# *Introduction*
## *The Question of Conveyance*

> [Y]ou are not to worry in the faintest degree about the question of my conveyance to-morrow, meeting me, causing me to be met, or getting me over at all. I can with utter ease procure myself to be transported. I shall *come* – 'that is all you know – and all you need to know'.
>
> Henry James to Arthur Christopher Benson, 16 January 1896

In a letter to his friend Arthur Benson, confirming a visit the following afternoon, James treats his arrival as a *fait accompli*, playfully eliding the business of 'getting [him] over'.[1] The confident, though characteristically convoluted and reflexive, 'I can . . . *procure myself*' registers the mechanical heft of 'conveyance', even as it airily gestures at the sheer availability of transport at the turn of the century: the extent to which travel is no longer *travail*, but undertaken 'with . . . ease'.[2] James at once waives the 'question of [his] conveyance' – from central London to Windsor – and treats it as a jokey piece of rhetorical over-elaboration, invoking, in place of the details of his journey, the closing lines of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819): 'that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know' (48–50).[3]

The allusion might prompt us to consider what value transport has in our reading of James: What *do* we need to know? And how might that knowledge bear upon the endless need to know that drives his narratives? While the significance of travel for Henry James hardly needs restating, there has been remarkably little attention to this *question of conveyance*: how it is accomplished and represented, or what it might mean for his characters 'to be transported' (by one means, as opposed to by any other). These are not questions that James forbore to ask of other writers. Thus, in a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson (21 October 1893), he reproaches his

[1] *Henry James: Letters to A. C. Benson and Auguste Monod*, ed. E. F. Benson (1930), 28.
[2] For the etymological history of the relationship between travel and travail, see Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (2017), 1–2.
[3] *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (1988; repr. 2006), 346.

friend for passing up an opportunity for loco-historical evocation: 'I utter a pleading moan when you, e.g., transport your characters, . . . in a line or two from Leyden to Dunkirk without the glint of a hint of all the ambient picture of the eighteenth-century road' (*HJL* iii.438). According to Edith Wharton, the abstraction of transport also bothered James when reading George Meredith:

> He himself, James said, . . . was always at a loss to know where he was, or what causes had led to which events, or even to discover by what form of conveyance the elusive characters he was struggling to identify moved from one point of the globe to another . . . till at last the practical exigencies of the subject forced the author to provide some specific means of transport, and suddenly, through the fog of his verbiage, the reader caught the far-off tinkle of a bell that (here there was a dramatic pause of suspense) – that turned out to be that of a mere vulgar hansom-cab: 'Into which,' James concluded, with his wicked twinkle, 'I always manage to leap before the hero, and drive straight out of the story.'[4]

Wharton's anecdote treats the writing of transport as 'mere prosaic detail', though a detail James considers orientating and necessary, and as having a bearing on the reader's basic expectation of verisimilitude. For the realist novelist, moreover, the social and moral discriminations available in transport as a behaviour were important. Nancy Bentley's observation that the 'vehicles of transit' in Wharton's fiction are 'machines that govern manners' is equally true of the responses they elicit from James and his characters, whether noticing the omnibuses 'and other democratic vehicles' thronging the wharves of New York (*CS* ii.326) or expanding upon the Venetian *traghetti*, 'which have their manners and their morals'.[5]

Transport is the process and infrastructure for travel, and travel is always more than mere detail for Henry James. It provides the situational basis for most of his novels and stories, as well as their peculiar relational logic and perspective. Transport forefronts this awareness of a relationship because it is mediated and vehicular: as opposed to travel, it insists upon the fact of *being carried*, with all of its banal, intimate, potentially coercive implications. The relative 'ease' with which James 'can . . . be transported' from his flat in Kensington Gardens to Benson's cottage – eliminating the need for 'meeting me, causing me to be met, or *getting me over at all*' – thus privately remembers the burdensome transport of the semi-paralytic writer

[4] Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (1934), 233.
[5] Bentley, *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture 1870–1920* (2009), 220; 'Great Streets of the World: The Grand Canal', *Scribner's Magazine*, 12 (November 1892), 546.

