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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Edwin H. Sauer

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HENRY JAMES: THE SYMBOLS OF MORALITY IN THE NOVELS OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD, 1881 - 1900

A Dissertation

Submitted

In partial fulfilment of the

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Edwin H. Sauer

M. A. Miami University, 1947

B. S. in Ed., Miami University, 1935

To my father and mother

with honor and love

and

to my nephew

Robert Karl Sauer

born January 5,

1951

with the hope that his generation

will do even greater honor to its

Jacobites

than my own.

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Preface

The purpose of this study of the novels of Henry James can be expressed quite briefly: to investigate the imagery of the stories written between 1881 and 1900 in order to determine whether or not symbolic structures will support the contention that James was a novelist of greater moral and social significance than some recent criticism has judged him to be. I limit the investigation to the years 1881-1900 because the later novels, by which I mean the novels after 1900, when James's art took a distinctly different turn, have lately received an unusual amount of attention, and because, with a few exceptions, James's novels and stories before the publication of The Portrait of a Lady in 1881 seem, to me at least, to be the work of apprenticeship.

My emphasis is meaning rather than imagery, and consequently the arrangement within the chapters presents the data of scholarship before the discussion of the symbols. I am aware of the possible charges that this method exposes me to: I may be accused of having labored to find in the novels an imagery which supports the discoveries I made in the materials outside the James text; I may be admonished that other investigations would reveal different possibilities of meaning. After assuring my reader that my procedure was always to start with the text, I can only refer him to that area and place on him the burden of demonstrating the validity of his objection. In only one case do I feel upon reconsideration of the material that there may be

a metaphorical pattern in addition to the one I present: the symbol of the shoe in The Spoils of Poynton deserves attention which I might have given it. But surely this image will only say again what the symbolism I have found in the story affirms: the dry, sterile, obtuse, grasping nature of a society in which intense competition for household furnishings can determine moral conduct.

No matter how careful one is in preparing an analysis like that of this study, the final results are still academically suspect, I suppose. With all due respect to one's objectivity, professorial comments will undoubtedly suggest that an element of the subjective must inevitably be noticed. I can construct no defense against this charge; it is just and valid. Certainly there is subjective interpretation here. "That's where the human still came in" is the way Mr. Frost puts it somewhere, and I believe that literary study must remain human and, therefore, literary.

I am pleased to acknowledge the percipience and diligence with which Dr. George H. Ford guided this study and read the manuscript. Without the benefit of his sound and comprehensive knowledge of the novel, I could not have brought my investigation to its present order, but Dr. Ford is not to be held responsible for the conclusions which the investigation has prompted. I wish also to thank Dr. P. V. Kreider and Dr. William S. Clark for their careful reading of the manuscript, and the staff of the library of the University of Cincinnati for their eager and intelligent assistance.

It is with deep sorrow that I record my regret that this study will not be read by my former teacher and friend, the late F. O. Matthiessen, the foremost student of James in our time. It is not necessary here to honor the rich humanity of Professor Matthiessen, but I hope that, in some small sense, this thesis will seem to perpetuate his devotion to all that was most distinguished in the history of American culture.

Edwin H. Sauer

University of Cincinnati

April, 1951

CHAPTER ONE

The Moral and Social Earnestness of Henry James

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To speak of a revival of interest in Henry James, as we frequently do at present, is to imply a preceding period of dissatisfaction or neglect. Yet the student of modern fiction is likely to reject this implication as prejudiced or unhistorical, for Henry James has always had his share of perceptive readers and admirers; there have been favorable critical appraisals of James in every generation since the publication of the novels. The writer who can elicit tributes resulting from the penetrating analysis of such distinguished literary figures as William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and William Crary Brownell in his lifetime; Ford Madox Hueffer, Joseph Warren Beach, Percy Lubbock, and Rebecca West in the period immediately following his death; and Edmund Gosse and Pelham Edgar in the early nineteen-twenties, can hardly be thought of as a novel discovery of recent years.[1] There has been a constant audience for

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[1]Tributes from the literary personages listed here can be found in the following works: William Dean Howells, "Mr. Henry James's Later Work," North American Review, CLXXVI, 125-37 (January, 1903); CCIII, 572-84 (April, 1916); also reprinted in The Question of Henry James, F. W. Dupee, ed., (New York, 1945), pp. 6-19; Edith Wharton, A Backward Glance (New York, 1934), pp. 169-96. For the story of the friendship of James and Stevenson, see Janet Adam Smith, ed., Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson, A Record of Friendship and Criticism, (London, 1948); Joseph Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters (New York, 1921), pp. 11-19; William Crary Brownell, "Henry James," in American Prose Masters (New York, 1909), pp. 339-400; Ford Madox Hueffer, Henry James, A Critical Study (New York, 1916); Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New Haven, 1918); Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York, 1920) and Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1921); Rebecca West, Henry James (New York, 1916); Edmund Gosse, Aspects and Impressions (New York, 1922), pp. 17-53; Pelham Edgar, Henry James: Man and Author (New York, 1927).

James's fiction, and it has been an informed and discriminating one.

Our notion of James's temporary eclipse during the late nineteen-twenties and the nineteen-thirties probably arises from our having witnessed then the most sustained critical attacks on his work. It was, of course, a period of abrupt and daring assertions in nearly every sphere of man's activity -- the political and economic as well as the cultural -- and the continued uncertainty of the succeeding decade delayed for a while the restoration of balance and sufficient critical reflection. The thirties were a time when a writer like James T. Farrell could acquire a reputation as a serious literary artist, and plainly there was little room for Henry James in such surroundings. Still, even in those dark years, there were occasions for praise: in 1934 Hound and Horn, a literary monthly, published a Henry James issue which brought forth commentary from Edmund Wilson, Marianne Moore, Francis Fergusson, Stephen Spender, Newton Arvin, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Cantwell, Edna Kenton, Glenway Wescott, and others.[2] Obviously the hostility to James which would have promoted his decline met with some resistance, enabling us to observe again that the opinion of those critics who represent and support most significantly the interests of a society at only a particular moment of its history is not a valid instrument for measuring an author's appeal. The readers of fiction who were reluctant to abandon James prepared the way for critical reaction to James's opponents, and the reaction was not long delayed.

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[2]Hound and Horn, VII, (April: May 1934), pp. 361-562.

The greater part of this study will consist of detailed examinations of James's use of symbols in his novels and stories to demonstrate how such analysis can provide full understanding of his concern with moral problems. In the present chapter, however, an historical review of criticism about James will be presented in order to prepare for the detailed examination. Here the object will be to review briefly the variety of disagreement concerning James's moral and artistic intentions in order that the ultimate conclusions of this study will be seen in proper perspective. Before coming to the matter of symbols, then, it will be necessary to consider whether or not readers have found any moral concern in James's novels and stories.

The disparagers of Henry James have by now been so generally discredited that one raises their names with some sense of dealing in the archaic and obsolete. Vernon Louis Parrington, Van Wyck Brooks, Granville Hicks[3] -- these names seem faded and ineffectual to us now; their strictures have been disposed of by the carefully detailed and genuinely pertinent studies of such critics as F. O. Matthiessen, Yvor Winters, Lionel Trilling, F. R. Leavis, Philip Rahv, L. C. Knights,

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[3]V. L. Parrington, "Henry James and the Nostalgia of Culture," in Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), Vol. 3, pp. 239-41; Van Wyck Brooks, The Pilgrimage of Henry James (New York, 1925); Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition (New York, 1933), pp. 105-24.

Quentin Anderson, and numerous others.[4] These latter men have been in the foreground of what has been called "the James revival" (though somewhat inaccurately, as we have noted above), and they have helped us to understand that much of the adverse criticism of Henry James stems from a failure of imagination or from distressingly limited notions of the nature of reality.

Perhaps the most formidable of those who have written adverse criticism of James -- formidable in the sense that he has had the greatest influence, at least in the academy -- is Parrington, who is the voice of party-line liberalism as it applies itself to the history of American literature. In most of our universities, Parrington's book, Main Currents in American Thought (1930), is considered indispensable reference equipment to survey courses in American literature, and many class lectures are often only quick summaries of his position.

And yet it is doubtful that any commentator on American letters has ever been more persistently in error than Parrington. Hardly any of his judgments remain unchallenged, and every new conflict reveals the over-all inadequacy of his book. His fatal shortcoming is,

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[4]Matthiessen's principal work on Henry James is Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1944), but there are additional entries under Matthiessen's name in the bibliography; Yvor Winters, "Maule's Well or Henry James and the Relation of Morals to Manners," in Maule's Curse (Norfolk, 1938), pp. 169-216. Because of the nature of this thesis, I have had slight opportunity to use Mr. Winters's essay on James, but I should feel seriously delinquent if I were not to mention that it seems far superior to me to all other studies of equal length; Lionel Trilling, "The Princess Casamassima" in The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1950), pp. 58-92; F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (New York, N. D.), pp. 126-72; Philip Rahv, ed., The Bostonians (New York, 1945), Introduction, pp. v-ix; also, Rahv, ed., The Great Short Novels of Henry James (New York, 1944); L. C. Knights, "Henry James and the Trapped Spectator" in Explorations (New York, 1947), pp. 174-89.

as Lionel Trilling has demonstrated, that he had an oversimplified conception of the real world.

> There exists, he believes, a thing called reality; it is one and immutable, it is wholly external, it is irreducible. Men's minds may waver, but reality is always reliable, always the same, always easily to be known. And the artist's relation to reality he conceives as a simple one. Reality being fixed and given, the artist has but to let it pass through him, he is the lens in the first diagram of an elementary book on optics.[5]

When Parrington considered that a writer had "turned away" from this fixed reality, he felt justified in an immediate condemnation of the literary work. Reality to him was the world of the frontier -- the world of physical action, of rugged, everyday idealism, of social and political altruism. This world was hostile to exercises of the mind and imagination, which it could only regard as extravagant, unreal and ultimately useless. Parrington denied the greatness of virtually all the American writers whom a later criticism has extolled, in particular Hawthorne, Melville, and James, leading Professor Trilling to make what can surely be regarded as a just estimate of Parrington's usefulness.

> Parrington said that he had not set up shop as a literary critic; but if a literary critic is simply a reader who has the ability to understand literature and to convey to others what he understands, it is not exactly a matter of free choice whether or not a cultural historian shall be a literary critic, nor is it open to him to let his virtuous political and social opinions do duty for percipience. To throw out Poe because he cannot be conveniently fitted into a theory of American culture, to speak of him as a biological sport and as a mind apart from the main current, to find his

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[5]Trilling, "Reality in America," The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1950), pp. 4-5.

> gloom to be merely personal and eccentric, "only the atrabilious wretchedness of a dipsomaniac," as Hawthorne's was "no more than the skeptical questioning of life by a nature that knew no fierce storms," to judge Melville's response to American life as less noble than that of Bryant or Greeley, to speak of Henry James as an escapist, as an artist similar to Whistler, a man characteristically afraid of stress — this is not merely to be mistaken in aesthetic judgment; rather it is to examine without attention and from the point of view of a limited and essentially arrogant conception of reality the documents which are in some respects the most suggestive testimony to what America was and is, and of course to get no answer from them.[6]

With James, Parrington was particularly severe. He called his chapter "Henry James and the Nostalgia of Culture," and it is, it seems to me, a notable crystallization of Parrington's general position.[7] For one who thought himself a realist, Parrington has written an amazingly impressionistic essay. It develops without reference to a single work of James; there are no concrete illustrations from the text of any one of the novels or short stories to support major points of argument. We read such a statement as "he was a self-deceived romantic, the last expression of the genteel, who fell in love with culture and never realized how poor a thing he worshipped,"[8] and we want to object, from our experience with the whole James, that there did not exist in James's day, a more penetrating critic of "culture." If we have read Henry James thoroughly, if, in particular, we have read carefully the novels and stories written between 1881 and 1900, then we can only be mystified by Parrington's assertion that James "worshipped" the genteel

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[6] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[7] Parrington, op. cit., pp. 239-41.

[8] Ibid., p. 240.

tradition and was blind to its imperfections and inconsistencies. If there did not exist the strong, positive, corroborating evidence of the Notebooks, the Letters, and the autobiographical books to testify to James's constant distress with the evils of his society, we would still have the eloquent testimony of The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, The Reverberator, "Collaboration," "Greville Fane," "Louisa Pallant," "Owen Wingrave," In The Cage, and many other tales. When we read in Parrington that "It was the first mistake of Henry James that he romanticized Europe, not for its fragments of the medieval picturesque, but for a fine and gracious culture that he professed to find there,"[9] we are constrained to vigorous protest against what seems to be Parrington's unfamiliarity with the complete text of James. James's Letters alone will demonstrate quite otherwise, but one does not have to go even that far. In what possible sense is the treatment of Europe in The Portrait of a Lady, The Awkward Age, What Maisie Knew, "A London Life," "The Modern Warning," "The Pupil" romanticized or shown as having "a fine and gracious culture"? The very opposite is true; each of these tales contains as stern an indictment of characteristic European modes of behavior as literature can offer. Edmund Wilson points out that in those novels and stories of James which deal with what has generally been called "the international theme" it is America and the American who usually get the better of it.[10] As Philip Rahv puts it,

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[9] Loc. cit.

