

FEMINISTS ASSAULT HENRY JAMES

(1843-1916)

Henry James created a number of complex heroines, he tended to idealize intelligent cultured women and he sympathized with women as victims--of themselves as well as of others--such as Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer. And though American women were offended by his "slander" of American womanhood in *Daisy Miller* (1878), over time, women as readers and as critics have been drawn to James, who like Edith Wharton is comparable to Jane Austen.

The "middle period" includes *The Bostonians*, his satire of radical Feminism, his only long work set wholly in America. The hostile response to *The Bostonians* by Bostonian liberals, feminists especially, discouraged James from setting any more of his fiction in America. Although this satire is one of his most enjoyable novels to read, and has been declared a masterpiece by many critics, it has been suppressed since the 1960s. Feminists have been condemning it ever since its publication and since Feminism became politically correct in the 1980s the career of any American professor who dared to assign it would likely suffer as a consequence. James's disappointment led him to try for success in the theater. He wrote four comedies and dramatized *The American*. In 1895 when he came on stage to accept applause after the first performance of his play *Guy Domville*, he was hissed and booed off the stage.

The Novels and Tales of Henry James were published in 24 volumes between 1907 and 1909--about two-thirds of his fiction. His achievement was not much appreciated. In 1910 he fell ill from disappointment and fatigue. Then in 1913, on his 70th birthday, over 300 admirers presented him with his portrait by Sargent, which hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London. Later a radical Feminist slashed the painting with a knife, leaving scars.

Michael Hollister (2015)