Alphonse Daudet, who, visiting Windsor with James the previous spring, had been obliged to wait in the carriage while the latter left an apologetic card ('I thought it unfair to inflict on you the awkward problem of his getting, or not getting, into your house – of his *getting over to Eton at all*' (*LHJ* i.247, my emphasis)). In 1885, writing to Henrietta Reubell about the awkward 'arrangements' he must make 'for the transport of my [invalid] sister', Alice – 'a very complicated business; she has to be carried on a litter, &c.' – James likewise describes a duty of care in which the tender and the practical are equally commingled (*CL 1884–1886* i.244).

Transport lends itself to the complex dependencies that inhere in James's fictional worlds, as well as to broader cultural anxieties about the effects of global travel at the turn of the century, a period that saw 'the accelerated movement of peoples and goods across national borders'.[6] Ruskin's analogy for the railway's appropriation of the traveller – that it transmutes the passenger into a 'parcel' – undergoes defter, more elaborate configurations at the hands of James's characters, who readily employ the facilities of transport to dispatch people.[7] As Bentley notes, 'American travellers were, in a sense, the human objects in a larger field of transatlantic commerce and communication'.[8]

James's travellers, both British and American, are queasily susceptible to the risks of object-hood, whether the American spinster who is 'simply shipped … straight back' (*CS* v.400), for her resemblance to a Holbein painting ('The Beldonald Holbein' (1901)), or the portable Fleda Vetch, from *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), 'ticketed, labelled and seated' in her 'third-class compartment', having 'conscientiously accept[ed]', along with other country-house treasures, '[t]he position of a bit of furniture' (*SOP* 150, 250, 263). In *Roderick Hudson* (1875), Christina Light remonstrates wearily with her mother over a commission for her sculpted likeness: 'how can you carry a marble bust about the world with you? Is it not enough to drag the poor original?' (*RH* 144). In 'Pandora' (1884), the description of 'energetic passengers' disembarking from a transatlantic steamer at New York – 'engaged in attempts to draw' customs officials 'towards their luggage or to drag heavy pieces toward them' (*CF* xxvii.18) – likewise elides the distinction between people and baggage. *Dragging* is an action tinged with horror and fatigue (the terminally ill Milly Theale is thus 'offered … to [her author's] imagination' as a 'victim' 'dragged by a greater force than any

[6] Rowe, 'Henry James and Globalization', *HJR*, 24 (2003), 213.
[7] 'Going by railroad I do not consider as travelling at all; it is merely "being sent" to a place, and very little different from becoming a parcel' (Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, (1856), iii.300).
[8] Bentley, *Frantic Panoramas*, 57.

she herself could exert' (*CF* xxxiii.230)). Yet the sense of being managed, shown, handled, and especially *taken about* has also this caressing, sociable application for James's characters. 'She wants to go out again; that's the only thing in the wide world she wants,' notes Rose Tramore of her dishonoured mother in 'The Chaperon' (1891), while her aunt's prediction that this unfortunate relative will 'drag you down!' is met by 'the girl's own theory . . . that all the dragging there might be would be upward, and moreover administered by herself' (*CS* iii.816). The story turns upon the significant and mysterious reversals of agency wrought by Rose's success at 'dragging' her mother back into society: 'No observer . . . would have been acute enough to fix exactly the moment at which the girl ceased to take out her mother and began to be taken out by her' (*CS* iii.849).

What is at stake for James's characters at such moments? And what is the author's own investment in the act of being transported? This book examines transport as a decisively influential context for James's life and work, as well as a complex idea whose energies and instabilities are closely bound up with his aesthetic logic. My title, 'the *writing* of transport', takes into account the actual overlap between technologies of transport and writing in this period (such as the railway's role in the production and distribution of periodical literature), but more especially refers to the ways in which James's texts prove acutely responsive to the processes of transport and to their formal and epistemological arrangements. Above all, transport draws attention to the charged 'in-between' spaces of his narratives, those *relations* that have particular value for James. The author's complex preoccupation with relationality – a quality ranging from the innate metaphoricity of his prose to his characters' series of transatlantic encounters – motivates this study of conveyance in his fiction. As I argue, James's use of transport to interrogate the relation between people or places indicates his understanding of knowledge *itself* as relational and of journeying as an experience that activates the communicative as well as the physical meaning of 'conveyance'.

