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# The Complete Letters of Henry James, 1880–1883 Volume 1

Henry James

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The Complete Letters of Henry James

1880-1883

VOLUME I



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The Complete Letters  
*of*  
Henry James, 1880–1883

VOLUME I

Henry James

Edited by Michael Anesko and

Greg W. Zacharias

Associate Editor, Katie Sommer

With an introduction by Susan M. Griffin

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In Memory of Millicent Bell,  
a fine lady and a meticulous scholar



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# Introduction: A Finer Art

SUSAN M. GRIFFIN

On 6 June 1880 Henry James wrote several letters: one, accepting Louise Chandler Moulton's invitation to visit; a second, telling his mother that he had returned to London from Italy and was anticipating his brother William's arrival in London; and a third, sending the opening pages of *The Portrait of a Lady* to William Dean Howells for publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*. James's epistolary efforts that day speak variously of his life at the time: his social life; his deep, though ambivalent, ties to family; and his professional negotiations.<sup>1</sup>

By 1880 Henry James had decided that Europe was to be his home. He was a popular guest at the London townhouses and country homes of the British, visiting, for example, the John Clarks at Falmouth in England and Tillypronie in Scotland. He formed what Alan G. James describes as "durable friendships" with Lord and Lady Wolseley (xi). He visited Lord and Lady Rosebery (the latter a Rothschild) at Mentmore and Epsom and in London. And he was now a member of a London men's club. But James remained an American, and as such, he visited and was visited by his compatriots in these years, for example, Louise Moulton, the Boston literary correspondent for the *New York Times*, who, like many Americans of her class and education, was a regular traveler to Europe, staying for months at a time. In London, Paris, Rome, and Venice, James maintained friendships with Clover and Henry Adams, Francis and Lizzie Boott, Katharine de Kay Bronson, Isabella Stewart Gardner, James Russell Lowell, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, to name only a few. Indeed, there were so many Americans abroad that James complained of their interference with his work, writing to his mother on 4 July [1880]: "I am [. . .] much [. . .] more interested in my current work than anything else—*∫* am a good deal bothered with the number of transitory Americans who come to see me, with appeals (tacit or explicit) for 'attention' which I have neither time nor means to show them" (p. 12). Nonetheless, contact with and knowledge about his native land were important to James. As he explained to Grace Nor-

ton, “But I take an interest in seeing all the young Americans I can; living as I do away from home, I [. . .] wish [. . .] to guard against the reproach—& indeed the real disadvantage—of not knowing what manner of generations are growing up there” (20 September 1880, p. 60).

On the whole, this was an interest James seemed happy to satisfy from afar. Comfortably lodged in 3 Bolton Street, Piccadilly, a short distance from his beloved Reform Club, free to travel to the country for weekends and to the Continent for longer trips, by June 1880 James had been postponing a trip to his native land for some time. The 6 June 1880 letter to his mother reflects his mixed feelings: he is deeply affectionate and, at the same time, mildly apologetic for being out of touch: “You will have wondered what has become of me in all these days since I last wrote from Florence” (p. 4). Henry was already making excuses, limiting the time that William could interfere with his life: he will not journey to meet William at Liverpool. Instead, he will use the time for work so that, he says, he will have more free time when William arrives. Perhaps predictably, William’s visit was not to be a resounding success: he disliked England and criticized Henry’s busy social life as “superficial” (*CW* 7 5: 121). In turn, Henry wrote to his mother on 4 July [1880] with a report on William that illustrates how the lifelong sibling rivalry among the James children played out in matters of health (e.g., who needed more attention and financial help because of an illness, who was healthier and therefore more successful): “I must say, however, that even at best there remains more of nervousness & disability about him than I had supposed, & I can’t get rid of the feeling that he takes himself, & his nerves, & his physical condition, too hard & too consciously” (p. 11). The strategic nature of these health reports becomes all the clearer when, just over two weeks later, Henry positioned himself on the other side of the sibling contest. Immediately following William’s departure, Henry wrote:

