

Henry James: Language and Style

Holst Katsma

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Course Description:

The late critic Tzvetan Todorov once praised Henry James for exploring more thoroughly than any other author “paths opened by language but unknown to literature.” In this course, we will survey the work of Henry James with a particular emphasis on the value of James’ stylistic innovation. Beyond building a vocabulary for talking about style in general and Jamesian style in particular, this course will try to understand style’s power and utility. Key questions will include: What does Jamesian style want from us? Why does James adopt an excessively difficult style? Does Jamesian style allow for particularly insightful explorations of affect or sexuality? Did Jamesian style successfully elevate the novel’s cultural prestige? Is ‘late style’ in James really a thing? And why does Jamesian style find more success in novels than in plays? Each week will explore style from a different methodological perspective, pairing primary texts with secondary readings by Roland Barthes, Theodor Adorno, Eve Sedgwick, Franco Moretti, D.A. Miller, David Kurnick, Martha Nussbaum, and others. Students should consider submitting their final paper to *The Henry James Review*—one of the very best single-author journals and a testimony to James’s lasting significance—and should write and format their final paper with this in mind. In order to start the course running, students will be expected to read the first volume of *Portrait of a Lady* over the summer.

Course Goals:

- To examine the literary career of Henry James—a pivotal, fin-de-siècle stylist of perennial interest to philosophers, queer theorists, literary critics, and cultural historians
- To explore a variety of methodologies for talking about language, style, and the value of stylistic innovation
- To learn how to write an upper-level, 20-25 page work of literary criticism on a viable research topic
- To learn how to identify, engage with, and model works of literary criticism and theory
- To learn how to write with greater clarity and precision

Assignments:

- One 5-7 page paper, due in the 5th week of the course: in this paper you should (i) close read an aspect or passage of a literary text from the first five weeks of the syllabus, and (ii) make reference to one work of criticism (ideally but not necessarily in the introduction).
- One 2 page prospectus and annotated bibliography with 8-10 sources, due in the 8th week.
- One full draft of the final paper (20-25 pages), due in the 12th week. This full draft will be returned with comments for revision within a week. Students will receive more specific

guidelines in advance of the draft deadline.

- One 20-25 page final paper, due during reading week (official deadline TBA).
- A number of mini-assignments, all designed to help you through the research and writing process.
- One 5 minute conference presentation (ungraded) on your paper.
- Mandatory program-wide meetings (TBA)

Grade Breakdown:

- Participation and preparation: 15%
- Mini assignments: 10%
- Short paper (5-7 pages): 15%
- Prospectus and annotated bibliography: 10%
- Preliminary draft (20-25 pages): 10%
- Final paper (20-25 pages): 40%

**Submission of final paper required to pass the course

**Conference presentation and mandatory program wide meetings, ungraded

Course Texts:

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Penguin Classics)

Henry James, *Henry James: Major Stories and Essays* (Library of America College Editions)

Henry James, *The Awkward Age* (Penguin Classics)

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (Penguin Classics)

**All other texts will be excerpted or posted on Canvas as PDFs

Syllabus: *Unit 1: Preliminary definitions*

Week 1: Introduction

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) Volume I

Roland Barthes, "What is Writing?"

Gerard Genette, "Style and Signification"

Leon Edel, selections from *Henry James: A Life*

Week 2: What is style?

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) Volume II

Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication"

Franco Moretti, "Style at the Scale of the Sentence"

Theodor Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven"

Dick Hebdige, selections from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*

Unit 2: How does style's excessiveness—all style and no substance—make it particularly adept at exploring emotions and sexuality?

Week 3: How does style make us feel? (affect theory)

Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw" (1898)

William James, "What is an Emotion?"

Jonathan Flatley, "Reading into Henry James"

Week 4: The sexuality of style (queer theory)

Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903)

Eve Sedgwick, "The Beast in the Closet"

D.A. Miller, selections from *The Secrets of Style*

Assignment: Find an article from *The Henry James Review* that interests you. Make an outline of the work's argument, reducing it to a series of claims. Be prepared to summarize the essay's argument, and how it proves that argument, in class.

Unit 3: What is style's relationship to genre? Can style help explain why James was a notoriously unsuccessful playwright but a widely beloved novelist?

Week 5: Melodramatic style (genre theory)

Henry James, *Guy Domville* (1893)

Henry James, *The Awkward Age* (1899), Book I

David Kurnick, "Horrible Impossible: Henry James's Awkward Stage"

Peter Brooks, selections from *The Melodramatic Imagination*

Leon Edel, "Henry James: The Dramatic Years"

****DEADLINE: Short paper due (5-7 pages)**

Week 6: Boring style (narratology)

Henry James, *The Awkward Age* (1899), Books II-VI

Tzvetan Todorov, "The Verbal Age"

Nicholas Dames, "The Disease of Temporality; or, Forgetful Reading in James and Lubbock"

Mandatory class visit to the English Department Research Librarian, Odile Harter, to discuss library resources, search techniques, etc.

Unit 4: Is James's difficult style particularly moral or prestigious?

Week 7: Style's moral imperative (philosophy)

Henry James, *The Awkward Age* (1899), Books VII-X

Robert Pippin, "Modern Morals"

Richard Rorty, "On Pippin on James"

David Kurnick, "What does Jamesian Style Want?"

Martha Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy"

Assignment: Come up with 1-2 potential, concrete ideas for your essay text/topic, to be discussed with me in an individual meeting.

Week 8: Sophisticated style and cultural prestige (sociology of literature)

Henry James, "The Art of the Novel" (1884)

Henry James, Preface to *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Awkward Age* from *The Art of Fiction: Prefaces* (1907-1909)

****DEADLINE: Prospectus and annotated bibliography due**

Unit 5: How does a writer's style and the perception of style change over time?

Week 9: Late style (artistic evolution)

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Books I-II

Seymour Chatman, selections from *The Later Style of Henry James*

Edward Said, "On Late Style"

Assignment: Report on secondary research that you have conducted for your essay, summarizing (i) relevant literary critical arguments, and (ii) relevant contextual information.

Week 10: The afterlife of style (reception theory)

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Books III-IV

Selections from *The Henry James Review* 39:3 (Henry James, 1916-1945)

Assignment: Bring in an outline of your paper to discuss with the class.

Week 11: Private style in the archive (book history, genetic criticism)

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Books V

Henry James, selections from *The Complete Letters of Henry James, 1855-1884*

Unit 6: End-game

Week 12: Peer draft workshop

****DEADLINE: Full draft due**

Week 13: Conclusion

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), VI and Preface

****DEADLINE: Final essay due during reading week (date TBA by Junior Tutorial Program)**

Course Policies:

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code: "Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments, academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole. I will allow each student a "free" tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late really disrupts the work we're doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Late Grades: Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: "Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week

of the term, (DATE). Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”