[10] Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," in The Question of Henry James. ed. by F. W. Dupee, (New York, 1945), p. 183.

"the truth is that his quarrel with his native land was a lover's quarrel."[11] His disappointment, like Swift's, did not preclude love or enforce detachment. Henry James's long sojourn in England was not exclusively a pursuit of the "culture" of an aristocratic society, and it did not render him insensitive to the virtues of his fellow Americans or incapable of depicting them with realistic accuracy in his novels. Philip Rahv says that "it was for the sake of Europe's historical 'opulence' that he left his native land,"[12] but for the student of James's work the ultimate authority should be a letter which Henry addressed to his brother William on October 29, 1888.

> I can't look at the English-American world, or feel about them any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together that an insistence on their differences becomes more and more idle and pedantic; and that melting together will come the faster the more one takes it for granted and treats the life of the two countries as continuous or more or less convertible, or at any rate as simply different chapters of the same general subject....I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries,) and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized.[13]

Like Goldsmith's Lien Chi Altangi, Henry James was not less a citizen of his native land for being also a citizen of the world. He made of his residence abroad an immense advantage, for it assured the reliability

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[11]Philip Rahv, ed., The Great Short Novels of Henry James, p. viii.

[12]Philip Rahv, "Attitudes toward Henry James," in Dupee, op. cit., p. 279.

[13]Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York, 1920), I, pp. 141-42

of his reporting the contrasts between the old world and the new. James saw the good and bad in both ways of life; he respected virtue and castigated evil irrespective of their geographical settings. Parrington's failure to see this is inexplicable, and it is this failure which makes the startling imperception of his conclusion possible.

> He [James] was concerned only with nuances. He lived in a world of fine gradations and imperceptible shades. Like modern scholarship he came to deal more and more with less and less....Yet how unlike he is to Sherwood Anderson, an authentic product of the American consciousness![14]

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Van Wyck Brooks's study of Henry James (The Pilgrimage of Henry James, 1925) is so well-known as scarcely to need summary here.[15] Its central thesis is that, although there is unquestionable success in the earlier novels of James, the later work (Brooks speaks of The Spoils of Poynton, 1897, as the first novel of the later period) deteriorated because James alienated himself from his native country and thus from the Sacred Fount of his genius.

There are persuasive refutations of Brooks's thesis -- that by Alfred Kazin is perhaps the most thoughtful[16]--but it is interesting to observe the extent to which Brooks himself disagrees with Parrington. His work is detailed and thorough, and though later readers of James have been

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[14]Parrington, op. cit., p. 241.

[15]It should be mentioned that Brooks has done other work on James. Lyon Richardson's Bibliography of James in Dupee, op. cit., p. 283, gives the complete list.

[16]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), pp. 281-83.

disposed to challenge his ultimate conclusions about the last productions of James's career, it is not possible for them to say that those conclusions represent a failure in diligence.

What must be emphasized, and what makes Brooks's study of considerable assistance though of limited general interest to the findings of this thesis, is that Brooks's conclusions apply only to the later work; for the novels and stories preceding The Spoils of Poynton he has unqualified praise. Far from representing James as an aimless aesthete who failed to handle the stuff of reality with any conviction that his books should serve social utility, Brooks, along with Ford Madox Hueffer,[17] saw that James's mission was to civilize America -- to develop the individual American consciousness to the richest and most responsible extent.

> He is the friend of all those who are endeavoring to clarify their own minds, to know their own reasons, to discover their real natures, to make the most of their faculties, to escape from the lot of mere passive victims of fate. His tragedies are all the tragedies of not knowing; and those against whom he directs his shafts are the representatives and advocates of mass opinion and of movements that mechanize the individual. He was the first novelist of the distinctively American line of our day: the first to challenge the herd instinct, to reveal the inadequacy of our social life, to present the light of the highly personalized human being in the primitive community. And James succeeds, where so many later novelists have failed, succeeds in presenting the struggle for the rights of personality -- the central theme of all modern American fiction -- because he is able to conceive personalities of transcendent value.[18]

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[17] Hueffer, op. cit., pp. 61-2.

[18] Brooks, op. cit., pp. 103-4.

Critics of The Pilgrimage of Henry James have been able to demonstrate that Brooks was thoroughly dishonest in that he, as Kazin puts it, "virtually falsified passages from James's own books to 'prove' what he wished to believe."[19] Quotations from the novels are made to stand for James's own views, says Kazin, and excerpts from the Letters and autobiographical books are used without reference to the time at which they were written. There are unfortunate misreadings, Brooks often failing to grasp the full complexity of a passage and thus arriving at conclusions which are quite alien to James's real meaning. Furthermore, Brooks's analysis of the later novels is hasty, and, in a sense, non-literary, for he manifests the greatest impatience with James's interest in method and technique.[20]

Brooks, as an interpreter of Henry James, made the mistake so frequent in his contemporaries: he chose to see the life of art as somehow isolated from common human experience. The assumption is that the artist, by virtue of dedication to his craft, is made incapable of sharing and understanding the everyday concerns of his fellowmen. The life of art and "the life of life" are seen as antitheses; it has been inconceivable to much American criticism that the artist, while

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[19]Kazin, op. cit., p. 288.

[20]For example, Brooks, thinking to discredit James, quotes the remark of H. G. Wells that "James begins by taking it for granted that a novel is a work of art that must be judged by its oneness, judged first by its oneness." (Brooks, op. cit., p. 129.) But surely this view of the novel is the one which criticism has come to accept as the most informed and enlightened one. To attack James for his insistence that each novel must achieve a unity of effect, that, as James wrote in a letter explaining The Awkward Age (a book which Brooks dislikes), the novel must be composed "of presented episodes architecturally combined and each making a piece of the building" (Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 333) is to attack him for his virtues rather than his faults.

engrossed in the production of his poem, his novel, his painting or his symphony, can participate fully in the social realities of the community life; it has not been understood that devotion to his art can illuminate and clarify the problems of cooperative existence. The dichotomy between art and life which some American critics have insisted on is a vestigial frontier distrust of the mind, an unwillingness to allow the significance of any kind of fastidious effort. Art and the material upon which it works exist in a reciprocal relationship with one another -- a writer is more authoritative in the command of his subject when he has most fully controlled the instrument of presentation. What Van Wyck Brooks missed altogether in James is the lesson for all criticism that, in Kazin's words, "the devotion to his craft...had imparted as much moral significance to his art as his art had illuminated hidden meanings in human life."[21]

But the errors of Parrington and Brooks are considerably less objectionable than those of Granville Hicks, who, in The Great Tradition (1933),[22] adds an offensiveness of tone to his treatment of James. One is not sure how much of The Great Tradition its author would now be willing to defend; presumably some of it has been repudiated since it was written when Hicks was a member of the Communist party, which he no longer is. At any rate, the doctrinaire Marxist position is obvious, with Hicks rigidly insisting that all art must be a form of action and

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[21]Kazin, op. cit., p. 288.

[22]Hicks's book had a tremendous vogue in the depression years and was accepted in various quarters as a battle-cry for a new social seriousness in American letters.

that the artist must be "a participant rather than an observer."[23] What this means, supposedly, is that the artist must be committed in his work exclusively to the eradication of social disorders; and so stringent a view can only lead Hicks to the not unexpected celebration of the Muckrakers and John Dos Passos above all other American writers. This is all part of the heresy which insists on seeing the novel as an exact copy of life rather than, like the poem, as an image of life, and it explains Hicks's dismay at discovering that the world of James's novels is not his (that is, Hicks's) world. I should like to look rather carefully at Hicks's comments on James, for they are, in their innocence, strikingly representative of what are to me recurrent aberrations in modern criticism.

Hicks's particular biases can be seen in the manner in which he utilizes the James biography. After observing that James "preached and practiced"[24] the doctrine of the "sanctity and sufficiency of art,"[25] Hicks goes on to say that such a doctrine has never been popular at any time or in any place but that one would hardly have expected an American of the post-Civil War period to be among its recruits. This leads him to assert James's isolation from his fellowmen but, more interestingly, to see the acceptance of that doctrine as being conditioned by James's economic status.

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[23]Hicks, op. cit., p. 109.

[24]Ibid., p. 106.

[25]Loc. cit.

> Only an unrepresentative American of that day could, one feels sure, have belonged to such a company [the adherents to the doctrine of the sanctity and sufficiency of art .] Unrepresentative Henry James, thanks in large measure to his father and grandfather, undoubtedly was. His grandfather had made a comfortable fortune in business, had invested his money wisely, and had left his descendants free to live as they saw fit.[26]

Why "unrepresentative"? If it was possible for American business men of the nineteenth century to make a comfortable fortune, invest their money wisely and thus leave their descendants free to live as they saw fit -- and we have the emergence of the great wealthy American families of the period to prove that it was -- then in what sense is James unrepresentative of his time and out of touch with the historical and cultural developments which came together to assure his family's prosperity? Hicks can only mean that James was unrepresentative of a particular class of men, the men who were not well off; and the corollaries for Hicks would then be two: (1) that a man without means could not possibly be dedicated to the "sanctity and sufficiency of art" and (2) that being "unrepresentative" of that class of men which has to work for its daily bread, James was prevented -- as Hicks says later -- "from throwing himself into any contemporary struggle."[27] The basic assumption underlying Hicks's observations is simply that if one is "unrepresentative" of the working classes -- if fortune has arranged matters for one in such a way that he does not have to earn a livelihood -- then one is incapable of producing any art of usefulness,

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[26] Loc. cit.

[27] Loc. cit.

significance and power. Readers of Henry James's critics know that, in recent years at least, virtually all of the objections to James have been as naive and as arrogant as this one.

Hicks can be downright cruel in his use of the biography of James. Repeating his assertion that James did not take part "in any of the great movements of his day," Hicks writes, "not even in that supreme struggle that had absorbed so many of his contemporaries."[28] Hicks is referring to the Civil War, of course, and the inference is plainly that James's failure to participate was a matter of his own delinquency. The fact is that James was declared physically unfit for military service because of a serious injury sustained in his youth, an injury which gave him, as Percy Lubbock tells us, "many years of uncertain health."[29] However, James did not live apart from the struggle between North and South. His two youngest brothers took part in the fighting, "Wilky receiving a grave wound of which he carried the mark the rest of his life."[30] Readers of the second of James's autobiographical volumes, Notes of a Son and Brother, (1914) [31] know James's recollections of the intensity of the war years and the meaningfulness for him of the military experience of his brothers, and

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[28] Ibid., p. 109.

[29] Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 9.

[30] Loc. cit.

[31] Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (New York, 1914).

such readers remember the eloquence and political sagacity of Henry James's beautiful tribute to the dead Lincoln.[32] Indeed, it is noteworthy that Hicks cannot deny the eagerness of James to take part in another great movement of the last years of his life, World War I. "He threw himself into war activities with the most amazing fervor, in view of his age and the state of his health, and his zeal on behalf of the Allies surpassed the zeal of most Englishmen."[33]

But without reference to what James was writing to his friends about the decadence and vulgarity of England as late as 1914,[34] Hicks goes on to pursue his disparagement.

> It must have been gratifying to him to feel that at last he had identified himself with the people in whose midst he had established himself, and to celebrate his success he became a British citizen. Fortunately death came long before the danger of disillusionment.[35]

Disillusionment in England was hardly possible for the man who had written "A London Life," The Tragic Muse, What Maisie Knew, and The Awkward Age, but it is interesting to note that another writer on James, and not an unreservedly friendly one, Miss Rebecca West, takes an entirely different view of James's war activities.

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[32] Ibid., pp. 429-31.

[33] Hicks, op. cit., p. 120.

[34] See the Letter to Sir Claude Phillips, July 31, 1914, in Lubbock, The Letters, II, pp. 376-78.

[35] Hicks, op. cit., p. 120.