## Comings and Goings

In its description of a relationship between starting point and destination, the journey is implicitly dialogic. 'I shall *come*', announces James to Benson, dismissing but also teasing the 'question' of his journey thither. Comings and goings have this especially interrogative valence in James's fiction, with its rituals of visitation. 'What do you mean by "coming" to you?' presses Rose Tramore, in response to her grandmother's statement

that she will no longer receive her should Rose go to live with her vulgar mother ('then you'll not come to *me*, you know' (*CS* iii.811)). The question is also put by Kate Croy to Merton Densher, in a very different exchange that yet also takes the form of an ultimatum issued, or a bargain struck:

> 'I'll tell any lie you want, any your idea requires, if you'll only come to me.'
> 'Come to you?' She spoke low.
> 'Come to me.'
> 'How? Where?' (*WD* 414)

Whether the damning judgment passed upon Mrs Tramore – 'it was inveterately said of her that she went nowhere' (*CS* iii.812) – or the dying Milly Theale's own admission that she no longer leaves her Venetian palace ('I go about just here' (*WD* 372)), comings and goings have, like Densher's sole demand, 'admirable, merciless meaning' (*WD* 414). They constitute the crossing of thresholds, be they social, sexual, or even otherworldly. 'It is a question of the children "coming over to where they are",' James decides, of the beckoning ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) (*CN* 109), a question that reverberates throughout the text itself ('Came how – from where?' stammers Mrs Grose, as the governess relates Miss Jessel's arrival 'on the other side of the lake'. 'From where they come from!' she shoots back (*CS* iv.671)).

Such questions, Maud Ellmann observes, proceed from the 'transferential world' of James's fictions, in which '[d]esire is a question of coming over to the other's place'.[9] As the governess's impatient rejoinder indicates, however, it is the *coming over* that matters, and not the specifics of place, which themselves fade before the overwhelming pull of a relation. As 'elementary, intransitive' acts of motion, *coming* and *going* indicate speakers or subjects rather than destinations (*OED*), and in James's fiction, travel is rarely one-way. Thus, the author's habitual London caters for sociable 'reciprocities' thanks to a railway network that provides 'the tremendous system of coming and going'.[10] In sketching his outline for *The Ambassadors* (1903), James uses the phrases 'come out' and 'go out' to designate Strether's transatlantic journeys:

> [M]y vague little fancy is that he 'comes out,' as it were (to London, to Paris . . .), to take some step, decide some question with regard to some

[9] Ellmann's reading focuses on psychical rather than physical travel, describing James's characters as 'vehicles of transference, animated by an interpersonal, nomadic consciousness' (*The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (2010), 39, 37).
[10] 'London' (1888), 234.

> one.. . . It is a case of . . . some other young life in regard to which it's a question of his . . . bringing home. Say he 'goes out' (partly) to look after, to bring home, some young man whom his family are anxious about, who won't *come* home, etc. – and under the operation of the change *se range du côté du jeune homme*, says to him: 'No; STAY: – *don't* come home.' (*CN* 142)

The question of conveyance (the 'bringing home' of one 'who won't *come* home') succinctly describes the premise of *The Ambassadors*. Throughout the novel, coming out, bringing home, sending back, getting there – generic yet plaintively insistent phrases – become a constant refrain, culminating in Mrs Newsome's terse summons: 'Come back by the first ship' (*CF* xviii.207).[11] The phrase 'coming out' occurs fifty-two times in *The Ambassadors*, used to refer both to the journeys undertaken by Americans 'coming out' to retrieve Chad and to Strether's own ambivalent issue from his predicament (the much-contested question of where Strether will 'come out' is one in which friends like Maria Gostrey and Miss Barrace take great interest). In his 'Project' for the novel, James directly aligns the interpretive process of reading with that of transatlantic travel, reflecting that Strether's 'coming out' on behalf of Mrs Newsome is for a reason that 'presently comes out for us' (*CN* 551). Thus, also, in a letter to the Duchess of Sutherland, the author advises his friend on how to read the novel: 'Keep along with it step by step – and then the full charm will come out. I *want* the charm, you see, to come out for you – so convinced am I that it's there!' (*HJL* iv.302).