Dearest Mammy—

I must write you but a short note, for I am sorry to say your poor old infant is rather seedy. I am just recovering from one of those wretched sieges of pain in my head which I have had so often & which are so very unprofitable. (20 July [1880], p. 19)<sup>2</sup>

Alice James's visit to Europe the following year, though much longer than William's, was easier on Henry. Alice and her friend and companion, Katharine Loring, sailed for England in late May, not to return to the United States until September. By this time, the entire James family had come to rely on Loring's seemingly limitless ability to care lovingly for Alice. Henry therefore felt free to continue his travels on the Continent, where he had been since February, not seeing the two women until some six weeks after they had arrived in England. Upon meeting Katharine Loring, he wrote to his mother, "The blessing that Miss Loring is to her it would be of course impossible to exaggerate. She is the most perfect companion she could have found, if she had picked over the whole human family, & your minds' may be at rest as to things going on proportionately well with her" (18 July [1881], p. 233). Together, the three seemed to find a happy balance of independence and intimacy, and Henry was able to work steadily on *The Portrait of a Lady*, sending off installments to the *Atlantic Monthly* in a timely manner.

James's earlier 6 June [1880] letter to his friend and editor William Dean Howells is explicitly concerned with these installments (p. 3). While James's tone is personal, his communication is definitely that of a business transaction. From young adulthood, James had worked to form relationships with editors, publishers, and other authors in the literary world. This was partly a matter of affinity but was also, as Michael Anesko has shown, because James was determined to manage the business of writing professionally ("*Friction*"; "Introduction"). Howells had recently (February 1880) reviewed James's *Hawthorne* in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the prestigious journal in which James had been publishing since 1865 and for which Howells served as assistant editor starting in 1866 and then editor (1871-81) ("*James's Hawthorne*"). Thus, James's pleasant, friendly letter to Howells is preoccupied with the details of literary life: he is pleased that Howells has agreed to a revised timetable for the publication of *Portrait* ("You received my request like an angel"), forwards a recent review of Howells's work and gossips a bit about the reviewer, and asks for a copy of Howells's *The Undiscovered Country*. By 1880 James had indeed established himself professionally both in the United States and in Britain. His short novel *Washington Square* was to begin

its simultaneous serialization in Leslie Stephen's *Cornhill Magazine* in June. Publication in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* followed the next month and book publication by Harper's in the United States and Macmillan in Britain thereafter.

But James regarded *Washington Square* as a minor work, writing to his friend Grace Norton on 20 September 1880 that "I understand quite what you mean about the absence of local colour in Washington Square, a slender tale, of rather too narrow an interest. I don't, honestly, take much stock in it—the larger story [*The Portrait of a Lady*] coming out presently in Macmillan & the Atlantic will be a much more valuable affair" (p. 61). On the whole, readers and critics agreed that *Washington Square* was light reading, cleverly done. In England the reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* appears to have found local color enough, noting that this American story marked a shift in James's focus; the reviewer expressed the hope that *Washington Square* would be the first in a Balzacian "Scènes de la vie de province" ("*Washington Square*"). (James, on the other hand, thought Howells had mastered American local color and urged him to become the "American Balzac"; see 31 January [1880], *CLHJ*, 1878–1880 2: 110.) The *New York Tribune* complained that James's depiction of antebellum New York was another instance of his "turning up his nose at his countrymen" ("New Publications: Henry James, Jr."). Indeed, several American critics used their reviews to critique James himself. The *New York Herald* imagined him as "a cynical dandy lying back in his easy chair and telling a story leisurely to a friend" ("*Washington Square*"); the *Chicago Tribune* found James a "dilettante" ("Recent Novels"). James himself had told Howells that *Washington Square* was "a tale purely American, the writing of which made me feel [. . .] acutely [. . .] the want of the 'paraphernalia'" (31 January [1880], *CLHJ*, 1878–1880 2: 110), echoing his earlier complaints in *Hawthorne* (1879) about the meager circumstances offered to the American writer, "the large number of elements that were absent from them, and the coldness, the thinness, the blankness" (42–43).