> By innumerable beautiful acts, by kindly visits to French and Belgian refugees and wounded soldiers, by gifts of money and writings to war charities, he raised an altar to the dead who had died for the countries he had always loved at the hands of the country which ever since he was a student at Bonn, he had always loathed.[36]

Hicks is obliged to insist at any cost on James's detachment from social conflict, and thus when he comes to The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, in both of which James's concern with social and political matters is as direct and as full-bodied as that of any of his contemporaries, Hicks must at once declare them failures. And why? Because "in both he was less concerned than usual with the leisure class, and in both he ventured, contrary to his usual practice, into the field of social theories."[37]

This reasoning in circles is quite as pronounced when Hicks attempts to account for the "failure" of The Bostonians. The book could not succeed since "he was quite unfitted because of his ignorance of the fundamental issues in the struggle for feminine independence."[38] Like many other readers of the novel, Hicks has failed to grasp the full complexity of James's treatment, a complexity which is often a matter of what Edmund Wilson called "the ambiguity of Henry James."[39] Certainly it is this ambiguity which Hicks does not allow for in his interpretation of The Princess Casamassima.

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[36] West, op. cit., p. 117.

[37] Hicks, op. cit., p. 113.

[38] Ibid., p. 114.

[39] Wilson, op. cit., passim.

> What he proposed to do was to defend civilization against the attacks of the dispossessed majority by demonstrating that this majority has a stake in the finer things of life, as cultivated by the privileged minority. This thesis forced him to deal not only with ideas that he did not grasp but also with types of character he did not understand. The only way for him to conceal his ignorance was to make his hero, Hyacinth Robinson, completely exceptional both as a member of the working class and as a radical; he did succeed in making Hyacinth plausible, but in doing so he defeated his fundamental intention.[40]

One is disposed for the sake of the argument to accept Hicks's view of what James intended in writing The Princess Casamassima and to overlook the undemonstrated assertion that James was forced to deal with types of character he did not understand (one wonders if Hicks means this to apply to the characters of the novel who are members of the leisure class). But surely it is impossible to reconcile the various parts of Hicks's last sentence. If Hyacinth Robinson could be made plausible in spite of his completely exceptional characteristics as a member of the working class and as a participant in revolutionary activity, then surely James must have seen both in Hyacinth and in the socity of which he was a member a political and economic ambiguity which made fixed positions and carefully defined class lines impossible. How then did he defeat his intention, since Hyacinth's plausible exceptionalness is concrete realization of his stake, as a member of the dispossessed majority, in the finer things of life?

The Princess Casamassima and The Bostonians are difficult

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[40]Hicks, op. cit., p. 114.

books -- in their own way, as difficult as the later novels, and it will not do simply to repeat again and again of them, and always without any kind of substantiation, the dictum of which Hicks is so fond: that they could not be successful "because they involve varieties of experience he that is, James was incapable of understanding."[41]

Such repetition leads Hicks into curious contradictions. Discussing The Tragic Muse, he tells us that "Nick Dormer's political career never seems a real temptation, or even a real alternative, for the reason that the political life of England is never presented to us as a comprehensible and important form of human activity."[42] But of course not; that is precisely James's point -- that the political life of England is neither comprehensible nor important as Nick watches it being practiced. Nick speaks a powerful indictment of how political activities are conducted; success is a matter of whose oratory is most theatrically and sentimentally effective.

> "I speak beautifully. I've got the cursed humbugging trick of it. I can turn it on, a fine flood of it, at the shortest notice. The better it is the worse it is -- the kind's so inferior. It has nothing to do with the truth or any search for it; nothing to do with the effort really to understand or really to discuss -- with intelligence or candour or honesty. It's an appeal to everything that for one's self one despises...to stupidity, to ignorance, to prejudice, to the love of names and phrases, the love of hollow idiotic words, of shutting the eyes tight and making a

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[41] Loc. cit.

[42] Ibid., p. 115.

> noise. Do men who respect each other or themselves talk to each other that way? They know they'd deserve kicking! A man would blush to say to himself in the darkness of the night the things he stands up on a platform in the garish light of day to stuff into the ears of a multitude whose intelligence he pretends he rates high."[43]

It is hard to see how Hicks's political commitments would permit him to reject the revolutionary usefulness of that speech;[44] but reject it he does and goes on to speak of "Nick's vaguely patriotic emotions,"[45] which I, at least, am unable to find any manifestations of in the novel.

Hicks goes on to make other startling contradictions. For example, after asking us to consider "where is such a life led as he describes?",[46] Hicks takes our scorn for granted in offering us James's own answer to the question.

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[43] The Novels and Stories of Henry James, New and Complete Edition (London, 1921-23), XII, pp. 91-2. This is the edition of James's work used throughout this thesis.

[44] There can be no doubt that James had a very low opinion of English politics, at least in the early eighteen nineties. In 1893, in a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson, he is particularly strong in his condemnation: " 'Politics,' dear politician -- I rejoice that you are getting over them. When you say that you always 'believed' them beastly I am tempted to become superior and say that I always knew them so. At least I don't see how one can have glanced, however cursorily, at the contemporary newspapers...and had any doubt of it. The morals, the manners, the materials of all those gentlemen are writ there more large than any record is elsewhere writ, and the impudence of their airs and pretensions in the presence of it revolts even the meekness of a spirit as resigned to everything as mine. The sordid fight in the House of Commons the other night seemed to me only a momentary intermission of hypocrisy. The hypocrisy comes back with the pretended confusion over it." (Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 207.) Hicks does not refer to this letter, which was written just three years after the publication of The Tragic Muse.

[45] Hicks, op. cit., p. 115.

[46] Ibid., p. 117.

> If the life about us for the last thirty years refuses warrant for these examples, then so much the worse for that life;...there are decencies that in the name of the general self-respect we must take for granted, there's a kind of rudimentary intellectual honour to which we must, in the interest of civilization, at least pretend.[47]

There is nothing to be scornful of in that statement. Dr. Johnson, to cite only one other critic, would have approved it. To take certain decencies for granted in the name of the general self-respect is the essence of the civilized community, and no society would get beyond barbarism without a rudimentary intellectual honor to which its artists and its philosophers and statesmen would have, for a certain time at least, to pretend. James could hardly have stated the artist's fundamental obligation more forcefully. Here, however, is Hicks's comment: "But this is the purest romanticism, this writing about what ought to be rather than what is!"[48] What a curious position for the critic attached to a positive program of moral and social reform to have manipulated himself into!

It is not surprising, then, that Hicks's arrogance and self-contradiction lead him into a snobbish pity for James near the end of his remarks. He tells us that James wanted someone to understand him, to show him where "in the universal scheme of things, such a work as his belonged."[49] He wanted, says Hicks, "someone to justify him."[50]

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[47] Ibid., p. 118.

[48] Loc. cit.

[49] Ibid., p. 121.

[50] Loc. cit.

If so, then Henry James has, in recent years, acquired what he wanted, for the world of scholarship and criticism seems more than eager to try to accomplish the task. The writing on James at present is exceeded in amount — as far as American writers are concerned — only by that on Melville; for example, as I write this chapter, PMLA, after publishing two recent articles on James, promises two for the very near future.[51] This quantity of writing not only justifies James, it also justifies itself, for such a great deal of activity can hardly be anything but an assurance that our scholars and critics, determined on conspicuous rewards for their efforts, see the richness of substance that is there. They are not likely to be deterred by Hicks's next comment.

> There have been men who thought they understood James and tried to state the justificationof his career. There has been a kind of James cult. But the majority of readers, however thoughtful and patient, have rejected him.[52]

The majority of serious readers are at present doing nothing of the sort. In the last decade there have been inexpensive reprints of nine of his novels: The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, The Turn of the Screw, The Princess Casamassima, (reprinted in two separate editions), The Bostonians, Daisy Miller (available even in a pocket book edition), Washington Square, The Ambassadors, and, of course,

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[51] Publications of the Modern Language Association. See the issues LXIV, December 1949; LXV, September 1950 and December 1950; LXVI, March 1951. In addition to essays on James, these editions contain, in the announcements of forthcoming articles, titles of essays still to appear.

[52] Hicks, op. cit., p. 121.

The American (which can be secured also in a number of text-book editions.)[53] In addition to the full-length novels, there have been published collections of the novelettes (The Great Short Novels of Henry James, edited by Philip Rahv)[54] and of various categories of novels and short stories (Stories of Writers and Artists and The American Novels and Stories of Henry James, both edited by F. O. Matthiessen,[55] Eight Uncollected Tales of Henry James, edited by Edna Kenton,[56] and The Short Stories of Henry James, edited by Clifton Fadiman.)[57]

Furthermore, it has been reassuring to see that popular media of entertainment have been able to make use of James. Two of his novels -- Washington Square and The Turn of the Screw -- were recently adapted for the commercial theater and as plays, titled respectively The Heiress and The Innocents, had considerable success both in New York and on the road. The Heiress was then made into a motion picture and won virtually all the awards of motion picture drama critics in the year of its appearance. James's shorter novel The Aspern Papers has also been given motion picture treatment.

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[53] The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, The Turn of the Screw, Washington Square, and The Princess Casamassima are now in Modern Library editions. The last named novel was previously re-published in New York by The MacMillan Co., 1948. Both The Ambassadors and Daisy Miller are regularly available in the Harper's Modern Classics Series, Harper and Brothers, New York, and so far as I have been able to determine the most recent edition of The American is that of Rinehart Editions, No. 16, Rinehart and Co., Inc., New York.

[54] Philip Rahv, ed., The Great Short Novels of Henry James, (New York, 1944.)

[55] F. O. Matthiessen, ed., Stories of Writers and Artists (New York, 1945) and The American Novels and Stories of Henry James (New York, 1947).

[56] Edna Kenton, ed., Eight Uncollected Tales of Henry James (New Brunswick, N. J., 1950).

[57] Clifton Fadiman, ed., The Short Stories of Henry James (New York, 1945).

But the most amazing development of all has been Henry James's success on television! There is pleasant irony for devoted readers of James in being able to call attention to the fact that three of his tales — The American, The Ambassadors, and "The Pupil" — have been dramatized on national television channels, the second and third presentations as the result of requests from television owners who enjoyed the first. Surely this does not seem to indicate public rejection of James.

The fault of the criticism of Granville Hicks, like all literary criticism which uses political theory as its exclusive point of reference, is that it fails to deal adequately with the full dimension of ideas. It fails, that is, as Henry James never did, to see all the implications of a given man's historic position. Concepts exist in a state of tension, of action and reaction; however noble and salutary they may be, they are not isolatable from emotion and historic development. To attach oneself to a social concept is not to remove oneself from the realm of doubt and insecurity; if one fails to acknowledge the protean character of all ideas, one has failed in his first responsibility to the particular idea which commands his allegiance. To fail to see that any code of political idealism is a body of fluid principles rather than a fixed, unalterable credo is to fail to understand the dynamics of ideological tension, the inevitability of the conflict of forms, and the cultural necessity of reaction. The trouble with criticism like that of Granville Hicks is that it has been one-dimensional and un-complex. What literary criticism has needed in America in recent years is not more political conviction but more imagination.

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The years 1881-1900 were the most productive years of Henry James's career. He turned out during this time eight full-length novels, half a dozen novelettes and an indeterminate number of short stories. Furthermore, his principal experience of writing for the theater falls within this period; in his collection of The Complete Plays of Henry James,[58] Leon Edel designates the years 1890-1895 as "the dramatic years,"[59] that is, as the time when James's talents were concentrated on dramatic composition. Four collections of critical and reflective essays appeared between 1881 and 1900: Portraits of Places, 1883, Partial Portraits, 1888, Picture and Text, 1893, and Essays in London and Elsewhere, 1893.[60] The stories deal with a wide variety of subject: to this period belong most, though not all, of the stories of the international theme, the stories of the supernatural, the stories of artists and writers, and the stories of severe social criticism. Obviously it is difficult to comment adequately on such a bulk of work; the immense productiveness of the period offers so many aspects of study that, as F. R. Leavis says, "nothing less than a book of formidable length could pretend to adequacy"[61] or, one might add, could do justice to James.

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[58]Leon Edel, ed., The Complete Plays of Henry James (Philadelphia and New York, 1949).

[59]Ibid., p. 5.

[60]Editions of these non-fictional works of James used in this thesis are listed in the bibliography.

[61]Leavis, op. cit., p. 126.

In giving insufficient attention to this period of James's career his critics have unfortunately not done justice to him. Until very recently the major works of the years 1881-1900, with only a few exceptions, have been ignored altogether or dismissed as narratives of slight interest. The Portrait of a Lady, The Turn of the Screw, The Spoils of Poynton, "The Lesson of the Master" — these have been virtually the only stories of the period which have had the scrutiny of critics and general readers alike; The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, The Reverberator, The Tragic Muse, What Maisie Knew, In The Cage, The Awkward Age — these works have had to be re-discovered for a time which has just begun to see how indispensable they are to the total evaluation of Henry James.