James envisages the coaxing extrapolation of his idea in terms of sociable visitation, as a subject 'coming out' to greet its reader. As applied to *The Ambassadors*, the conceit implicitly describes the figure of the emissary: a 'messenger', like Strether himself, 'at last reaching' his recipient, having 'run a mile through the dust' (*CF* xviii.91).[12] James's fiction evinces his particular interest in couriers, which include 'Mr. Max' – of the 'enormous whiskers' (*CS* ii.599) – in 'The Siege of London' (1882), the self-professed 'courier-maid' of *The Ambassadors*, Maria Gostrey (*CF* xviii.10), and the

[11] Noting 'the metaphor of turnarounds' that pervades *The Ambassadors*, Michael Seidel points out that, for James, who judged himself an 'outsider' in both America and Europe, 'to move in any direction is to experience something of a homecoming' ('The Lone Exile: James's *The Ambassadors* and *The American Scene*', in *Henry James's The Ambassadors*, ed. Harold Bloom (1988), 142, 125).

[12] This description, of Strether's first encounter with Chad in Paris, brings to mind the literal definition of 'courier' as 'a running messenger' (*OED*). Julie Rivkin has argued that the novel itself is governed by an 'ambassadorial logic', so that 'ambassadorship is both the novel's subject and its strategy of composition' (*False Positions: The Representational Logics of Henry James's Fiction* (1996), 57, 66).

unctuous professional Eugenio, who appears first in *Daisy Miller* and who travels across texts (and 'crosse[s] from Paris' (*WD* 358)) to act on behalf of Milly Theale.[13] Though a mere 'mercenary monster' (*WD* 366), Eugenio guesses instinctively how Milly must be handled: 'Eugenio had, in an interview of five minutes, understood her, had got hold, like all the world, of the idea not so much of the care with which she must be taken up as of the ease with which she must be let down' (*WD* 359).

In James's lifetime, couriers were charged with the practical duties of travelling, chief amongst which were 'the responsibility and trouble of securing conveyances'.[14] But their distinct value was interpretive: the ability to surmount the language barrier gave local guides the edge over one's usual servants. James is interested in their status as communicators and custodians of information. To Densher, Eugenio represents 'a relation which required a name of its own, an intimacy of consciousness' (*WD* 458), while Milly reflects that 'their common consciousness had rapidly gathered into an indestructible link' (*WD* 359).[15] Awaiting the train of Milly's doctor, Sir Luke Strett, in Venice, it is 'under [Eugenio's] direction' that the gondola 'bestirred itself, with its attaching mixture of alacrity and dignity, on [Densher and Strett] coming out of the station together'. Densher, who has been barred by Eugenio from Milly's presence, finds 'himself of necessity refusing a seat on the deep black cushions beside the guest of the palace' – '"I don't," he said with a sad headshake, "go there now"' (*WD* 490–1).

Access to knowledge, as well as to places and persons, is prohibited by such exclusions. Accompanying Strett back again to the station for his departure, Densher is once again anticipated by Eugenio, who, 'in the field early, was mounting guard over the compartment'. Tormented by suspense about Milly's condition, Densher finds himself mutely directing his inquiry at Eugenio, aligning the courier with the doctor as powerful and inscrutable sources of information ('Eugenio resembled to that extent Sir Luke' (*WD* 498)).

If couriers could be dispensed with by the late nineteenth century, when improved transport facilities made getting from one place to another a

[13] In the whiskered 'Mr. Max' there is perhaps an echo of 'the Italian courier, Jean Nadali, black-whiskered and acquired in London', whom HJ fondly remembers in *A Small Boy and Others*, sitting 'in the rumble' of the travelling carriage while the young HJ recovers from malaria, 'stretched at my ease on a couch formed by a plank laid from seat to seat' (*SBO* 221, 220).

[14] *American Guide to Europe* (1874), xiii.

