pupil” that similarly focuses on transgression; but here the subject of shame turns out to be the vulgarity of money, the appalling insistence of the pecuniary, the full shamefulfulness of which in genteel culture turns out to be central to the meaning of James's tale.

The volume concludes with essays centering on – but extending their concerns well beyond – five of James's most famous and challenging works. Sara Blair shows how James's “realist” novel, *The Bostonians*, crucially grapples not only with questions of gender and national identity in a post-Civil War environment, but with the very possibilities of culture itself. The novel, Blair shows, interrogates the powers of culture at the moment of realism by comparing and contrasting various scenes of culture-making, ranging from reading groups and salons to Lyceums and public lectures to its own fictive endeavor. As such, Blair concludes, James's work points not only backwards – toward the cultural formations of elite Boston – but forward, to those to be organized alongside, rather than in opposition to, the logic of a booming mass culture. Eric Haralson turns to a novel of James's so-called Major Phase (the phrase is Matthiessens's), showing how *The Ambassadors* challenges not only fin-de-siècle notions of masculinity, but the nineteenth and twentieth century's very insistence on the power of sexuality itself. William Stowe places another “Major Phase” novel, *The Wings of the Dove*, in the multiple contexts of gender, sexuality, economy, and the culture of professionalism, suggesting that the great achievement of James's novel is not only to enter into dialogue with each of these, but also to transcend them. Marjorie Sabin centers on questions of empire, particularly at the moment of imperial decline, that moment when the British empire felt itself facing decay in the face

## PREFACE

of their upstart American cousins. Sabin reads James's text *The Golden Bowl* against Conrad's famous record of the hollowing out of the colonizer in the face of the colonized, *Heart of Darkness*; James's heroine, Maggie Verver, represents a new version of the Conradian virtuous liar, one who gains a new but highly equivocal power by her mastery of an idiom of deceit. This power, Sabin shows, at once attracts and repels James as a model for not only the civilizing process as experienced in a newly decrepit Europe, but in a booming America. And it is with that issue that Ross Posnock concludes the volume. Posnock shows along with Freedman, Banta, Blair, and Stevens – alongside, in some sense, virtually every contributor to the volume – how James not only anatomizes the critical terrain of his own moment, but anticipates the possibilities and problems of a dawning modernity. Boldly comparing James and his African-American contemporary W. E. B. Du Bois, Posnock argues that the racial politics of Jamesian fiction, generally taken to be reactionary at best, actually anticipate a pragmatist pluralism that flourished among African-American writers like Ralph Ellison as well as critics of our own era who are attempting, in Posnock's view, to think beyond race to a cultural politics of hybridity.

Readers will find here, then, many Henry Jameses: Henry James the shrewd anatomist of metaphysical evil, of mass culture at the moment of realism, of novel theory, of economic necessity, of queer identity, of racial mixing, of Rooseveltian masculinity, of female power and imperial destiny – and this is just to name a few. And they will find examples of just about every critical method and possibility of our own moment. It is my hope – and the hope of my fellow authors – that the volume will help them gain better traction on both: will help them to a better knowledge not merely of James and his own era but of the rich and multifarious critical practices and cultural possibilities of our own. For the reader of this volume will discover what its authors have learned, too: that whatever issue one finds oneself confronting, it remains as impossible now as it has been for the past century to do so without coming to terms with Henry James.

One of James's most oft-quoted comments is a sentence from the *Preface* to the New York Edition of *Roderick Hudson*: "Really . . . relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally, but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they *appear* to do so." The same "exquisite problem" faces the editor facing the daunting prospect of acknowledging all the relations, contributions, and suggestions that have gone into the making of a volume. I need to thank Eric Sundquist, for propos-

## PREFACE

ing me as editor; an anonymous reader for the proposal, who made a number of very insightful suggestions; Martha Banta, who in addition to contributing a marvelous piece with promptness and ease gave some particularly sage counsel at a crucial moment; T. Susan Chang and Anne Sanow, for shepherding it through its many incarnations; and Katharita Lamoza, copy-editor *extraordinaire* and, finally, of course, the authors of the pieces that follow, who cheerfully wrote and even more cheerfully revised. I also need to thank a number of friends – Liz Barnes, Alison Booth, Monica Feinberg Cohen, Adrienne Donald, Christopher Flint, Daniel Hack, June Howard, John Kucich, Anita Norich, David Scobey, E. Blake Vermeule are just a few of them – for aid and comfort over the time I’ve spent working on the volume. And everything here is for Sara.