Unsurprisingly, then, the "big" novel that James had been planning—and discussing—for some time had only one episode set in the United States—and that was the scene in which the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer, is rescued from the dullness of

Albany and taken to Europe. On 2 February [1877], James described it to Howells as “a portrait of the character & recital of the adventures of a woman—a great swell, [. . .] psychologically; a *grande nature*—accompanied with many ‘developments’” (*CLHJ*, 1876–1878 1: 50). To his mother on 15 March 1878, he promised that it would “be to the American ‘as [. . .] wine [. . .] unto water’” (*CLHJ*, 1876–1878 2: 63). In October 1880 *The Portrait of a Lady* appeared first in *Macmillan’s Magazine* and the next month in the *Atlantic Monthly*, running through November/December 1881.

Reception of *The Portrait of a Lady* confirmed the fact that, while he had not yet fully achieved the critical and popular success that was his aim, James had solidified his status as a literary artist of great skill. As Philip Horne points out, sales were, for James, quite good (although hardly those of a best seller): “In the first six weeks *The Portrait of a Lady* sold 2,937 copies in America, and 5,530 by the end of 1882” (134). On 27 December [1881], James wrote to Frederick Macmillan, “[M]y book is selling—largely, for one of mine. I hope it is doing something of the kind *chez vous*. I have seen a good many English notices, & appear to myself to have got off on the whole very well. Look, if you can put your hand on it, at a Review in the *Tribune* for Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> very glowing, & well-written.” This *New York Tribune* review, written by John Hay, was glowing indeed: “No work printed in recent years, on either side of the Atlantic or on either side of the English Channel, surpasses this in seriousness of intention, in easy scope and mastery of material, in sustained and spontaneous dignity and grace of style, in wit and epigram, and, on the whole, in clear conception and accurate delineation of character” (“James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*”).

Many reviewers, on the other hand, found the novel overly long, cold, even immoral. The *Athenæum* asserted, “It is impossible not to feel that Mr. James has at last contrived to write a dull book” (“Novels of the Week”). Isabel Archer is deemed “unnatural,” her story “improbable,” her decisions arbitrary (“Literature.” *Independent*). Some—though not all—reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic saw the book as a satirical comment on Americans, especially American women. Yet amidst these complaints there was almost universal acknowledgment of Henry James’s literary “brilliance.” The re-

viewer for the *Californian* speaks as “the wearied reader of this most skillful book” (“The Portrait of a Lady. By Henry James, Jr.”). The *New York Sun* review, while judging that James had not, like Bret Harte, achieved “the mastery of the emotions,” nonetheless recognized that “it is, in fact, his style which constitutes Mr. James’s capital merit” (H[aziltine]). The *Pall Mall Gazette* asserted, “There can hardly be much difference of opinion as to the great, if not unmixed, merit of this ‘Portrait of a Lady.’ We do not know a living English novelist who could have written it” (“*The Portrait of a Lady*”). W. C. Brownell in the *Nation* offered that “‘The Portrait of a Lady’ is an important work, the most important Mr. James has thus far written, and worthy of far more than mere perusal—worthy of study.”

While the final installments of his first masterpiece were being published, James made a much-postponed visit to the United States, setting sail on 20 October 1881. This was not to be a return to an American life: James had already decided that Europe was his home. And his ties to America were about to be weakened in ways that he did not anticipate. During the visit, his mother died; before the end of 1882, Henry Sr. died as well. Nearly forty years old, Henry James, following his father’s death in December 1882, began to drop “Jr” from his signature. By the end of June, it was almost always absent from his name. It can be argued that, with the events of 1881 and 1882, Henry James truly achieved maturity both personally and professionally.