[15] Writing to Charles Brookfield on 22 November 1882 to offer him the role of Eugenio in the dramatic version of *Daisy Miller*, James notes that '[t]he part is an important one' (*CL 1880–1883* ii.235).

much less arduous process, it is telling that James continues to employ them – both actually and in an ironic, unofficial capacity – in late texts like *The Ambassadors* and *Wings*.[16] Directly charged with the duties of travelling *and* communication ('conveyance', in both senses of the word), couriers dramatize the need to know, whilst representing the way to knowledge as a process of costly mediation. Throughout his fiction and travel writing, James directs attention to such functionaries of travel – 'the many-buttoned brotherhood' of conductors, customs officials, and chauffeurs – as persons charged with a sympathetic or uncanny confidence.[17] Like the porter who appears at the railway station in Boulogne before a hovering Maisie and Sir Claude – and to whom Maisie, in her sudden 'illumination', understanding French, applies for tickets: '*Prenny, prenny. Oh prenny!*' (*WMK* 288) – these figures bear witness to momentous questions and decisions. Even as they smooth the way for characters like Milly Theale, they also exert an interrogatory pressure.

One such personage oversees the journey of Ralph Pendrell in *The Sense of the Past* (1917), as he is 'transported a hundred years back' in time (*CN* 506). In his notes for the novel, James 'hovers' repeatedly over how to manage this 'miraculous excursion' (*CN* 507), faced by the fact that 'the jump . . . to the far off time, from the present period to the "Past" . . . was going to have to be somehow bridged' (*CN* 503).[18] The difficulty, almost 'putting too formidably the question of a transition' (*CN* 505), is managed by Ralph's visit to the American Ambassador, to whom, while his cab waits outside, Ralph entrusts his secret. This diplomat 'feels a kind of superior responsibility' for his visitor, and 'stretches a point to see him, as it were,

[16] 'If you need a courier (but you really do not), ask your banker or landlord for the address of one' (Edmund C. Stedman and Thomas L. Stedman, eds., *The Complete Pocket Guide to Europe* (1900), xxii). Nicola Bradbury's edition of *The Ambassadors* suggests that there was continuing demand for female travel guides such as Maria Gostrey humorously represents, whose services were cheaper than their male counterparts (*CF* xviii.403), while HJ himself identifies Maria as a 'highly contemporary . . . type' (*CN* 546), but she is decidedly an 'amateur courier' (*CF* xviii.503). Oliver Wendell Holmes, returning to Europe for the first time in fifty years, mentions engaging 'one of those useful androgynous personages known as *courier-maids*, who had travelled with friends of ours', and who is found to be 'zealous and active in providing for my comfort' (*Our Hundred Days in Europe* (1887), 17–18).

[17] In 'An Autumn Journey' (1874), boarding a diligence at Lucerne, James shares a seat with a conductor who 'show[s] his great yellow teeth in a jovial grin all the way to Bellinzona . . . in the face of the somber fact that the St. Gothard tunnel [was] scraping away into the mountain . . . and numbering the days of the many-buttoned brotherhood' ('An Autumn Journey: Leaves from a Notebook', *Galaxy* (April 1874), 541–2).

[18] For HJ too, this journey spans a period of lapsed time, that of the tale's revision: 'I thus seem to get what I remember originally groping for . . . when I broke this off just here so many years ago . . . my missing link, my jump or transition from this last appearance of my young man's in the modern world . . . and his coming up again . . . in the "old"' (*CN* 510).

safely home' (*CN* 509). It is on this return, exiting his vehicle at No. 9 Mansfield Square, that Ralph steps into the Past.