It is not difficult to account for the neglect of these stories, particularly on the part of those who want to find fault with James. They are relatively free of the involutions of style and the complexity of structure associated with the last books of James's career — they contain little, that is, of what Edmund Wilson called the "Jamesian gas"[62] — and consequently they lend themselves less easily to attack and parody. Above all, they are "deep" stories — "deep " in the sense of possessing several layers of meaning. The reader of What Maisie Knew, "Owen Wingrave," The Awkward Age, "Lord Beaupre," or (and especially The Turn of the Screw) is never fully

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[62]Wilson, op. cit., p. 182.

satisfied that he has realized all the possibilities of significance in the tales, and the same thing is true of nearly every other work of this period. Unsuspected insights and revelations lie hidden in James's stories, not because it was James's intention to obscure or bewilder but because he insisted on viewing his material from as many angles as the subject suggested. Then, too, there is a sense in which James's story is never fully told. James believed that the act of reading must be a creative response, that the reader should be expected to do part of the job. He is specific about this in the Preface to The Turn of the Screw.

> Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough...and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy...will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.[63]

Not even James's critical readers seem always to have been willing to perform acts of creative reading — this would certainly seem to be true of Parrington, whose judgments on all of the novels and stories are so general as to cover only two pages in Main Currents in American Thought[64] — and, as a result, only the surface meanings

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[63]James, The Novels and Stories, XVII, p. xxiv.

[64]Parrington, op. cit., pp. 239-41. The essay on James appears in the third volume of Parrington's work, the volume left incomplete at his death. Consequently there is the possibility that the remarks on James may have been revised had Parrington himself seen the book through the press. However, the essay on James belongs to the section which is regarded as having been finished, and I see no reason why it is not to be accepted as the final word on James of Parrington's volume.

of the novels have been considered. In dealing with James, critics have often demonstrated a bluntness of perception, an unwillingness to probe into areas which the details of the dramatic narrative must almost certainly have suggested to their imaginations, and consequently they have offered a false picture of James to their public. David Daiches said only a few years ago that "James has been unfortunate in that few critics have discovered how to read him."[65] Only recently has criticism begun to repair the damage of misreadings: in contrast to the errors of Parrington and Hicks, I wish to cite the studies of Alfred Kazin, Philip Rahv, and L. C. Knights[66] as examples of more thorough kinds of critical interpretation.

Kazin tells us that James "had transcended the commonplace meaning of realism."[67] "One could begin to criticize James only at that point where one left off criticizing his contemporaries."[68] James might have been a source of great annoyance to some of his readers and even to the literary world of his time, he might have been "a comic figure to shallow minds,"[69] but, if so, it was because of "a phenomenal ability to wind himself deeper and deeper into the complexities of consciousness."[70]

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[65]David Daiches, "Sensibility and Technique," The Kenyon Review, V, 1943, p. 579.

[66]See notes 4 and 17, this chapter.

[67]Kazin, op. cit., p. 47.

[68]Ibid., p. 49.

[69]Ibid., p. 47.

[70]Loc. cit.

On The Princess Casamassima Kazin makes a quite different judgment from that of Hicks.

> He [James] had no politics, no experience...of poverty and the poor, no sympathy with social revolution; but he was the only American novelist of his time who, illuminating almost by an artist's instinct what the conscious citizen's mind would never understand, invested the whole atmosphere of revolution and conspiracy in The Princess Casamassima with an imperishable significance ....What shrewder prognosis of the embattled future was written in James's generation?[71]

It was James's artistic seriousness which raised him above his contemporaries, which gave weight, power and validity to his work even when his subject was outside the realm of his experience. James's ignorance of the poor and the world of revolutionary activity was compensated for by the ease with which he conducted himself in the realm of the aesthetic imagination. James would have rejected the notion that the facts of one's biography must of necessity condition the degree of authority with which a writer is able to treat his material. If the artist is serious enough and if his imagination is active enough, then he can get a very real impression of experience other than his own. James says this so well in his essay "The Art of Fiction" that the entire passage should be attended here.

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of the consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the

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[71] Ibid., p. 48. The italics are mine.

> mind; and when the mind is imaginative — much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius — it takes to itself the faintest hints of life. It converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair...to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. [James then gives the example of the English woman novelist who presented in one of her novels a completely accurate account of French Protestant youth, after having seen only once a group of young French Protestants at dinner.] The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience....The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to know any particular corner of it — this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience....If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions <u>are</u> experience, just as...they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, 'Write from experience and from experience only,' I should feel that this was a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, 'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!'[72]

The fact that Kazin, like Lionel Trilling,[73] is able to consider <u>The Princess Casamassima</u> the most authoritative account in James's time of the conflict between rich and poor as demonstrated in revolutionary socialist activity is one additional testimony that James himself was one of the people on whom nothing is lost.

<u>The Bostonians</u>, published in the same year as <u>The Princess Casamassima</u> (1886), met with the same lack of sympathy, and Philip Rahv's introduction to a recent edition of the novel shows how much

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[72]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in <u>Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment</u>, eds., Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, Gordon McKenzie (New York, 1948), pp. 48-9.

[73]Trilling, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 58-92.

the public was at fault. James never quite got over his disappointment in the kind of reception which this novel received; in the Letters he returns again and again to the subject, debating for some time with himself before deciding to omit it from the New York edition of his works.[74]

But, as Rahv points out,[75] the novel could not possibly have been warmly received, certainly not in America; it was too far ahead of its time. Its subject and tone were antithetical to everything which the dictatorship of gentility had established, and its fate "was the same as that of Dreiser's early novels and other pioneer works that attempted to cope with the materials of American life in the manner of realistic fiction."[76] That James dared to treat the high seriousness of New England transcendentalism with astringent irony was bad enough, but that he chose so soon after the Civil War to put the expression of that irony in the mouth of a Southern intellectual who could not accept the easy Northern humanitarian idealism -- this was almost equivalent to treason. Furthermore, the treatment of the Olive Chancellor-Verena Tarrant relationship must have made the readers of the novel uncomfortable. Probably, as Rahv says,[77] they were incapable of approaching it in their minds with any degree of candor; still they could not have been insensitive to James's plain indication of the sinister aspects of the

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[74] See the letter to Edmund Gosse of August 25, 1915, in Lubbock, The Letters, II, pp. 496-98.

[75] Rahv, ed., The Bostonians, p. vi.

[76] Loc. cit.

[77] Loc. cit.

relationship and of the clear intimation that Olive Chancellor's interest in the other girl has very little to do with a belief in Verena's tremendous ability to further the cause of feminism. The subject of the book is of the kind that Howells might have found congenial. Yet, Rahv says, "Howell's writing of that time is tepid and weakly romantic in comparison."[78]

> It was James alone who seriously undertook to adapt the techniques and creative outlook of novelists like Balzac and Turgenev to native materials....In The Bostonians....the irony is turned to polemical uses, the polemical note being symptomatic of the social and cultural change precipitated by the War. It brought to a close New England's heroic age, 'the age of plain living and high thinking, of pure ideals and earnest effort, of moral passion and noble experiment.' ....At bottom the criticism of American life expressed in The Bostonians is...that 'in this country the people have rights but the person has none.' This concern with the status of the individual, with defending the integrity of the personality and its right to its own discriminations and its own experience, is the central thread that runs through all of James's fiction.[79]

L. C. Knights states Rahv's conclusion in slightly different terms in an essay titled "Henry James and the Trapped Spectator."[80] Like his editorial associate F. R. Leavis, Mr. Knights prefers the James of the middle period, and he does a careful analysis in his essay of The Portrait of a Lady and In The Cage, both of which belong to the period 1881-1900. The essence of his agreement with Rahv is his view that "from an early period James was interested in persons whose free and normal development -- the development that, given their

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[78] Ibid., p. viii.

[79] Loc. cit.

[80] Knights, op. cit., pp. 174-89.

endowment, one might have expected -- is thwarted by the egotism of others;"[81] and Knights asserts that as James's work proceeded he became more and more concerned with the dilemma of "the trapped, the caged, the excluded consciousness."[82]

Knights acknowledges that there may be a biographical explanation of James's preoccupation with the trapped or isolated creature, that James himself felt excluded from the world of adventure and public dispute, but he insists that such isolation or detachment need not be thought a shortcoming.

> It is ridiculous to speak as if his plight were peculiar and unrelated to a more general predicament. It wasn't merely that he saw more clearly than anyone else, and recorded in his Prefaces, the increasing gulf between the artist and the public of common readers, he senses also the forces that, in his time, were making for 'the awful doom of general dehumanization.' And in his apprehension of the isolation of the individual....he showed himself the first of the 'modern' novelists.[83]

If Knights is correct and the Henry James of the middle period is the first of the modern novelists, a writer who tried in his work to arrest "the awful doom of general dehumanization";[84] if Rahv is right and James's work during the years 1881-1900 has as its central theme the defense of "the integrity of the personality and its right to its own discriminations",[85] and if such a novel as The Bostonians

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[81] Ibid., p. 181.

[82] Loc. cit.

[83] Ibid., p. 189.

[84] Loc. cit.

[85] Rahv, ed., The Bostonians, pp. viii-ix.

sounds a polemical note "which is symptomatic of the social and cultural changes precipitated by the war";[86] if Kazin is right when he calls The Princess Casamassima a "prognosis of the embattled future"[87] unequalled in James's generation and investing "the whole atmosphere of revolution and conspiracy...with an imperishable significance,"[88] then it is impossible to accept the accusations of James's critics when they assert that he has nothing to say about social and political struggles. The renewed attention to the middle period of James's career demonstrates that James was a writer of definite social and moral responsibility committed to a positive stand on many of the matters of public importance in his time rather than a writer who wished to evade issues of public dispute. The re-discovery by critical readers of the formerly neglected novels and stories of the middle period has made it possible for a mature and well-disciplined criticism to proclaim the full value and comprehensiveness of James's work.

iv

Criticism has attempted to arrive at the meaning of James's novels in many ways, although the formalist approach has probably always been the most rewarding. Historical and biographical studies have yielded fresh and important insights, but those who would attempt to see the man and his times in the fiction must always keep in mind

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[86] Ibid., p. viii.

[87] Kazin, op. cit., p. 48.

[88] Loc. cit.

that they are dealing with the most objective of all novelists and that James regarded a too-positive declaration in the work of an author's own position as a violation of artistic propriety. To be sure, James wrote and talked about his work constantly, and we have the Prefaces, the Notebooks, the Letters, the autobiographical books, the critical studies, and the numerous reminiscences of his friends to inform us of the range of his interests and the nature and vigor of his opinions. But the critic who claims to find in the novels of James the explicit statement of the convictions of the author must be very sure of his ground. What James permits one of his characters to say is not of necessity what James himself believed, and although this caution is so obvious as scarcely to need insertion here, critics continue to make the error of hearing the voice of James himself whenever one of the figures is saying something which the date of James's biography would seem to support as James's own view. No less a critic than Stuart P. Sherman makes this mistake when he accuses James of being "a little deficient...in warm fraternal feeling."[89]

> In The Princess Casamassima, one of the rare places in which he permits a view of the dark netherward of society to fall upon the eye of a sensitive observer, this is the reported reaction: "Some of the women and girls, in particular, were appalling — saturated with alcohol and vice, brutal, bedraggled, obscene. 'What remedy but another deluge, what alchemy but annihilation?' he asked himself, as he went his way; and he wondered what fate there could be, in the great scheme of things, for a planet overgrown with such vermin,

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[89]Stuart P. Sherman, "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James," in The Question of Henry James, ed., F. W. Dupee (New York, 1945), p. 72.

> what redemption but to be hurled against a ball of consuming fire?"[90]

And Sherman goes on to make the judgment on James mentioned above.

But it is Hyacinth Robinson, a character in the novel, whose reaction Sherman is distressed by, and there is no warrant in The Princess Casamassima for believing that James permits himself to speak through this unusual young man. Hyacinth's reflections in this passage are exactly appropriate to the kind of person he is, to the kind of background which James gives him — he is surely one of the most successfully dramatized heroes in James's entire galaxy — but that the reader of the novel is justified in believing that his views are those of his creator is very doubtful.

Occasionally we do feel that the speech of a character has been so dramatically arranged as to give it special advantage in the narrative — I think, in this respect, of several of the speeches of The Tragic Muse, in which one feels that James may have been expressing some of his minor irritations with current artistic practice in the wit of Gabriel Nash (though that James is Nash I should certainly deny) and his regard for artistic integrity in the wisdom of Madame Carré — and when we come upon such a speech we are permitted to speculate about the author's relation to the view expressed. But even then the schooled reader of James will restrain himself. He knows that in the James world everything is shown, not told; he does not find Dicken's paragraphs of soliloquy-like exposition or Thomas Mann's long essays in philosophical

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[90] Loc. cit.

speculation. By his knowledge of the fastidiousness and control with which James practiced his art, he is persuaded to guard against any certainty about seeing the author as one of the dramatis personae of the book.