One thing that maturity was not to include was marriage. The subject comes up a number of times in James’s letters during this period, always treated mockingly. The year before his American trip, he wrote to Sarah Butler Wister: “I find some of my friends have supposed that I put off my journey because I had intentions of marriage here! & that I was waiting a little in order to provide myself ([. . .] for my return) with a blushing bride! This was a complete illusion” (14 November 1880, p. 98). The next month, James took up the topic again with Grace Norton, this time a bit more seriously: “But I shall not marry, all the same. I am happy enough as it is, & am convinced that if I should go further, I should fare worse. I am too good a bachelor to spoil. That sounds conceited—but one may be conceited, in self-defense, about a position [. . .] with which

[. . .] the rest of the world associates a certain idea of the ridiculous” (28 December 1880, p. 135). In a world where marriage is the norm, Henry James claims what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *The Epistemology of the Closet* has shown to be a distinctive nineteenth-century identity: “the bachelor,” a type who is pointedly celibate, emotionally detached, loosened from familial constraints and obligations, “artistic,” gossipy, faintly absurd, and slightly suspicious (188–95). In a 25 November 1881 notebook entry discussing his choice of and love for London, James says, “London is on the whole the most possible form of life. I take it as an artist and as a bachelor; as one who has the passion of observation and whose business is the study of human life” (*Complete Notebooks* 218).<sup>3</sup>

And, as a bachelor, James felt free to write flirtatiously to women and men, married and single, in letters filled with gossip, which, despite disclaimers, he loved. (In a gossip-filled letter to his mother dated 22 January [1882], he demurred, “But I [. . .] can’t gossip—*+* shouldn’t be writing.”) To Isabella Stewart Gardner he was nearly always facetiously romantic, as, for example, on 3 September [1882], “Your journey to Japan *+* India is a coup de génie: won’t you take me with you as your special correspondent *+* companion? (I mean special companion.)” or on 12 April of the same year, also to Mrs. Gardner, “To come to you *+* be punished is almost a reward. I’m delighted you are better. I shall give myself the pleasure of coming tomorrow, as I am obliged to go to Cambridge today. Be well, be happy, *+*, above all, be good!” Epistolary extravagances are common, as in a letter to William H. Huntington on 22 November [1882]: “It was insufferable however to miss you; if it had been foretold me in advance that I should do so beyond remedy, I should have branded the soothsayer as a charlatan.” Or to Henrietta Reubell, regarding travel to the United States: “You [. . .] would have [. . .] a great career here, *+* would return—if you should return at all, with a multitude of scalps at your slim girdle. There is a great demand for brilliant women, *+* I can promise you that you would be intimately appreciated” (9 January 1882).

From his letters to friends and acquaintances, we can trace James’s judgments on the state of his native land in 1881–82. Writing from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Frederick Macmillan, he notes how

America has changed in the six years he has been gone: “New York is a big place, & is rapidly becoming an interesting one. I am struck, throughout, with the rapid & general increase of the agreeable in American life, & the development of material civilization” (27 December [1881]). To Sir John Clark on 8 January [1882], James again stresses the rapidity of progress in his native land: “Things go very fast here, & the change that has taken place in the last two years is almost incredible. The increase of civilization, [. . .] of wealth, luxury, knowledge, taste, of all the arts & [. . .] usages [. . .] of life, is extremely striking.” While in the 1880s these seem to James largely changes for the better, when he returns to the United States in 1904, it will be precisely the continuing rapidity with which America leaves the past behind that disorients and appalls him.

James’s judgments about the state of American civilization to some extent varied city by city. About Washington, DC, where James arrived in January, visiting with the Henry Adamses, he was ambivalent. In his 8 January [1882] letter to Clark, James describes Washington as “the place in the world where [. . .] money—[. . .] or the absence of it, matters least. It is very queer & yet extremely pleasant; informal, familiar, heterogeneous, good-natured, essentially social & conversational, enormously big & yet extremely provincial, indefinitely agreeable.” This admiration seems to have stemmed, at least in part, from the fact that, unlike New York, Washington was not dominated by business and by money: “[A]n air of leisure hangs over the enormous streets, where every one walks slowly & doesn’t look keen & preoccupied” (8 January [1882] to Sir John Clark). In short, it was, at least in this respect, more European.<sup>4</sup> But the racial makeup of the city bothered James; as he put it in an ugly comment to Tom Perry: “It is, [. . .] materially, [. . .] too much of a village—a nigger-village, sprinkled with whites, it seems to me in my darker moments” (23 January 1882).