The practical function of Ralph's cab is kept in sight: he explicitly selects 'a four-wheeler with the glasses up', and 'not a hansom' (*SP* 104), because it is raining. Though more agile and usually convenient, the hansom's open front entrance – directly behind the horse and between its prominent two wheels – made for muddy spatter, as well as 'obstruction and inconvenience with the reins, the door, and the window, which even when it is let down allows the rain to splash through in one's face'. For these reasons, '[a] hansom is not a good wet-weather carriage', and 'a four-wheeler is even preferable on a really wet day'.[19] The roomier vehicle also allows for the fantastic possibility that the Ambassador might escort home not only Ralph, but Ralph's ancestor and fellow passenger from Mansfield Square, whom he claims to have left waiting 'in the cab' (*SP* 104). The smaller side windows of the four-wheeler provided less visibility, though more protection from bad weather (there is a 'strained' moment before Ralph is able to 'approach his cab near enough for an effective view of its inner state' and to make 'a sufficient thrust of his head through the window of his "growler" to assure himself' of whether 'a conceivable companion might lurk there' (*SP* 108)). The type of cab also matters, finally, because it is old-fashioned, signalling its fitness for visits to and from the Past. The 'conscious quaintness' of a 'ricketty "growler (*GB* 210)"' operates similarly for Prince Amerigo in *The Golden Bowl*, on seeing his former lover, Charlotte Stant, pull up outside:

> [H]e remembered no occasion . . . from which the picture could have been so exactly copied. He remembered none, that is, of her coming to see him in the rain while a muddy four-wheeler waited. . . . *The sense of the past* revived for him nevertheless as it had not yet done. (*GB* 209, my emphasis)

The nostalgia belongs to the four-wheeler, and not to the occasion, which is unprecedented, though it marks the resumption of Charlotte and Amerigo's affair. Charlotte's cab, like Ralph's, bridges a temporal transition of sorts, reminding the Prince of a past relationship, and suggestively broaching its continuation in the present.

I want to leave Charlotte's cab waiting here for just a moment – as indeed *she* does, prolonging the moment when she will have 'to settle' (*GB* 214) – to return to Ralph and his. (Both vehicles, Ralph's and Charlotte's, are made to wait while their respective interviews take place, and both their

[19] Maudslay, *Highways and Horses* (1888), 206.

drivers are to be 'magnificently paid' (*SP* 112).) As Ralph appreciates, the solicitude shown by the Ambassador accompanying him home is disproportionate. His Excellency is perceived as 'going further – under some exceptional stress' (*SP* 108). Yet such curiosity serves a purpose, one that is not merely sympathetic (answering Ralph's need for 'confession' (*SP* 94)) but also testimonial: it is 'so as to be able to have first-hand evidence', James explains, that he must 'mak[e] him come down to the street in the cab' (*CN* 509–10). Just as Ralph is impelled by the 'pressing need to communicate' (*SP* 87), so the Ambassador is there 'to test his visitor's extraordinary statement, and then plausibly propose or insist on getting in with him and tracking him, as it were, to his lair' (*CN* 510). His surveillance of Pendrell (who, moreover, *wants* 'to be tracked' and to 'have an eye kept on' him (*SP* 106, 107)) is at once protective and faintly disciplinary. If Ralph disappears, the ambassador 'shall be able to give [an] account of him' (*CN* 510).

Whether ambassadors, couriers, or chaperones, James's travellers are invariably witnesses and agents, imbued with a quasi-managerial or administrative authority. They remind us that while travel is often a statement of freedom, *to be transported* is rarely a strictly autonomous act. If Charlotte's choice of a four-wheeler is 'conscious' and deliberate, reminding her of her former independence ('when I could do as I liked' (*GB* 211)), her husband's decision – to 'ship back' to American City (*GB* 480) – grimly reinstates her future. Transport is a powerful and punitive communication at the end of *The Golden Bowl*, when Maggie regards the Ververs' looming journey to America as a letter secretly imparted by her father:

> *There* was his idea, the clearness of which for an instant almost dazzled her. It was a blur of light, in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked, by contrast, in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed.... [I]t was as if she had held a blank letter to the fire and the writing had come out still larger than she hoped. (*GB* 480)

James invokes the obsolete, judicial sense of 'transport' here, as a penal sentence for convicts.[20] Meanwhile, the phrase 'come out' describes the action of invisible ink: that which has 'become evident or apparent', or has been caused 'to show itself prominently' (*OED*). As we have seen, however, James is also wont to use *come out* to refer to transatlantic journeying, and here, the phrase borrows from its proximity to a description of literal travel. Charlotte's visibility corresponds, spectrally, with her absence

[20] Penal transportation was regularized and authorized by the Transportation Act of 1718, though had been in practice long before that. The last shipment of convicts from Britain was to Australia in 1868.