Consequently many critics approach the novels of James formally. They study the tone, the structure, the method of subject-problem analysis, the style, and the language of the work; in accord with James's theories of art they study its unity, its single-ness of effect and then try to ascertain the centrality of the author's vision. Meaning and manner are inseparable in James; subject and form fuse in the condition of all successful art, and the critic can only look at the work from the outside. It is possible for Philip Rahv to speak as he does of the meaning of The Bostonians because the satirical tone of the novel can hardly be missed. It is possible for Alfred Kazin to praise the "shrewdness"[91] of The Princess Casamassima because of the complexity of its structure and the flexibility with which James handled the analysis of its central conflict. Method and technique themselves yield meaning and tell us something about the author and his times: if we are alert we may see the relation of form, symbol, and vocabulary to Zeitgeist, the state of mind and the world condition inherent in the character of personal language, the use of metaphor as Weltanschauung.

The tone, structure, and general organization of the novels of Henry James's middle period have much to tell us about the meaning of the books; these factors are the ones which must support the

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[91]Kazin, op. cit., p. 48.

contention of James's social and moral earnestness. Working with these constituents, the critic of James may come to a valid notion of what James himself stood for, and he can go on to test his findings in the non-fictional writings. Presumably this is a pleasant occupation which can do no real harm to anyone, and some truly profitable observations may result. But it is not really necessary to bring the author in at all. What the book means should be sufficient for our interests — if, that is, they are literary interests — and the more proper function of our investigation is to see how each of the formal elements supplements and re-enforces that meaning. I shall be able to show from my analysis of a selected number of the novels and stories of the middle period that they have serious statements to make about problems of regular human concern, and it will be possible in nearly all cases to demonstrate from entries in James's Notebooks and from comments in his Letters and critical essays that his intentions were such as formal analysis of the works will announce them to have been. Without ignoring other formal considerations, I propose to study the symbolical language of these novels and stories, where I am sure specific clues to the meanings of the novels reside.

Indispensable to the formalist approach to literary art is the conviction that all literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolical; the assumption follows from the scientific study in our time of the symbolical and metaphorical character of all language. The concomitant for the formalist critic, then, is that the exploration of meaning in literature is not complete until a systematic analysis

of its metaphorical and symbolic content has been undertaken. Both the quantity and the quality of the findings of such exploration will always depend on the subtlety and general complexity of the work being studied, which is only another way of saying that the results will be more or less interesting depending on the quality of the author's mind. Thus the student of Henry James's symbolic language does not need to fear that his discoveries will be dull. For one thing, they can serve as effective ammunition to silence the charge that James was socially and morally "thin." The imagery of the tales of Henry James's middle period will attest the scope and the constancy of James's psychical anxiety; his symbols are symbols of morality.

CHAPTER TWO

Symbolic Language as an Instrument of Meaning

i

In his chapter on The Wings of the Dove in Henry James: The Major Phase F. O. Matthiessen discusses James's use of symbols, but he insists that James was no symboliste.[1] James was aware, says Matthiessen, of the French movement, but he had little in common with the French poets. The major difference between his art and theirs is that he did not start with the symbol. "He reached it only with the final development of his theme, and then used it essentially in the older tradition of the poetic metaphor, to give concretion as well as allusive and beautiful extension, to his thought."[2]

This is an important distinction. It is not possible to claim for James the highly conscious symbolic schematization which we find in the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka. In his work the symbols grew out of meaning; they substantiate and re-enforce the central ideational emphasis; they contribute to the tone and texture of the novel. James's symbols are like those of Charles Dickens: the fog hangs over Bleak House to establish dramatically the whole moral atmosphere of the novel; the dust in Our Mutual Friend suggests, with the same force as in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, the sterility and barrenness

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[1] Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1944), p. 71.

[2] Ibid., p. 72.

of the experience of the people in the story; the marshes, which are called "meshes" in Great Expectations, introduce the symbol of the net to suggest the world of crime and violence in which most of the characters of the novel are ensnared. In other words, Henry James, like Dickens, is a symbolist in the sense that every writer since Homer has been a symbolist: setting out to create the art object, he saw reality imaginatively in a series of metaphorical relationships. He was impelled by the structure of his language and the order of the world around him to the practice of figures of speech. He was aware, however, that symbols must be used with great care, and he thought the symbolism of some of Hawthorne's stories excessive.

> In The Scarlet Letter there is a great deal of symbolism; there is, I think, too much. It is overdone at times, and becomes mechanical; it ceases to be impressive, and grazes triviality. The idea of the mystic A which the young minister finds imprinted upon his breast and eating into his flesh, in sympathy with the embroidered badge that Hester is condemned to wear, appears to me to be a case in point. This suggestion should, I think, have been just made and dropped; to insist upon it and return to it, is to exaggerate the weak side of the subject....In such a process discretion is everything, and when the image becomes importunate it is in danger of seeming to stand for nothing more serious than itself.[3]

Nevertheless, James must have realized that the use of metaphor is inescapable in all forms of verbal expression. Anyone who uses language in regular syntactical patterns must rely occasionally on presentational symbols, either deliberately or otherwise. The practice of metaphor can hardly be called an exclusively conscious or intentional

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[3]Henry James, Hawthorne in English Men of Letters, ed., John Morley (New York, 1879), pp. 113-15.

device. John Middleton Murry says that "metaphor is as ultimate as speech itself, and speech is as ultimate as thought."[4] In any work of the creative imagination in language, then, the regular appearance of bold, striking comparisons is to be expected.

But it often occurs that we find that the same metaphor, or a slight variant of it, is repeated throughout the poem, novel or play, or we notice that the metaphors are drawn consistently from the same area of experience and reality; we get, that is to say, a pattern of metaphor, and when such a pattern can be demonstrated we are permitted to speak of the symbolic structure of the work, and of the way in which the language of the piece supports its meaning. There is, furthermore, the kind of literary construction in which a non-metaphorical object keeps recurring so frequently at critical moments of the narrative as to acquire dimension larger than its reality -- a descriptive factor becomes involved in the tone and meaning of the work. The fog in Bleak House, the snow in Joyce's "The Dead" are cases in point, and these stories are said, for this reason, to have symbolic structure.

The impetus to the scrutiny of symbolic language in a literary work is provided in our time by both philosophy and science. Alfred North Whitehead writes of man's need to express himself in symbols.

> Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration: it is inherent in the very texture of human life. Language itself is a symbolism....Mankind, it seems,

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[4]John Middleton Murry, Countries of the Mind, Essays in Literary Criticism (London, 1931), p. 1.

> has to find a symbol in order to express itself. Indeed expression is symbolism.[5]

Thus the initial reason for attention to the symbolism of the novel is simply the fact that the novel makes use of language; and criticism of the novel, says Mark Schorer, "must begin with the base of language, with the word, with figurative structures, with rhetoric as skeleton and style as body of meaning."[6]

No more distinguished support of the initial contentions of this thesis with regard to the importance and significance of symbols could be supplied than that which is to be found in the various writings of Mrs. Susanne Langer.[7] Mrs. Langer has demonstrated the availability of symbols for opening up wide new fields of philosophic speculation; the problem of meaning, which, she says, has all but eclipsed the problem of observation, is a new generative, epistemological theme. "The triumph of empiricism in science is jeopardized by the surprising truth that our sense-data are primarily symbols."[8]

Mrs. Langer deals at length with the artistic symbol, and she rightly warns against any discussion of symbolism in a literary work if the discussion does not see the symbol in relation to the other elements which go to make up the entire work. Furthermore, she feels that

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[5]Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect (New York, 1927), pp. 61-2.

[6]Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy'," The Kenyon Review, Vol. XI, (Autumn 1949), p. 539.

[7]Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York, 1948).

[8]Ibid., p. 16.

artistic symbols are, in a sense, "untranslatable"; "their sense is always bound to the particular form which it has taken. It is always implicit."[9]

> An artistic symbol — which may be the product of human craftsmanship, or (on a purely personal level) something in nature seen as 'significant form' — has more than discursive or presentational meaning: its form, as such, as a sensory phenomenon, has what I have called 'implicit' meaning, like rite and myth, but of a more catholic sort. It has what L. A. Reid called 'tertiary subject-matter,' beyond the reach of 'primary imagination' (as Coleridge would say) and even the 'secondary imagination' that sees metaphorically. 'Tertiary subject-matter is subject-matter imaginatively experienced in the work of art...something which cannot be apprehended apart from the work, though theoretically distinguishable from its expressiveness.'[10]

Such a statement makes clear the immensity of dimension within which a fully comprehensive analysis of artistic symbols in a work of art would have to operate. But in the kind of exercise which this thesis proposes the ultimate objective is apprehension of meaning, and the analysis of symbolic structure is only for the purpose of coming to a better understanding of what the intellectual propositions are which in the novel make a particular kind of symbolic pattern appropriate. Any study of the use of symbols *per se* is likely to be either idle or non-literary, and any study of the symbols to learn more about the author is almost certain to be clinical and suspect. The legitimate literary concern in these matters is to see how the philosophical or political speculations of the author *determined* the

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

metaphor, among other things -- how the author's commitment to a specific body of content imposed a suitable coherence of form. The symbolism of Henry James is not isolatable from any of the other effects of the novel and must be sudied in conjunction with them. The stricture of Professors Rene Wellek and Austin Warren is applicable here.

> In terms of our scheme it [imagery] is a part of the syntactical, or stylistic, stratum. It must be studied, finally, not in isolation from the other strata but as an element in the totality, the integrity, of the literary work.[11]

Obviously this kind of study requires a particularly diligent kind of textual observation; one does not come to conclusions about the symbolic structure of a novel after the first reading. Furthermore, the person who undertakes such a study must be scrupulously clear in the meanings which he assigns to the terms of his investigation and analysis. Terms like metaphor, symbol, and image will occur repeatedly in these pages, and this is a propitious opportunity for defining them.

Aristotle's definition of metaphor in the Poetics has a final kind of validity.

> But the greatest thing of all by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of original genius, since a good metaphor implies the intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.[12]

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[11] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1949), p. 218.

[12] Aristotle, Poetics, in Greek Literature in Translation, eds., Whitney J. Oates and Charles T. Murphy (New York, 1947), p. 659.

Every word of the last subordinate clause is important, especially the epithet "intuitive", which asserts the spontaneous, immediate, and non-inferential cognition of metaphorical relationship. Herbert Read's definition of metaphor seems a particularly accurate modern one.

> It [metaphor] is the synthesis of several units of observation into one commanding image; it is the expression of a complex idea, not by analysis, not by abstract statement, but by a sudden perception of an objective relation. The complex idea is translated into a concrete equivalent.[13]

That metaphor is inevitable in language is obvious; man is scarcely able to communicate without it. So necessary do some metaphors become to everyday speech that they lose their metaphorical quality. When we talk about the "foot of the bed", for example, we are not aware any longer that we have spoken figuratively — we have used what is generally called a "dead" or "faded" metaphor — and Professors Wellek and Warren, following the leads of I. A. Richards, George Campbell, and Hedwig Konrad, insist on a distinction between what Richards calls the "omnipresent principle of language" and the specifically creative metaphor used for emotional effect.[14] It is only the latter kind which is the interest of this study, but it is instructive to call attention to the "faded" metaphor here, because, in most cases, the "faded" metaphors were once poetic and creative; and their continued usefulness attests to the prevailing metaphorical content of all language. But the presence of metaphor in the imaginative use of language, that is, in

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[13]Herbert Read, English Prose Style (London, 1949), p. 25.

[14]Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 201.

literature, is even more marked, the metaphor performing a number of functions necessary to the mental activity of original expression. These functions are specified by Murry.

> Metaphor appears as the instinctive and necessary act of the mind exploring reality and ordering experience. It is the means by which the less familiar is assimilated to the more familiar, the unknown to the known: it 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name', so that it ceases to be airy nothing.[15]

No attempt will be made to differentiate in this study between metaphor and simile. The modern tendency is to use the word metaphor in a general sense to mean both kinds of figure. Read says that simile and metaphor differ "only in degree of stylistic refinement",[16] and, perhaps, as Murry suggests, it would be well to abandon both terms in favor of the more flexible word "image".

> The word "image", precisely because it is used to cover both metaphor and simile, can be used to point towards their fundamental identity; and if we resolutely exclude from our minds the suggestion that the image is solely or even predominantly visual, and allow the word to share in the heightened and comprehensive significance with which its derivative "imagination" has perforce been endowed -- if we conceive the "image" not as primary and independent, but as the most singular and potent instrument of the faculty of the imagination -- it is a more valuable word than those which it subsumes: metaphor and simile.[17]

Murry's suggestion can make for greater economy and precision in literary analysis, but the term "metaphor" cannot be dispensed with

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[15]Murry, op. cit., p. 2.