Whether he was pleased or unhappy with what he found in the United States, Henry James, almost from the first and increasingly as the visit went on, expressed a longing for London. His correspondence during the visit continued to sound this note. To Jane Hill on 15 January [1882]: “I am torn by conflicting passions—the sense that

I am passing my winter very pleasantly here, and the sentiment of homesickness (for the very paving-stones of Piccadilly,) pushed to the point at which (when there is a lady in the case) one begins to neglect one's personal appearance. I am (at times) absolutely dishevelled with longings for London."

These mixed emotions can be seen in an additional rich source for Henry James's thoughts during this visit to the United States, the first of what Leon Edel calls his "American Journals," begun on 25 November 1881, and ending on 11 November 1882 (James, *Complete Notebooks* 213–33). Unusually for James, this notebook was used not only to record impressions, anecdotes, and ideas for future fictions but also as an occasion to reflect on and describe his previous few years. In the first entry, written at the Brunswick Hotel in Boston, James begins by berating himself for having "so long" neglected to take notes on his observations and reflections (213). (He had, in fact, begun a different notebook on 7 November 1878, which he wrote in irregularly. It was put aside during the American visit.) But, rather than a puritanical examination of conscience, this self-chastisement is made in terms purely professional; James laments that over the past six years "so much has come and gone, so much that it is now too late to catch, to reproduce, to preserve. I have lost too much by losing, or rather by not having acquired, the note-taking habit. It might be of great profit to me. . . . I ought to endeavor to keep, to a certain extent, a record of passing impressions, of all that comes, that goes, that I see, and feel, and observe. To catch and keep something of life—that's what I mean" (213–14). Despite these missed opportunities, James, using an image to which he will return throughout the rest of his life, describes how nothing is truly lost. Buried, unconscious, submerged knowledge, he asserts, powerfully shapes thought—and art. Of those "lost impressions" he wrote: "[T]hey are not lost altogether, they are buried deep in my mind, they have become part of my life, of my nature" (214). There are also parts of his recent past that James *can* recover directly, so he decides to "look back over all that has befallen me since last I left my native shores" (214), creating an autobiographical account of these events.

This account shows how the visit to America becomes a means of

recovering not only the past but, perhaps more importantly, James's past self: "I am glad I have come—it was a wise thing to do. I needed to see again *les miens*, to revive my relations with them, and my sense of the consequences that these relations entail. Such relations, such consequences, are a part of one's life, and the best life, the most complete, is the one that takes full account of such things. One can only do this by seeing one's people from time to time, by being with them, by entering into their lives" (James, *Complete Notebooks* 214). The immediate knowledge that comes with physical proximity seems necessary to intimacy. And yet, "apart from this I hold it was not necessary I should come to this country. I am 37 years old, I have made my choice, and God knows that I have now no time to waste. My choice is the old world—my choice, my need, my life" (214).

