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| Adams, Henry (1838–1918) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Although he was known as a historian during his lifetime, Henry Adams — like Henry James — is often seen as an American precursor to Modernism. This is mainly due to his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*. His autobiography not only registers an aristocratic intellectual’s despair at the loss of ideals in the transformation of American society but, written in the third person, also secures a distance from that despair in order to observe it self-consciously and ironically. After his death, Adams’ literary significance was appreciated by new critics, such as Yvor Winters and R. P. Blackmur. |
| Although he was known as a historian during his lifetime, Henry Adams — like Henry James — is often seen as an American precursor to Modernism. This is mainly due to his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*. His autobiography not only registers an aristocratic intellectual’s despair at the loss of ideals in the transformation of American society but, written in the third person, also secures a distance from that despair in order to observe it self-consciously and ironically. After his death, Adams’ literary significance was appreciated by new critics, such as Yvor Winters and R. P. Blackmur.  Adams was a great grandson of the second president of the United States, John Adams, and a grandson of the sixth president, John Quincy Adams. He was educated at Harvard University and later in Germany. During the American Civil War he served in London as a private secretary for his father. After teaching history at Harvard and editing the *North American Review*, he settled in Washington D.C., researching American history (which led to *The Life of Albert Gallatin* and *History of the United States of America*), and making his house a salon of politicians and intellectuals. Works created during this period include two novels, *Democracy* and *Esther*, both of which portray the vicissitudes of ideals in contemporary America through the heroines’ adventures. Throughout his life, Adams struggled to conceptualize the major transformations of American society; this latter, he argued, was losing touch with its republican ideals as a result of capitalism’s increasing social and economic dominance. *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* and *The Education of Henry Adams*, major works that address these questions, were his attempts at develoing a new theory to account for the matrix of history in which the transformations of American society occurred — from the unity of the Middle Ages to the chaos of the twentieth century — but not without an ironical gesture towards his own ignorance. Key Works:*The Life of Albert Gallatin*, 1879. *Democracy: An American Novel*, 1880.  *Esther: A Novel*, 1884.  *History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*, 1889­–91.  *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 1913.  *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918.  *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma*, 1919. |
| Further reading:  (Bush)  (Lears)  (Rowe)  (Samuels and Samuels)  (Harbet)  (History of the United States During the Administration of James Madison) |