[16]Read, op. cit., p. 28.

[17]Murry, op. cit., p. 4.

here, even though the word "image" will also be occasionally employed. The words will be used synonymously, and either of the two can be used to make clear the special distinction of the symbol. For the symbol is the metaphor or image used persistently in a piece of literature. The distinction is a purely quantitative one: a symbol comes into being when the metaphor or image recurs repeatedly in the work; and a marked coordination of symbols into an elaborate structural pattern will result in an intricate symbolic system, such as that which we get in the poetry of Yeats's last period.

The claim cannot be made that James designed an elaborate structure of symbols with certain images from novel to novel always representing fixed imaginative concepts. A coherent symbolic system of this sort is more likely to be found in the work of a poet, for the writer of fiction will almost certainly feel that any technique so complex as to require constant reference to preceding stories must eventually defeat the purpose of the single narrative. Writers of fiction, like Henry James, have generally preferred to employ the symbol, either consciously or unconsciously, only as an instrument of meaning — meaning direct and clear. The novelist will eschew verbal obscurity, though at the same time requiring efforts of concentrated attention on the part of his readers. He will use the symbol, as Henry James always did, not as a manifestation of aesthetic trickery or scintillating verbal skill — not, that is, as an indication of how brilliantly something can be said — but as an integral, inseparable part of what was to be said.

ii

Such a study as this thesis proposes to undertake is not without critical precedent. It would be impossible and unprofitable to list here all of the recent studies in the imagery of various writers and historical periods, but a few should be cited to demonstrate the range of activity within which critics who employ the method have been engaged. Everyone knows, for example, Miss Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's study in the imagery of Shakespeare,[18] though not all are agreed that her findings are conclusive. Another monumental study of Shakespeare's imagery, the title of which indicates the author's awareness of the dimensions of the space within which he may properly operate is Shakespeare's Bilder: Ihre Entwicklung und Ihre Funktionen im Dramatischen Werk by Wolfgang Clemen.[19] Clemen's book, appearing the same year as Miss Spurgeon's (1936), surpasses hers altogether in an understanding of what imagery is for. Clemen is concerned with imagery only as a device of dramatic presentation and poetic intention -- as one of the tools of superior craftsmanship. Miss Spurgeon views imagery as a vehicle which conveys the author's personality. English criticism has

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[18]Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery (New York, 1936). I introduce Miss Spurgeon's name with some misgivings, for the academic reputation of her book has been anything but constant. Miss Spurgeon's investigation was exhaustive and informed, but it started from questionable assumptions. Miss Spurgeon wanted to find out something about Shakespeare the man from reading his plays. She was not satisfied to let the accumulation of images in a particular play tell her something about the meaning of that one play; she went on to make deductions about the interests and enthusiasms of Shakespeare's private life. Miss Spurgeon believed that the writer who attempts such a task as she set before herself must be equipped with the very kind of data which is non-existent in Shakespeare's case -- the substantiating authority of biography, letters, notebooks, records, and histories to prove that an author's interests were what the study of his imagery has asserted them to be.

[19]Wolfgang Clemen, Shakespeare's Bilder: Ihre Entwicklung und Ihre Funktionen im Dramatischen Werk, Bonner Studien Zur Englischen Philologie (Bonn, 1936).

produced several studies of Shakespeare's symbolism which stay within the text; two are by G. Wilson Knight,[20] who would prefer his work to be called "interpretation" rather than criticism. Mr. Knight limits himself to the work itself instead of venturing into the hazy geography outside it. Similarly, the study of P. V. Kreider,[21] which makes a careful investigation of the repetition of figures in the plays, draws conclusions which attest Shakespeare's powers of thought and dramatic skill.

Both L. C. Knights[22] and E. M. W. Tillyard[23] utilize their somewhat brief analyses of the symbolic content of Shakespeare in making restrained and persuasive judgments on the plays. These men also know the limits wherein they are privileged to work, and we do not get from them any "disclosures" about Shakespeare the man.

Two shorter studies in the symbolism of the Elizabethan period -- both by critics who have demonstrated their command of the techniques of traditional scholarship -- are "Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance" by Don Cameron Allen[24] and "Shakespeare as a Symbolist Poet"[25] by Cleanth Brooks. Critics who study symbolic patterns

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[20]G. Wilson Knight, Myth and Miracle: An Essay on the Mystic Symbolism of Shakespeare (London, 1929); also, The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies (London, 1930).

[21]Paul V. Kreider, Repetition in Shakespeare's Plays (Princeton, N.J., 1941).

[22]Knights, op. cit. The first four essays in Explorations (New York, 1947) are studies in Shakespeare: "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" "Shakespeare's Sonnets", "Prince Hamlet," "Shakespeare and Shakespeareans."

[23]E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (New York, 1946).

[24]Don Cameron Allen, "Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance," Philological Quarterly, XV (1936), pp. 81-92.

[25]Cleanth Brooks, "Shakespeare as a Symbolist Poet," The Well Wrought Urn (New York, 1947).

have found especially fruitful areas in Shakespeare, but there exist essays on the symbolism of writers in all periods of literary history. A few titles will suffice to show the length to which critical practice has been carried. There are, for example, Helen Flanders Dunbar's comprehensive study of Dante, Mario Praz's discussion of the metaphor of the particularly rich period of the early seventeenth century, Richard Fogle's "Empathic Imagery in Keats and Shelley," Mark Schorer's elaborate dissection of the metaphor of three English novels — Persuasion, Wuthering Heights, and Middlemarch — and Allen Tate's often-anthologized article, "Hardy's Philosophical Metaphors."[26]

A recent book on Milton's imagery, however, falls into customary errors. Theodore Howard Banks in Milton's Imagery[27] tells us that he wants to examine "not the writer's art but his character."[28] Mr. Banks believes that Milton's images "reveal his preoccupations and beliefs, his likes and dislikes, his knowledge or ignorance, his experience or lack of it, in short his personality."[29] The book undertakes "to explore, through an analysis of the subject matter of Milton's images, the various aspects of his complex character."[30] The faultiness of Banks's findings

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[26]Helen Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in The Divine Comedy (New Haven, 1929); Mario Praz, Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery, Studies of the Warburg Institute, III (London, 1939); Richard H. Fogle, "Empathic Imagery in Keats and Shelley," PMLA, LXI (1946), pp. 163-91: Mark Schorer, op. cit., Allen Tate, "Hardy's Philosophical Metaphors" in Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, eds., Schorer, Miles, McKenzie, (New York, 1948), pp. 182-7.

[27]Theodore Howard Banks, Milton's Imagery (New York, 1950).

[28]Ibid., p. xii.

[29]Loc. cit.

[30]Loc. cit.

have been carefully demonstrated in a review of the book prepared for Modern Language Notes but as yet unpublished by F. Michael Krouse,[31] but I want to repeat my emphasis here that such a study as that of Banks starts from questionable assumptions, since it uses the imagery apart from the total work which alone gives it significance. The validity of the findings of both Miss Spurgeon and Mr. Banks could be tested, it seems to me, only in the psychological laboratory.

There are innumerable other studies of imagery, to be sure — far more than this thesis has the space to list — but certainly a sufficient warrant has been provided for a similar attention to the novels of Henry James's middle period. So conscious an artist as James was certain to make use of as many traditional devices of literary composition as he had assimilated, and that we shall find a wealth of symbolism in his work can be taken for granted. But, of course, the justification for the study of the imagery of any writer must finally be demonstrated by the results — specifically by the light which an analysis of symbols throws on the meaning and coherent wholeness of the work.

It should be apparent from what has gone before that no claim is made here that the method of approaching the meaning of a literary work through investigation of its symbolic structure will or should supplant more traditional methods of inquiry. The study of the symbols in a novel has obvious limitations; for example, it can tell us

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[31] I wish to acknowledge the kindness of Dr. Krouse in permitting me to see this review in advance of its publication in Modern Language Notes.

virtually nothing about the sources of both the form and the content of the novel and not very much about the cultural milieu out of which the work grew. Consequently the study of patterns of metaphor is not, in any sense, a substitute for other forms of critical and scholarly activity, all of which can throw light on a given text.

Neither, however, can the critic or scholar who wants to do a really thorough analysis of a work of fiction dispense altogether with attention to the symbols of the story. Awareness of symbolic structure in a work will help us to see not only what the ideas of a novel were but also the degree of clarity and understanding which the author brought to the expression of those ideas. The study of the symbols of a novel is more than an exercise in interpretation; it is part of the duty of evaluation.

The purpose of any kind of textual analysis is critical judgment, and the study of symbolic language as an instrument of meaning must clarify and establish the degree of an author's accomplishment. The success with which the symbolic structure of a novel joins in the central integration of a novel's parts to assert in a positive and unmistakable manner the ideas of the work is the ultimate interest of the kind of examination of the novels of Henry James which this thesis undertakes. An immediate demonstration of the method may help to elucidate the contentions of what has gone before in this chapter.

iii

In the Preface to The Aspern Papers (1888) Henry James speaks of the difficulty of social intercourse in Italy, which is the scene of his short novel.

> We peep at most into two or three chambers of their hospitality, with the rest of the case stretching beyond our ken and escaping our penetration. The pious fiction suffices; we have entered, we have seen, we are charmed. So, right and left, in Italy -- before the great historic complexity at least -- penetration fails; we scratch at the extensive surface, we meet the perfunctory smile, we hang about in the golden air.[32]

Interpreting the novel, a recent critic speaks of it as a story which "tells of a deep duel between a modern democratic violator of the private lives of famous folk and a late-surviving representative of the traditional aristocratic thesis that constituted privacy is a defensible and an inalienable luxury -- and the winner of the duel is the aged lady."[33] Thus both the setting and the theme of the novel suggest the difficulty of penetration -- of getting through something which is hidden or withdrawn.

As James tells us in the Preface, the novel had considerable basis in fact -- or at least in a legend which was passing for fact.[34] Jane Clairmont, the half-sister of Mary Godwin Shelley, had retired to Florence, Italy, and had lived there until she was quite old, her only companion a younger female relative, herself middle-aged. The legend had it that the old lady possessed certain valuable papers of Shelley's, papers eagerly sought by the whole literary world but most actively by an ardent American Shelleyite who, in order to gain possession of the documents which, by the way, the old lady had persistently refused to

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[32]James, The Novels and Stories, XVII, p. vi.

[33]Osborn Andreas, Henry James and the Expanding Horizon (Seattle, 1948), p. 147.

[34]James, The Novels and Stories, XVII, p. vii.

show to other seekers, became a lodger in the large bare Italian house which Jane Clairmont and her companion inhabited. Beyond this point the legend was offensive to James.

> It remained in a manner interesting, but became to my ear a trifle coarse, or at least rather vague and obscure. It mentioned a younger female relative of the ancient woman as a person who, for a queer climax, had had to be dealth with; it flickered so for a moment and then, as a light, to my great relief, went out.[35]

James follows the details of the legend very carefully, however. The narrator of his story is the ardent Shelleyite (the poet of James's story is called Jeffrey Aspern), and he persuades the old lady and her niece — called Miss Juliana Bordereau and Miss Tina Bordereau in the novel — to take him into their almost empty old Florentine home as a roomer. Miss Juliana agrees to his proposal, not knowing the real intention behind his request, because she fears that she is near death and wants to leave her niece somewhat provided for financially, since she doubts the girl's full competence to take care of herself and also apparently feels some remorse for having withdrawn the girl so completely from human society that Miss Tina has lost poise and social ease. Therefore, she accepts the lodger only if he is willing to pay an exorbitant rent, and this he willingly agrees to do because he knows the great value of the papers he is seeking.

Inside the house he is at first almost completely ignored by the ladies, and it is only gradually that he acquires a tenuous friendship with Miss Tina. Eventually, however, Miss Juliana indicates her

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[35] Ibid., p. ix.

willingness to talk with him occasionally, and the literary biographer is struck with the intensity of what he considers her vulgar greed for the rent he pays and also with her desire that he and Miss Tina should be more often in one another's company. At the old lady's suggestion he takes Miss Tina on a tour of the city which she had long forsaken, and he reveals to her the true reason for his sojourn in Florence. She assures him that her aunt does indeed have many valuable Aspern papers but that they are kept locked and hidden and that she, Tina, does not know where they are or how they could ever be approached. She becomes his partial confederate, however, and promises to do what she can to prevent any destruction of the valuable documents. Meanwhile Miss Juliana learns that he is a literary biographer.