One thing James's return shows him is how far he has come. And this too is a kind of visceral knowledge: sitting in Cambridge in 1881, "the long interval of years drops away, and the edges of the chasm 'piece together' again, after a fashion" (James, *Complete Notebooks* 224). What reappears is the image of the young James sitting in the same room "scribbling, dreaming, planning" but held back by "my damnable state of health" (224). Remembering fondly his early aspirations, James now recognizes what he has achieved: "I wanted to do very much what I have done, and success, if I may say so, now stretches back a tender hand to its younger brother, desire" (225). As Michael Anesko has said in his introduction to the previous two volumes of this edition, by the 1880s James had "mastered the mechanics of professional authorship" (*CLHJ*, 1878–1880 1: xxxvii). James's success was measurable: pushing always for higher payments from editors and publishers, James would see his income go from \$4,361 in 1880, to \$5,525 in 1881, to \$2,355 in 1882, to \$7,173 in 1883 (the fluctuations reflecting, in part, the fact that payments for longer works could be extended across calendar years). As his earnings became steady and (relatively) substantial, James was able to cut down on time-consuming small projects. In 1881 and 1882, for example, he published only five such pieces: in 1881 "The London Theaters" (*Scribner's Monthly*) and in 1882 "Alphonse Daudet" (*Atlantic Monthly*), "London Pictures and London Plays" (*Atlantic Monthly*), "Venice" (*Century Magazine*), and "The Point of View" (*Century*

*Magazine*). In the American journals he reaffirms this strategy: “My mind is full of plans, of ambitions; they crowd upon me, for these are the productive years of my life” (James, *Complete Notebooks* 226). Interspersed with these confident declarations, however, are expressions of anxiety over work undone.

The 1881–82 trip in many ways frustrated James’s stated ambitions. Much as he wanted to take advantage of this visit to see America and store up impressions, it was hard to find quiet periods of time for work: “Prolonged idleness exasperates and depresses me” (James, *Complete Notebooks* 226). During that 1881–82 trip, his travels were limited to Cambridge, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. Not until 1904–5 was Henry James to tour the United States more extensively, ranging from the Mid-Atlantic to the South to the West Coast.

The limited itinerary of 1881–82 was in part due to an unanticipated family crisis: while Henry was in Washington, DC, he received word from his brother Robertson (Bob) that his mother was ill, though not dangerously so. Henry responded right away: “I am filled with grief & horror at the news of poor Mother’s illness. Give her my tender love & assure her of my liveliest sympathy. I cannot bear to think that she suffers, & would come on to see her if I believed it would help her through—But if Aunt Kate has come, [σ] you are there she has care enough, (with what father & Alice can also give) & I should only be in the way” (27 January [1882] to Robertson James). But his mother’s condition worsened. By the time Henry was able to reach Cambridge, Mary Walsh James, aged seventy-two, had died.

America was truly no longer home. Henry had always been his mother’s favorite (her “Angel”). He created a life far away from her, but there is no mistaking the deep filial love that pervades his letters. Discussing the burial arrangements, Henry James described what the loss of his mother meant to him and to his family: “It is impossible for me to say—to begin to say—all that has gone down into the grave with her. She was our life, she was the house, she was the keystone of the arch. She held us all together, and without her we are scattered reeds. She was patience, she was wisdom, she was exquisite maternity. Her sweetness, her mildness, her great natural beneficence were unspeakable” (*Complete Notebooks* 229). Without Mary James, the James

family seemed to have lost its coherence, even its identity.<sup>5</sup> By December of the same year, Henry James Sr. had died. Bereft at the loss of his wife, he had, in the end, stopped eating. Henry Jr., who had been back in Europe for almost seven months, sailed for the United States upon hearing of his father's growing weakness. As with his mother, Henry arrived too late to see his father once again before death and, in this case, too late for even the funeral. It was, as he wrote to Lady Wolseley on 30 December 1882, "a violent shock." William also had been absent. Representing them both, Henry visited the gravesite in the Cambridge Cemetery on 31 December and, as he recounted to William, "stood beside his grave a long time & [. . .] read him your letter of farewell—which I am sure he heard somewhere out of the depths of the still, bright winter air. He lies extraordinarily close to mother, & as I stood there and [. . .] looked at [. . .] this last expression of so many years of mortal union, it was [. . .] difficult [. . .] not to believe that they were not united again in some consciousness of my belief." Leaving his parents behind, Henry James then turned to the present and its future: "On my way back I stopped to see Alice [William's wife] & sat with her for an hour & admired the lovely babe, who is a most loving little mortal" (1 January 1883 to William James).

