

destabilises. By placing her argument so firmly within both centuries, Kearns validates both nineteenth-century and twentieth-century realism and its agenda of correction of and interaction with its environment—she talks puzzlingly of an “imperiled ecological system of soul and society” (1) which only really becomes comprehensible once you get past the narrow use of “ecological” we seem to have been stuck with.

The choice of texts to illustrate the argument is at first glance deliberately provocative and very personal. While the critical pronouncements on realism of both George Eliot and Henry James are referred to frequently, their novels are not central to Kearns’s discussion. Rather she concentrates on six novels, none of which fit comfortably into any conventional program of realism: *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Blithedale Romance*, *Hard Times*, *The Awakening*. Her choice is justified—quixotically again—in the very first footnote: “I shall be violating a number of rules in my discussion of realism, the most immediately obvious violations being my generalizations across time . . . and space . . . I am trying to negotiate between analysis of literary realism as a mode of text production particular to time and place and analysis of literary realism as evidence of an epistemological positioning that exceeds the circumstantialities of time and place . . . Scrupulous attention to the specifics of each text would obviate any possibility for more generalized assertions; rather than take that road of continual and necessary qualification, I shall be rather willfully blithe” (249). This wilful blitheness (what a wonderful quality for a critic to have) results finally and importantly in the comment that realism is “a mode rather than a genre, for realism adapts itself so variously that its texts differ vastly from one another and have, as individual texts, a certain chimerical quality that is thoroughly confusing to the taxonomist” (247)—which is where I came in.

So, a difficult book which talks about communication in terms that are sometimes barely readable, but which at other times stimulates the imagination and the critical sense and illuminates possibilities in ways that are genuinely exciting (she bases a dense discussion of the ineffable, for instance, on Mrs Gradgrind’s wonderfully poignant search for her pain). I may not be Alice, but I found the journey through the looking-glass both an exhilarating and a bumpy one.

**Barbara Garlick**

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***The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, edited by Jonathan Freedman.  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.**

The Cambridge Companion series focuses on major authors whose work and its critical tradition hold a significant place in literary history. The essays in this collection reinforce the point that over the last hundred years Henry James’s work has featured prominently in literary criticism, not only being subject to different kinds of analysis but also being used to test, develop and debate them. In opening his introduction to the volume, Jonathan Freedman makes the point that “successive wave[s] of theoretical and critical practice . . . staked their claims and exemplified their style of interpretation by

offering powerful re-readings of James" (1). A number of important critical approaches recur through the volume. They often involve reevaluation of long-standing interests and issues in James's work: the concern with family relationships in James's life and fiction is contrasted to nineteenth- and twentieth-century bourgeois norms; the "international theme" is linked to American geo-political imperialism; individual identity is contextualised amid social economies of leisure and travel, business and mass culture. Finally James's place in the American literary heritage is seen not only as connecting nineteenth-century narrative traditions to twentieth-century innovations but also as revealing new and significant aspects of the figure of the author, including increasing professionalism and the widening gap between elite, literary and popular, mass cultures.

The opening essay—Martha Banta's "Men, Women, and the American Way"—illustrates a number of these concerns. Banta considers James's representations of the effects of rigid demarcation between social and cultural roles for male and female in nineteenth-century America: "the gender-shaped society of his homeland imposed narrowly defined sexual, political, and cultural formations upon its men and its women" (21). She contends that James's narratives test such "entrenched gender formulas" (35) by placing men amid complex interpersonal relations and not simply business connections, while women—such as Charlotte Stant and Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*—are actively engaged in social life. Rather than depicting conventional gender types, James poses "questions about the infinite variety of persons each sex can offer" (38). Eric Haralson's chapter, "Lambert Strether's Excellent Adventure," makes a related argument, focusing more exclusively on the ways in which James's work questions norms of male identity: "*The Ambassadors* simultaneously reflects and confronts the power of the modern gender system, especially in its prescriptions and expectations for masculine performance" (172). Haralson suggests that Lambert Strether adapts his mission to save Chad Newsome from, not for, the narrow parameters of heterosexual American masculinity (173). Through Strether's sensitive but rather passive ways, James explores a notion of male behaviour that is not based on outward action and sexual activity: "the same attributes that make Strether a failure as 'men go' make him the perfect bearer of the novel's argument, its necessarily gentle dissent from uniform masculinity and compulsory sexuality" (182). James's interest in sexual identity and the social pressures that produce it are further examined in Hugh Stevens's essay, "Queer Henry *In the Cage*." Stevens focuses on the social and sexual controversies that frame James's work in the 1890s and early 1900s, most notably the Oscar Wilde trials. In *In the Cage* "the trackings, the dissemination and the concealment of sexual knowledge are very much at stake" (126), and Stevens argues that James's tale recounts "the anxieties and the thrills and the play of desire in a culture both sexually censorious and addicted to sexual sensationalism" (132). These essays raise and review many of the important issues relating to sexual and gender relations that are represented in James's work.

Sara Blair's essay on *The Bostonians*, "Realism, Culture, and the Place of the Literary," also considers gender relations but locates them amid wider debates in late-nineteenth-century America over "the production, experience, and social stability of 'culture' in its myriad and changing forms" (152). On the verge of the twentieth century women are starting to play public roles as creators, consumers and a target market for

social products. Verena Tarrant personifies this new market and is actively sought by various other characters for the cultural agendas they represent. James appears to question each of these agendas and uses literary discourse not nostalgically to reclaim an older male-dominated cultural tradition (this being Basil Ransom's position). Rather James conceives of literature as "a contestant in the volatile, highly theatrical, public sphere of modern America—a contestant for the power to create, shape, and redirect fictions of country, community, and self" (154). Other essays also draw out James's interests in contemplating the fate of America's relations to the world in the new century, notably Margery Sabin's revision of the psychological complexities of *The Golden Bowl* in terms of international and industrial power, "The question that haunts the psychological, moral, and cultural situation . . . is whether America's new wealth would sponsor a new and superior civilisation or whether America was doomed merely to replicate the worst patterns of its earlier masters and rivals" (206-07); and Ross Posnock's interpretation of *The American Scene*, where James interrogates nationally and racially based invocations of personal and social identity. The terms in which James's work represents these issues are shown to be highly relevant to contemporary debates over ethnicity, identity, and world order.

Other essays in the volume discuss the textual and editorial questions that circulate around James's published writings, his role in the development of modern narrative theory, the ethical and epistemological issues inscribed through his nuanced literary discourse, and the textual indeterminacy and hybridity realised through generic experimentation. Finally an essay by Frances Wilson on the complex ties shared by Henry, William and Alice James illuminates the family's profound preoccupation with questions of identity and consciousness. These varied approaches to James and his work—ranging from traditional, close thematic readings to speculations on contemporary cultural politics—repeatedly return to such key issues. In so doing the volume acts as a survey of critical discourses and their impact on our understandings of authorship and literary discourse. It reveals the interplay among social, literary and personal history which produced and is reproduced by James's writings.

**Lloyd Davis**

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***Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, by Catherine Waters. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.**

In this compact and closely argued book Catherine Waters examines the place of domestic ideology in Dickens's writings, focusing on issues of class and gender as they affect representations of the family in selected novels from *Oliver Twist* to *Our Mutual Friend*. Although readers have long recognised the centrality of the family in Dickens's work, they have often been puzzled by the contradiction between his reputation as the promoter of cozy Victorian domesticity and the prevalence of fractured, disharmonious families in his fiction. One goal of Waters's fine study is to analyse the social and political grounds of this apparent contradiction. Where previous critics have offered