Just as the gentleman's money is beginning to run low and he is getting desperate to complete his mission, Miss Juliana becomes ill. She lies almost lifeless in an inner room of the apartment of the two ladies, and entering the outer parlor with Miss Tina one night he becomes convinced that the papers are hidden in a large desk which it seems possible for him to open without great difficulty. When Miss Tina leaves the room momentarily, seeming to invite his examination of the room, he begins his inspection of the desk, though he intends only to look and not to take. He is aware almost at once that he is being observed.

> I looked over my shoulder. It was a chance, an instinct, for I had really heard nothing. I almost let my luminary drop and certainly I stepped back, straightening myself up at what I saw. Juliana stood there in her

> nightdress, by the doorway of her room, watching me; her hands were raised, she had lifted the everlasting curtain that covered half her face, and for the first, the last, the only time I beheld her extraordinary eyes. They glared at me; they were like the sudden drench, for a caught burglar, of a flood of gaslight; they made me horribly ashamed. I shall never forget her strange little white tottering figure, with its lifted head, her attitude, her expression; neither shall I forget the tone in which as I turned, looking at her, she hissed out passionately, furiously:
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> "AH you publishing scoundrel!"[36]

The gentleman goes away from Florence for a short time and during his absence Miss Juliana dies and is buried. When he returns to the Bordereau place, he is met by Miss Tina who informs him that the papers are still intact and that there are quite a number of them, more than she realized. But they are not to be passed on to him except on a condition which she plainly infers. Her aunt had been trying to tell her something in the last hours of her life, Miss Tina declares, and the gist of Miss Juliana's intention was that it would be quite all right to pass the papers on to the lodger if he were a "relation" of Miss Tina's. The pathetic woman blurts out her idea to the astonished man.

> "If you weren't a stranger. Then it would be the same for you as for me. Anything that's mine would be yours, and you could do what you like. I shouldn't be able to prevent you -- and you'd have no responsibility. "[37]

Overcome with shame and distress, she bursts into sobs, "I'd give you everything, and she'd understand, where she is -- she'd forgive me!" [38]

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[36] Ibid., p. 104.

[37] Ibid., p. 117.

[38] Ibid., p. 119

Tina tells her uncomfortable auditor, who can only stammer out that such an arrangement just "wouldn't do" and goes out into the lagoon in a gondola to overcome his embarrassment. The next day when he sees Miss Tina again, not willing to agree to her condition but feeling sure that he can invent some way to keep himself free and still gain possession of the papers, he is told that she has burnt them "one by one, in the kitchen. "[39] Thus the attempt to penetrate that which has been hidden and kept from view has failed, and the dark secret of the letters remains unknown.

In the figurative language of the novel there is a corresponding "darkness." The pattern of metaphor employs the image of a mask or veil. The contrast of light and darkness begins with the first pages of the novel, and the concrete image of the mask is used for the first time at the end of Chapter One when Mrs. Prest, the lady who suggests the disguise of his entering the Bordereau home, comments on the meticulousness with which he has prepared himself for the adventure. "Certainly you've the courage of your curiosity. But it will be awkward about your letters; they won't come to you in that mask."[40] After this initial use of the image, I am able to count fifteen later uses, either of the word itself or of the "masking" idea in the reference to veils, hoods, shutters and shades, and all within the mere 120 pages of the text which I am using. There are, to be sure, other instances of metaphor in the narrative. Early in Chapter Two we

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[39] Ibid., p. 125.

[40] Ibid., p. 12.

find the sentence "I had drawn her by an invisible thread",[41] but the only other use of this image occurs in the final chapter of the tale when James has his narrator write, "I was almost awestricken by the astuteness with which the good lady found herself inspired, transparent astuteness as it was and stitching, as the phrase is, with white thread."[42] But two uses of an image do not constitute a pattern of sufficient interest, and we can abandon any further inquiry into the extent to which this figure develops a symbolic structure. Similarly in Chapter Two we find a metaphor from music. "I had now struck the note that translated my purpose, and I needn't reproduce the whole of the tune I played."[43] But one looks in vain for any repetition of this figure throughout the narrative.

It is only through the repetition of the mask metaphor that we have a symbolic statement of the central meaning of The Aspern Papers, and it is interesting to select some examples of the use of the image for illustration. After the initial use of the mask, the suggestion of something veiled or hidden reappears in Chapter Two in a less positive form as the maid-servant of the Bordereau house attends the narrator. James employs what can possibly be thought a variant of the mask as he writes that she was "very young and not ugly and wore clicking pattens and a shawl in the fashion of a hood,"[44] and in the same chapter it is

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[41] Ibid., p. 17.

[42] Ibid., p. 118.

[43] Ibid., p. 19.

[44] Ibid., p. 14.

significant that the first act of the narrator in the old dark house is that he "threw open the shutters of one of the divisions of the wide high window."[45] Wishing to penetrate the darkness of that which is hidden, he brings in light.

A startling use of the metaphor occurs with the introduction into the story of Miss Juliana. "Then came a check from the perception that we weren't really face to face, inasmuch as she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which served for her almost as a mask."[46] Throughout the story, except for once, Miss Juliana is never to be without this green shade; she sees and her own eyes are seen only in the moment when she discovers the lodger attempting to enter her desk. The green shade, or mask, is never forgotten when Miss Juliana is on the scene; it establishes the darkness of her motive as well as the darkness of her physical situation and of the hidden papers. Almost immediately after he brings the mask into the story for the second time James carries the figure to what would seem to be its ultimate and most severe variation.

> I believed for the instant that she had put it on expressly, so that from underneath it she might take me all in without my getting at herself. At the same time it created a presumption of some ghastly death's head lurking behind it.[47]

As Miss Juliana and her lodger discuss the financial arrangement of his stay in the old Italian place, James has his

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[45] Ibid., p. 18.

[46] Ibid., p. 21.

[47] Ibid., p. 22.

narrator say that "her baffling green shade continued to cover her attitude,"[48] and he feels confident that "the Misses Bordereau would take none but the most veiled interest in my proceedings."[49] The shutters of the house are used as an expansion of the darkness which the mask image has introduced. The old ladies live behind masked windows, apparently passing their days in the dark. "Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in the probability that, though invisible themselves, they kept me in view between the lashes."[50] There is further suggestion of the hood — or, for that matter, of the shade and mask — when the narrator tells Miss Tina that "You and your poor aunt are worse off than Carmelite nuns in their cells,"[51] and the image is used for precise dramatic statement when we are told that "Juliana had forborne to lift for innocent eyes the veil that covered the temple of her glory."[52] Later the green shade is spoken of as a "mystifying bandage"[53] and the darkness which surrounds Juliana receives additional emphasis when the narrator writes of her that she "looked at me as from the mouth of her cave."[54]

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[48] Ibid., p. 26.

[49] Ibid., p. 31.

[50] Ibid., pp. 40-1.

[51] Ibid., p. 49.

[52] Ibid., p. 54.

[53] Ibid., p. 61.

[54] Ibid., p. 79.

Explicit use is made of the image as the old lady comes to her sick bed. The narrator of the tale follows Miss Tina into her bedroom where she lies wrapped in darkness.

> I remember that what I said to her as I stood for a moment beside the old woman's bed was: "Does she never show you her eyes then? Have you never seen them?" Miss Bordereau had been divested of her green shade, but -- it was not my fortune to behold Juliana in her nightcap -- the upper half of her face was covered by the fall of a piece of dingy lace-like muslin, a sort of extemporised hood which, wound round her head, descended to the end of her nose, leaving nothing visible but her white withered cheeks and puckered mouth, closed tightly and, as it were, consciously.[55]

Only in the single moment when she discovers her lodger trying to open her desk does Juliana appear without her mask. "Juliana stood there in her night-dress, by the doorway of her room, watching me; her hands were raised, she had lifted the everlasting curtain that covered half her face, and for the first, the last, the only time I beheld her extraordinary eyes."[56]

But the use of the symbol is not dropped with the death of Juliana. Coming back to the Bordereau place after the funeral, the literary biographer finds Miss Tina, and there is a suggestion of the hood -- perhaps even of the mask -- in her appearance. "Her white face, in the frame of her mantilla, looked longer, leaner than usual,"[57] and as she begins to reveal the conditions under which she will present

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[55] Ibid., p. 92.

[56] Ibid., p. 104.

[57] Ibid., p. 108.

the Aspern papers to him, the narrator notices that her face "had taken so very odd, so strained and unnatural a cast."[58] That is, he is not looking at the real countenance of Miss Tina but at a contortion of it; he is looking, in short, at a mask. Miss Tina, following the lead of her aunt, has learned to mask the dark aspect of her intention. The painfulness of having to watch the poor spinster as she breaks down in revealing to him the gesture which she demands in compensation for surrendering the documents causes the lodger to become conscious of changes in his own facial expression, as though he too must mask himself. "She must have been conscious, however, that though my face showed the greatest embarrassment ever painted on a human countenance it was not set as a stone, it was also full of compassion."[59]

There is a splendid contest of conflicting shades as the story closes. After rejecting her advances, the narrator turns to Miss Tina the next day, not fully aware of what his attitude toward her is to be. He finds her greatly changed as a result of his rejection; all darkness has been dispelled.

> She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic. It beautified her; she was younger; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This trick of her expression, this magic of her spirit, transfigured her.[60]

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[58] Ibid., p. 115.

[59] Ibid., p. 119.

[60] Ibid., p. 125.

But it is only for a moment. She lets him know immediately that she has burned the papers -- all of them; and so the darkness which the possession of Jeffrey Aspern's secrets has always engendered in the possessor returns to overwhelm the narrator as the manifestation of a lack of generosity.

> The room seemed to go round me as she said this and a real darkness for a moment descended on my eyes. When it passed Miss Tina was still there, but the transfiguration was over and she had changed back to a plain dingy elderly person.[61]

The narrator of the story "scarcely able to bear his loss",[62] returns to his native precincts without the papers which had been the sole objective of his association with the two ladies. The secret of the Aspern papers is forever masked.

Now it is obvious that the symbolism plainly supports and is inseparable from the theme of the story -- the search to discover the secret of the hidden papers. But this would be a minor and scarcely remarkable function of the symbolism if it were the only one. A more careful scrutiny of the use of the mask metaphor will indicate that it is the instrument of a meaning which is not discernible in the bare details of the narrative progression.

Mr. Andreas is right when he sees The Aspern Papers as a comment on two conflicting ways of life, but his interpretation is an

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[61] Ibid., p. 126.

[62] Loc. cit.

under-reading of the text.[63] For if the novel is the story of "a deep duel between a modern democratic violator of the private lives of famous folk and a late-surviving representative of the traditional aristocratic thesis that constituted privacy is a defensible and an inalienable luxury",[64] then an ironic treatment of James's first-person narrator was surely demanded. Since he is not handled ironically, I think we must accept without question the sincerity of the narrator's conviction that the Aspern papers belong to the world. There is no judgment in the story on the professional aggressiveness of the young man; he is the bringer of light into a world of darkness, and if his variety of light happens to glare in the Bordereau place, the reason is that the masks of the two ladies have separated them too decisively from life.

Henry James, to be sure, was never the friend of violators of human privacy, but neither was he hospitable to the kind of self-imposed seclusion which would require a celebrated lady who lived only in the past of her peculiar kind of glory to deprive another person, in this case the niece, of the minimum opportunity for self-realization. If there is judgment in The Aspern Papers, it is a double judgment; though it may be improper for the young man to probe into the secrets of the past, it is even more objectionable that Miss Juliana should deny herself an equilibrium of responsibility to both past and present.

This interpretation is made necessary, it seems to me, by

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[63] Andreas, op. cit., p. 147.

[64] Loc. cit.

the final events of the story, with the application of the mask symbol to Miss Tina. Having come into the possession of her aunt's papers, Tina has also come into the possession of the mask; and just as the mask represented in Miss Juliana a failure in generosity and consideration, so now it must work to signify the selfishness of Miss Tina's intention to profit from them even at the cost of a violation of the personality of another. What she is counting on is that the young man will want the papers so badly that he will agree to her ungenerous conditions. This is why her face "had taken so very odd, so strained and unnatural a cast."[65]

On the day after his refusal, however, he finds her greatly changed; "her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic."[66] The selfishness of the previous day is gone, she seems "transfigured."[67] For a moment it occurs to the young man that he might indeed be able to pay her price. The mask has disappeared; she seems the soul of generosity.

But a moment later she tells him that she has burned the papers; she was incapable of making him the generous, charitable and humanely considerate gift of them; Miss Tina has been transformed into another Miss Juliana — she will isolate herself wholly now from communion with others, but her seclusion will be even more desolate and shadowy than was her aunt's for she has no memories and no papers of her own. She has been utterly victimized by Miss Juliana's greed, and her end is

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[65] James, The Novels and Stories, XVII, p. 115.