Nearly forty years old, Henry James by the end of the year had mostly dropped "Jr." from his signature. Despite the fact that he was the second son, Henry, rather than his older brother, William, was named executor of his parents' estate. He took the position of trust quite seriously, if not obediently, and the responsibility proved a considerable one. Henry Sr., reasoning that Wilky (Garth Wilkinson) had received more than his share of financial help over the years, cut him out of the will. Alice, as the only daughter, was to receive stocks and bonds that would generate a solid yearly income. The remainder of the estate, consisting primarily of commercial Syracuse real estate that generated a solid rental profit, was, according to the will, to be divided among William, Henry, and Robertson (albeit with a deduction from and limitations on the latter's share). Henry, knowing of Wilky's considerable troubles, financial and otherwise, felt that his father's judgment was unfair and made his own decisions about the distribution of assets. In this he was, ironically, following a course set earlier by the elder James—albeit with an important difference.

Henry Sr. had sued to break his father's will in a successful attempt to claim an inheritance; the novelist cut into his own share of the estate by insisting that his younger brother not be left out. His plan was to make the division among all four of the brothers. Henry traveled to Milwaukee in order to meet with Wilky and Bob about the will, and the matter seemed settled. However, William objected to this reduction of his share, arguing that to ignore their father's clear instructions was to cast a shadow on his memory. Henry responded that adjudicating past parental actions was not the business before them. "[T]he best way to justify Father," he insisted, "is simply to assume that he expected us, (as he did expect us) to rearrange equally" (11 February [1883]). Despite William's objections, Henry prevailed. Sharing his father's concern that Alice, chronically ill and without a spouse or a profession to support her, be comfortably provided for, Henry had already transferred his share of the income from the Syracuse real estate to her. He made no attempt to take over his father's position as the head of the family, a position that Henry Sr. had, in any case, filled idiosyncratically. Nonetheless, Henry's confidence in his own competence and his recognition that the weaker of his siblings needed support are those of a man whose life is, in some profound sense, his own.

That confidence manifested itself at a time when, as we have seen, Henry James resolved to rededicate himself to his writing. He repeatedly noted that he was almost forty, and thus "these are the productive years of my life" (James, *Complete Notebooks* 226). In his final entry in this section of the American journals, James declares: "I believe [. . .] that I have learned how to work. [. . .] When I am really at work, I'm happy, I feel strong, I see many opportunities ahead. [. . .] I must make some great efforts during the next few years, however, if I wish not to have been on the whole a failure. I shall have been a failure unless I do something *great!*" (232–33).

What did "something *great*" mean to Henry James in 1882? His ambition had been to surpass his most important American and English novelistic forebears, Nathaniel Hawthorne and George Eliot. In 1870 James had declared to his brother William that he meant "to write as good a novel one of these days (perhaps) as the H. of the [. . .] 7 G.'s" (*House of the Seven Gables*; 13, 14 February 1870, *CLH*7,

1855–1872 2: 292). To Grace Norton in 1873 he confided, “To produce some little exemplary works of art is my narrow and lowly dream. They are to have less ‘brain’ than [. . .] *Middlemarch*; but (I boldly proclaim it) they are to have more form” (5 March 1873, *CLHJ*, 1872–1876 1: 234). *The Portrait of a Lady* would seem to be the novel that accomplished this work. Richard Brodhead has convincingly argued that “in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the work James regarded as inaugurating the stage of full-fledged mastery in his career, Hawthorne is not left behind, but rather incorporated into the deepest levels of his imagination” (139). And many readers—including James himself when he came to write the novel’s preface—have understood *Portrait* as a response to—even a revision of—*Middlemarch*. Of course, there were Balzac and Turgenev, whom James both admired and learned from, but neither seemed to offer a model for greater novelistic achievement.

For Henry James at what he saw as this crucial moment in his career, “something great” could only be playwriting: “After long years of waiting, of obstruction, I find myself able to put into execution the most cherished of all my projects—that of beginning to work for the stage. It was one of my earliest—I had it from the first” (*Complete Notebooks* 226). Drama, James says, is “the ripest of all the arts” (226), the one that demands maturity from the artist. Having reviewed his career thus far, Henry James judged that his mastery of his profession was such that he could now turn to his greatest aspiration.