## A HENRY JAMES CHRONOLOGY

- 1843 Henry James born on April 15 near Washington Square in New York City. His father – Henry James Senior – takes his family (including Henry’s older brother William) to England and Europe, where Henry Senior suffers a nervous breakdown, one of the many “vastations” (in his phrase) to affect his family.
- 1845 The family returns to America, shuttling between Albany and New York City. Garth Wilkinson James born.
- 1846 Robertson James born.
- 1848 Alice James born.
- 1855–60 The family returns to Europe, where Henry Senior seeks a more supple education for the children. A succession of tutors is hired; the children then attend a series of schools. The peripatetic Jameses return to America, this time to live in Newport, Rhode Island; then they go back to Europe, this time to live in Geneva.
- 1862 The family returns to Newport, where two particularly crucial events occur. First, James becomes acquainted with his orphaned cousin Minnie Temple, generally taken to be the original of Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady*. Second, he suffers a back injury in a stable fire; this “obscure hurt” (as Henry, obscurely, called it) keeps him from serving in the Civil War, unlike his two younger brothers.
- 1863 After a brief stint at Harvard Law School, Henry devotes himself to writing. His first story is published anonymously the next year.
- 1865 Henry’s first signed tale, “The Story of a Year,” is published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. James begins to publish reviews, art criticism, and travel essays in journals like *The Nation* and *The Atlantic*.
- 1869 While James tours Europe – meeting painters like Dante Rossetti and William Morris, and intellectuals like George Eliot,

## A HENRY JAMES CHRONOLOGY

- Charles Darwin, and Leslie Stephen – Minnie dies of tuberculosis.
- 1870 *Watch and Ward* is serialized by *The Atlantic*.
- 1872–75 While shuttling back and forth between Europe and the United States, James writes *Roderick Hudson* (published in 1875). Moves permanently to Europe.
- 1875 James in Paris, where he befriends Turgenev and hobnobs with Flaubert, Zola, and Maupassant.
- 1877 *The American* published. After visiting Italy, James moves to England.
- 1878 *Daisy Miller* published – and becomes an international sensation. This is the year, too, of *The Europeans* and “An International Episode.”
- 1879 *Confidence* and *Hawthorne* published.
- 1880–81 James is based in London, but spends some months in Italy. Publishes *Washington Square* and *Portrait of a Lady*, which gain him a reputation as the pre-eminent American novelist of his time.
- 1882 Returns to America for visits punctuated by tragedy: mother and father die, as does brother Wilky (in 1883). Following his final return to England after this series of deaths, James settles into a life of writing, visits to country houses, and dining out – one marked by prodigious literary output for the next two decades.
- 1884 “The Art of Fiction.”
- 1886 *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* published, initiating a period in which James experiments with naturalism. Although public response to this work is respectful, a tone of disappointment creeps into reviews.
- 1888 *The Reverberator*, *The Aspern Papers*.
- 1890 *The Tragic Muse* published to decidedly mixed reviews.
- 1891 James decides to write for the theater, adapting *The American* for the stage with some success. He also begins a decade-long period of writing many short stories and longer tales.
- 1892 Alice James dies, after a year-long bout with breast cancer.
- 1893 *The Real Thing and Other Tales*.
- 1895 *Guy Domville* opens at the St. James’s Theater in London; James takes a bow, and is booed off the stage by this audience. Humiliated (and galled by the success of Oscar Wilde’s *Im-*

## A HENRY JAMES CHRONOLOGY

- portance of Being Earnest*, which followed it at the same theater), James abandons his new career as playwright. Publishes *Terminations*, containing many of the fables of the artist's life, which he continues to write during the next few years. James returns to fiction-writing, vowing to bring the lessons of the drama with him.
- 1896 *The Spoils of Poynton; Embarrassments* (containing "The Figure in the Carpet" and "The Next Time").
- 1897 *What Maisie Knew*. James hires a stenographer and begins to dictate his work, correcting typewritten transcriptions by hand. This is the method he is to employ for the rest of his life.
- 1898 *The Turn of the Screw*.
- 1899 *The Awkward Age*.
- 1901 *The Sacred Fount* published; writes *The Ambassadors* – published two years later. The novels of the next three years are generally thought of as James's greatest achievement: in F. O. Matthiessen's term, "the Major Phase."
- 1902 *The Wings of the Dove*.
- 1904 *The Golden Bowl*.
- 1905 Returns to America, touring the Northeast and the South, and then makes lecture tour to the West by Pullman car.
- 1907 *The American Scene* – James's reflections on his native land after more than a generation's absence. Revises many of his novels and tales for publication in the New York Edition; writes eighteen prefaces for the edition, published between 1907–1910.
- 1908 *Italian Hours*.
- 1910 James suffers a nervous breakdown. William comes to England to comfort Henry, then returns to America and dies. Robertson James also dies this year.
- 1913 *A Small Boy and Others*.
- 1914 *Notes of a Son and Brother*.
- 1915 Becomes a British citizen. Involves himself in war relief.
- 1916 After a brief illness, dies on February 28.