

Michael Anesko. *Henry James and Queer Filiation: Hardened Bachelors of the Edwardian Era*. Springer, 2018. Pp. XV, 111. €57.19. ISBN: 9783319945378.

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Michael Anesko is a senior lecturer and researcher at the Pennsylvania State University and his vast experience, along with his considerable merits in the research of the Anglo-American author Henry James, testifies to the relevance of his most recent book under review here. Indeed, this biographical work marks the beginning of the revelation of Edwardian queerness as it has never before been explored, as the author takes a further step in dealing with the socio-political circumstances that conditioned the relations among male contemporaries of James. Moreover, Anesko's retelling of the vital events of Henry James's life and career takes a particularly emotive vantage point in contrast to earlier accounts of his literary career and personal life which are limited to the provision of biographical data without further consideration of the personal or moral implications of his milieu.

Anesko's writing style is compendious and eloquent, despite the considerable amount of biographical information he provides. The chapters' titles encapsulate the general tone of the book, which is stylistic and succinct, by making film allusions and puns on words which bear sexual references to the queer. This is seen in chapter 5, "Fast & Vicious," chapter 10, "Within the Rim," or chapter 12, "The Jamesian Condom": these innuendos make the overall tone of the book light-hearted, never losing its cogency.

The number of highlights in this book outweighs that of the weaker points. What might be of less interest to early scholars looking to further their research on Henry James is the fact that the book comprises a range of details around the writer's milieu that touch on different stories indirectly attached to him, therefore leaving the reader in need of deeper insights into James's involvement in the facts approached. Despite this, the contribution made by Anesko with this book adds to the existing scholarship on the life of James, resulting in this comprehensive data collection from numerous sources, comprising newspaper articles, reports, novels, letters, poems, memorial tablets and microfilm reels lent by the Archives of American Art. All of these have served to produce an unprecedented work aimed at elucidating both the reception in upper-class social spheres of art pieces and literary work, and the



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socio-cultural circumstances that conditioned the adoption of discriminatory stances towards the validity of homosexual male talent. Queerness in the literary and personal network of filiations around James has been covered heavily since the 1980s in the critical study by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men and Epistemology of the Closet*, where she suggested that closeted secrecy would be “a strategic necessity of social life conditioned by . . . male homosexual panic” (vii). Due to this, Anesko intends to provide further and deeper insights into the roots of homosocial desire as a source of inspiration for much of the artistic productions by male contemporaries of James. As Anesko himself puts it:

Hardened Bachelors reconstructs a surprisingly open network of queer filiation in which James occupied a central place. But the lives of its satellite figures — most now forgotten or unknown— offer even more suggestive evidence of some of the countervailing forms of social practice that could survive even in that hostile era. (vii)

This book opens with Anesko exposing the details of James’s funeral arrangements as carried out by his sister-in-law, Alice, and his nephew Harry, focusing in particular on how the writing engraved into his headstone parked a debate between Harry and John Borie, James’s architect. In a letter to *The Times*, critic and poet Edmund Gosse depicts James as a “hero” belonging to a “neutral nation” (qtd. in Anesko 5) to mark the occasion of his funeral. Anesko cleverly devises the closing of the first chapter to lay the foundation for the subsequent ones, already addressing the question of queerness in the socio-cultural contexts of late nineteenth-century America. He outlines how James’s family was aware of the queerness around James and was concerned that the inscription formerly written by Borie, which read “Lover of the fine amenities,” would start rumours about his sexuality. For that reason, and despite Alice’s approval of Borie’s version, Harry thought of omitting that phrase from the tablet and include a much more concise, albeit circumspect, one.

I consider that Anesko’s exposition of James’s milieu sheds light on the question of late nineteenth-century heteronormativity in relation to identification: more precisely, the late nineteenth-century queering of James and other contemporary fellow artists fails to represent these artists’ own accomplishments, a fact that Anesko portrays neatly. Certainly, it would be worth drawing on Eric Haralson for analogical resonances of the queer across men between his book, *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, and the present

object under review. John Carlos Rowe claimed that Haralson “has taught us that queerness and the cultural avant-garde are imbricated, but too often this idea is forgotten amid the contentious sexual and identity politics of our postmodern moment” (536–37). In much the same way, the ascription of the Arts to homosocial narratives at the turn of the century is brought forth in the encounters that John Borie and Thomas Eakins had where Borie would pose for the artist’s brushwork, as well as in the relationship that Borie held with Victor Beigel, an English musician, with whom he came to reside in London. Eventually, what began as Borie’s acquaintance with the tycoon Robert Allerton would develop into common aspirations between them.

A substantial part of *Henry James and Queer Filiation* focuses on the figure of Robert Allerton, whose acquaintances include the Jameses, the von Gh lens and the Emmert family, or the Emmetry, with whom he would forge close relationships through John Borie. Allerton’s interest in young aspiring painter Aleck James, son to William and Alice, extended to Henry James, Uncle Henry, of whom he drew a portrait in charcoal that was retrieved after James’s death but of which no record survives (73). The social nexus that women occupy in men’s lives is crucial to understanding the “durable queer companionship” (33) built among male circles. Undoubtedly, the contribution of female figures to the acknowledgment and acceptance of homosocial bonds across various generations translates into a proliferation of the scholarship of the queer as well as society’s acceptance of established artistry created by and for homosexual males. Despite this, xenophobic criticism in the social spheres of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie has vastly complicated this social acceptance. Not only does Alice James’s approval of Borie’s version of the aforementioned queer inscription render female performance as relevant in fostering tolerance of the homosocial, but the personal connection that Allerton establishes with Bay Emmert also serves to consolidate women’s influence on the way people conceived social norms.