And he did take up playwriting when, after his mother’s death, he briefly settled in rooms on Mount Vernon Street in Boston, near enough to visit his father and sister in Cambridge but far enough for him to work in privacy. George and Marshall Mallory, who had restored Madison Square Garden after a devastating fire, had met with James and encouraged him to turn *Daisy Miller* into a play. However, even though James gave *Daisy Miller* a happy ending in the new script, the result was rejected by the Mallorys. Writing to Isabella Stewart Gardner on 5 June [1882], James gave his own account of *Daisy Miller*’s fortunes: “I think with extraordinary tenderness of those two pretty little evenings when I read you my play. [. . .] Drop a tear—a diminutive tear (as your tears must be—small but beautifully=shaped pearls,) upon the fact that my drama is not

after all to be brought out in New York (at least for the present.) I had a fundamental disagreement with the Manager & got it back from him just before sailing. It is possible it may see the light here—I am to read it to the people of the St. James's [. . .] Theatre next week." James had had eighteen copies of the script privately printed by Macmillan both for British copyright purposes and also, perhaps, in hopeful preparation for negotiations with London producers and theater managers. But those to whom James spoke in London were not interested either. Writing in Paris on 11 November 1882, he expresses his anger at the Mallorys ("asses and sharpers combined") and his "*disgust*, deep and unspeakable disgust" with "the conditions of production on our unhappy English stage" (James, *Complete Notebooks* 232). To Isabella Stewart Gardner, he passes on the final verdict: "Poor little *Daisy Miller*, in her comic form, has been blighted by cold theatrical breath, & will probably never be acted" (3 September [1882]). The play was published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, April–June 1883, as *Daisy Miller: A Comedy*.<sup>6</sup> That September James R. Osgood brought out the play in book form; Houghton Mifflin had earlier declined to do so (Wortman 284). Reviews of the printed version were lukewarm.

Planning his next career steps in November 1882, James was uncertain about how he might generate sufficient income to support his foray into the theater. On the one hand, "the dramatic form seems to me the most beautiful thing possible"; on the other, he felt pushed "both from within and without" to start another novel (James, *Complete Notebooks* 232). His immediate strategy was to write "*short* things, in such measure as I need, which will leave me intervals for dramatic work" (232). And James did publish several short fictions in the next few years, along with reviews, critical essays, and articles on travel. But his next play, *The American*, based on his early novel, was not written until 1890 and first performed on 3 January 1891. Clearly, all did not proceed according to plan. Yet as the coming volumes of letters will show, the years to follow—what Leon Edel called "The Middle Years"—were to be a time of enormous productivity and widening range. That same November 1882, William Dean Howells described what he called the "new school" of novelists who were creating fiction of a "finer art." "This school," Howells declared, "which

is so largely of the future as well as the present, finds its chief exemplar in Mr. James” (“Henry James, Jr.” 28).

## Notes

1. Of course, James may have written additional letters that day; these are the three that are extant.

2. Kaplan points out that this complaint may also have been meant to soften the news that Henry was postponing a trip home (227).

3. On the figure of the bachelor, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s important discussion in “The Beast in the Closet” chapter of *Epistemology of the Closet* (esp. 188–212), in which she quotes this same passage from the notebooks.

4. America’s lack of a leisure class is a topic that James addresses repeatedly in works ranging from *An International Episode* (1879) to *The American Scene* (1907).

5. Although in 1889 William was still to maintain that Henry remained “a native of the James family, and has no other country” (*CW* 7 6: 517).

6. William Wortman explains that “the *Century* editor, Richard Watson Gilder, asked for the play but then backed away when James requested \$1,500” (284). James then turned to Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s offer to print the play in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Wortman gives the fullest account of the play’s history, including a record of later adaptations of the novella by other writers.