Taking into consideration the relevant position of woman in the lives of male artists, it is made evident in this book that they play a major role in boosting men’s careers regardless of the criticism they received, especially that of Bay Emmet, whose “extraordinary accomplishment for a female artist at that time” consisted in having her paintings exhibited at the infamous Durand-Ruel gallery in Manhattan (43). Indeed, it was their reciprocal generosity that really boosted their careers as they “all participated lovingly in the creative and domestic lives of one another” (43). Bay’s paintings then had such a positive reception that she managed to buy a country retreat near Connecticut to which Beigel and Borie were regular visitors. It is noteworthy

that this “vital social network . . . would be transplanted to England in the years ahead and bring the queer couple within the perimeter of Henry James’s social field” (44), which in a way might have moulded the connection of this queer circle to artistry. In addition, the strong effect exerted by female painters in the Emmet family, such as Lydia Field Emmet and Ellen Emmet Rand, on the lives of male artists contributed to the pre-eminence of the artistic sphere, as the critic Bertha A. Houck stated: “the two most celebrated contemporary painters in the Emmet family . . . both individualists, but with an affectionate and intelligent interest in human beings which has made them great and respected portrait-painters” (qtd. in Anesko 48).

Interestingly, Anesko makes a case for James’s sexual identity based on the commotion he suffered after his experience of the First World War, which led some American expatriates, among them John Borie, to raise funds and facilitate coordination with the “stubbornly lethargic officials of the British Red Cross” (82). James wrote letters for the daily press of American journals like the *New York World* and *Springfield Republican* soliciting funds for the support of the newly formed “American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France” (83). His disappointment with America’s “inexplicable neutrality” prompted his determination to become a British citizen on 28 July 1915. Such neutrality for citizens of the United States, such as James and Borie, would come to be a “reprehensible form of national dishonour” (84), particularly on seeing that the outbreak of hostilities brought Britain’s veneration of German culture. Much speculation was generated around the motivations and consequences of James’s expatriation; for instance, the writer Van Wyck Brooks implied that James’s removal from his native land “entailed and reinforced the writer’s inherent effeminacy,” while others considered it a “precondition for apprehending the empowering possibilities of same-sex desire” (104).

Anesko brilliantly illustrates the point that the broad trajectory of James ran in tandem with the evolution of his affective ties and the people whom he came across and who inspired his literary work. Edith Warton and Theodora Bosanquet were terribly fond of James—in particular, Bosanquet wrote commemorative articles about her friend—and both feared that Harry should be assigned the edition of Henry James’s letters (96) owing to his reputation for censoring any queer exposure around his uncle’s productions. After *The Letters of Henry James* finally appeared in 1920, the James family lamented that the editorial company went ahead with the publication without their final approval. Mrs. Alice James, in fact, complained: “I am more and more impatient with Percy Lubbock’s [the main editor’s] work” and persuaded her

children Peggy and Harry to prepare a better edition (98). The ongoing conflict between James's relatives and Lubbock's unremitting publishing interests created a suspicious atmosphere around the Master (Henry James), Anesko asserts, hence why Harry's discomfort of his uncle's memorial stone became more understandable. As Alice herself accordingly pointed out: "people are putting a vile interpretation on his silly letters to young men" (98).

The book closes with Anesko's placing the readers in dialogue with Henry James's acceptance and affirmation of queer names and filiations which developed within his trans-Atlantic cosmopolitan milieu (104). Among those men, as stated above, there were female figures who, in some way or another, contributed to the destabilization of society's fixed aversion to queerness. "Mme. X," a society columnist, remembered John Borie, the architect, in a very fond way, assuring that Europe's ancient civilization was "gentler" and "more sympathetic" (104). Anesko adroitly points to James's and Borie's separation from America as a possible precondition for embracing same-sex desire, in contrast with those who "caustically implied" that James's immanent effeminacy was encouraged by this rupture (104). Not only this, but Anesko reifies the question of queer filiation in how three of the outstanding figures of this book, James, Borie and Beigel, designed their corresponding stone memorials: all carved in Roman *capitalis monumentalis* and with messages "appealing for indulgence for souls in purgatory" (105).

All in all, Anesko's innovative work has clearly justified its stated aims. It excels at collecting significant historical data that attests to enriching homosocial bonds and helps us understand the ways in which American male's bred-in-the-bone artistry opened up new avenues into the normalization of same-sex desire at the *fin-de-siècle*. The author of *Queer Filiation* shows us that, regardless of male artists' sexual condition, their talent was able to find a way beyond criticism, as well as the fact that women came forth as exceptional mediators and powerful catalysts of homosexual artists' prestige and recognition beyond America. This fact raises the question of whether filiation across genders could be capable of addressing and debunking gender inequality as a blot on nineteenth-century society.

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