[66] Ibid., p. 125

[67] Loc. cit.

darkness. "As she said this...a real darkness for a moment descended on my eyes," and when the darkness had passed, the transfiguration which the young man had noticed in her when it seemed she might selflessly surrender the papers was gone; "she changed back to a plain dingy elderly person."[68]

iv

If this interpretation of The Aspern Papers holds, then it can be seen that the symbolism of the tale is a vehicle which carries a highly moral statement, nothing less than a denunciation of any restriction of the rights of an individual personality. The censure of Miss Juliana for the self-indulgence which causes her to prevent Miss Tina's chance for experience until too late is unmistakable, I think; the greedy desperation to which they both finally are driven stems from her renunciation of the duties of kindness. This is another instance in the work of Henry James of what Rahv calls, as we have already seen, the "concern with the status of the individual, with defending the integrity of the personality and its right to its own discriminations and its own experience,"[69] which is the "central thread that runs through all of James's fiction."[70] A more laudable concern for the writer of fiction can hardly be imagined, but it is

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[68] Ibid., p. 126.

[69] Rahv, ed., The Bostonians (New York, 1945), pp. viii-ix.

[70] Loc. cit.

only one, it seems to me, of a number of moral themes which appear persistently in the novels of the middle period of James's career, all of which can best be ascertained through an inspection of imagery. Of these themes, there are four major moral concerns:

1. James's distress with the growing decadence of society as he observed it and his repugnance when faced with the prevailing vulgarization of taste.

2. James's anxiety over the change in the status of women and his willingness to deal with the full moral and psychological implications of the alteration.

3. James's preoccupation with the question of whether or not art could offer a legitimate refuge in a socially disordered world, and his apparent conclusion that the life of art forces an almost intolerable loneliness on the artist, which is nevertheless the strength of his art.

4. James's view of the good life, which he saw as the most nearly complete response possible to the varieties of experience, as the individual's willingness to explore and endure all the implications of one's destiny, and as the nearly stoical moral earnestness of accepting without protest the full consequences of one's decisions.

It is with the symbols which convey these moral attitudes in the novels which James wrote during the years 1881-1900 that this thesis proposes now to deal.

CHAPTER THREE

The Decadence of Society and the Vulgarization of Taste

i

There are astonishing revelations in the letters of Henry James, one of the most unexpected being that though he chose to live in England, James was never blind to the faults of his adopted country. He repeatedly made severe indictments of British politics and society. Through the seventies and eighties James was sharply aware of serious social irregularities, the major one of these being for him the failure of British aristocracy to accept the obligations of a ruling class. The first note of dissatisfaction in Lubbock's edition of the Letters is to be found in a piece of correspondence addressed from London to Miss Grace Norton on August 7, 1877. James laments England's lack of spirit in international affairs.

> I am not one of the outsiders who thinks [sic] that the "greatness" of England is now exploded; but there mingles with my interest in her prospects and doings in all this horrible Eastern Question a sensible mortification and sadness. She has not resolutely played a part -- even a wrong one. She has been weak and helpless and (above all) unskilful; she has drifted and stumbled and not walked like a great nation. One has a feeling that the affairs of Europe are really going to be settled without her. At any rate the cynical, brutal, barbarous pro-Turkish attitude of an immense mass of people here...has thrown into vivid light the most discreditable side of the English character. I don't think it is the largest side, by any means; but when one comes into contact with it one is ready to give up the race.[1]

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[1] Lubbock, The Letters, I, pp. 55-6.

James's disappointment is obvious there; it is so sharp as to allow him the bitterness of his adjectives "cynical, brutal, barbarous"; but in December of the same year, in another letter to Miss Norton, he is even more severe, going so far as to speak of England's "decline." Addressed from Paris, James's letter first calls attention to continental matters, and then makes his comment on England.

> It remains to be seen how England will take the Russian success. But one has a feeling now -- to me it is a very painful one -- that England will take anything; that over-cautious and somewhat sordid counsels will always prevail. On the continent, certainly, her ancient prestige is gone; and I almost wish she would fight in a bad cause, if only to shew that she still can, and that she is not one vast, money-getting Birmingham. I really think we are assisting at the political decadence of our mighty mother-land....But I must say that even the "decline" of England seems to me a tremendous and even, almost, an inspiring spectacle, and if the British Empire is once more to shrink up into that plethoric little island, the process will be the greatest drama in history.[2]

In all of James's writings there is scarcely a more interesting document, yet how different the attitude from what the attitude of Henry James is commonly supposed to have been. Certainly it is not the manner of a man deficient in social responsibility, and, in the light of such material, one is at a loss to understand the accusation that James "romanticized" England. The criticism of modern commercialism is not blunted; James saw in England the debilitating effects of materialistic enterprise; it had robbed a nation of its heroic nobility, and the last

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[2] Ibid., p. 58.

indication of that nobility would be seen only in England's fall. The decline is an even closer reality as James writes apprehensively to Miss Norton on January 24, 1885.

> The possible malheurs -- reverses, dangers, embarrassments, the "decline", in a word of old England, go to my heart, and I can imagine no spectacle more touching, more thrilling, and even dramatic, than to see this great precarious, artificial empire, on behalf of which, nevertheless, so much of the strongest and finest stuff of the greatest race (for such they are) has been expended, struggling with forces which perhaps, in the long run, will prove too many for it. If she will only struggle, and not collapse and surrender and give up a part, which, looking at Europe as it is today, still may be great, the drama will be well worth watching from [such] a good, near standpoint as I have here.[3]

James's fear that England would not struggle came obviously from his very unflattering view of the British aristocracy during this period. Criticism of a social class could hardly be more bitter than that of the English upper class which appears in a letter addressed to Charles Eliot Norton from Milan on December 6, 1886. James wrote a scathing attack.

> The subject of the moment, as I came away, was the hideous ----- divorce case, which will besmirch exceedingly the already very damaged prestige of the English upper class. The condition of that body seems to me in many ways very much the same rotten and collapsible one as that of the French aristocracy before the revolution -- minus cleverness and conversation; or perhaps it's more like the heavy, congested and depraved Roman world upon which the barbarians came down. In England the Huns and Vandals will have to

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[3] Ibid., p. 114.

> come up — from the black depths of the (in the people) enormous misery... At all events, much of the English life is grossly materialistic and wants blood-letting.[4]

The voice of that letter resembles the voice of a Swift or a Voltaire or even that of a modern revolutionary, and it is the voice of a number of James's novels and stories of the middle period. The letter to Norton is an explicit statement of what became the major theme in most of the novels which James published between 1881 and the end of the century: The Princess Casamassima, The Tragic Muse, The Spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age. The sense of James's interest in social problems which we get from this letter and the novels and stories of the same period simply does not square with the notion of James presented by Parrington and Hicks.

Percy Lubbock insists[5] that, as James grew older, he tempered this criticism until, with the outbreak of World War I, he was writing of the need to perpetuate English institutions as they had always been, and of course it can be shown that James's impatience with the English did not blind him to their virtues at any time. "Considering that I lose all patience with the English about fifteen times a day," James wrote to Charles Eliot Norton on November 13, 1880, "and vow that I renounce them forever, I get on with them beautifully and love them well."[6] For him the English remained "the great race — even at this

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[4] Ibid., p. 124.

[5] Ibid., p. xxv.

[6] Ibid., p. 74.

moment of their possible decline."[7] The English character had been the product of a wide variety of shaping forces. "I think it takes more to make an Englishman, on the whole, than to make anyone else — and I say this with a consciousness of all that often seems to me to have been left out of their composition."[8]

Lubbock would have us see James's quarrel with the English as something of a lovers' quarrel, and certainly it is true that James seems to lose sight of a number of the horrors as his years of residence in the British Isles accumulate. And yet as late as July 31, 1914, less than two years before his death, he wrote from Rye to Sir Claude Phillips the most vitriolic criticism of all. This is the tone of a man who could see in England, through the richness and comprehensiveness of his education and experience, the pervasive corruption of those forces of material wealth and its consequent vulgarity that had driven him from his home land. For the final truth is not that James left America; he was driven out by the crass Gilded-Age commercialism which had incensed Henry Adams and Mark Twain. James's letter to Sir Claude -- as Alfred Kazin says of The Princess Casamassima -- is a "shrewd prognosis of the whole embattled future."[9]

> With it all too is indeed the terrible sense that the people of this country may well -- by some awful brutal justice — be going to get something bad for the exhibition that has gone on so long of their huge materialized stupidity and vulgarity. I mean the enormous national sacrifice to insensate amusement, without a redeeming idea or a generous passion, that has kept making one ask one's self, from so far back, how such grossness and folly and blatancy could possibly

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[7] Ibid., pp. 74-5.

[8] Ibid., pp. 74-5.

[9] Kazin, op. cit., p. 48.

> not be in the long run to be paid for. The rate at which we may witness the paying may be prodigious -- and then no doubt one will pityingly and wretchedly feel that the intention, after all, was never so bad -- only the stupidity constitutional and fatal. That is truly the dismal reflection.[10]

The same convictions are to be found in the Notebooks. One of the most interesting entries concerns James's reading in 1895 a book titled Notes sur Londres by the Contessa di Puglia, who signed herself "Brada."[11] James quotes copiously from the little book and announces his general agreement with its subject.

> Skimming through this, I say, I was greatly struck with all that may be of dramatic, of fertile in subject, for the novel for the picture of contemporary manners, in 2 features of current English life on which he [James did not know the identity of the writer at this time] insists. One of them is perhaps fuller than the other; but what strikes me in both of them is that they would have as themes, as données dealt with, with the real right art, a very large measure of a sort of ringing and reverberating actuality. What I speak of, of course, is manners in this country. What 'Brada' speaks of in particular, as the 2 most striking social notes to him, are Primo, The Masculinization of the women; and Secondo, The demoralization of the aristocracy -- the cessation, on their part, to take themselves seriously; their traffic in vulgar things, vulgar gains, vulgar pleasures -- their general vulgarization.[12]

The published edition of the Notebooks contains more than two pages of material copied by James from Notes sur Londres, prefaced by James's comment that "the idea of his little book is the revolution in

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[10]Lubbock, The Letters, II, p. 377.

[11]"Brada" (Puliga, H. C. contessa di) Notes sur Londres (Paris, 1895).

[12]Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, pp. 191-2.

English society by the avènement of the women."[13] This was hardly a new idea for James, with The Portrait of a Lady and The Bostonians already behind him. "I saw it long ago," he writes, "and I saw in it a big subject for the Novelist."[14] On the subject of the decadence of English aristocracy, "its ceasing to have a style, to take itself seriously,"[15] James thought sufficiently well of the book to quote a long paragraph, several sentences of which will illustrate the nature of Brada's work.

> A vouloir être trop libérale et de bon accueil, à se moquer elle-même de ses vieux préjuges, l'aristocracie anglaise joue une grosse partie, et sans être un grand prophète on peut croire que dans sa forme actuelle ses jours sont comptés. Tout est permis à une caste fermée qui est persuadée de sa supériorité, mais du moment qu'elle abdique elle-même, prétend a la liberté d'allures du premier plébien venu, on ne sait plus très bien ce qu'elle signifie, et il est à craindre qu'un beau jour on ne le lui demande un peu redement.[16]

Interrupting his comments on and quotations from the "Brada" book, James inserted in the Notebooks a project for a short tale which later became the novel The Awkward Age, the subject of which is the decadence of a society which permits its young girls too much freedom.[17] But a number of projects were suggested by Notes sur Londres, particularly a vast satirical novel dealing with the general theme of aristocratic decay. This novel was never written, but some of James's

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[13] Ibid., p. 194.

[14] Loc. cit.

[15] Ibid., p. 195.

[16] "Brada", op. cit., p. 55.

[17] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 192.

Moral fervor got into both What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age and was never again to be totally absent from his major novels. James's description of the novel he might have written is memorable.

> I seem to see the great, broad, rich theme of a large satirical novel in the picture, gathering a big armful of elements together, of the train dont va English society before one's eyes — the great modern collapse of all the forms and 'superstitions' and respects, good and bad, and restraints and mysteries — a vivid and mere shadowy general hit at the decadences and vulgarities and confusions and masculinizations and feminizations — the materializations and abdications and intrusions, and Americanizations, the lost sense, the brutalized manner — the publicity, the newspapers, the general revolution, the failure of fastidiousness.[18]

ii

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Henry James was always at a loss to explain the fact that The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, both published in 1886, failed to receive the popularity which he had anticipated for them, and he could only console himself in a letter to Howells, with the faith that "Very likely too, some day, all my buried prose will kick off its various tombstones at once."[19] He thought of The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima as distinctly different from his previous work and considered that they extended his range of subject into areas which he previously found forbidding. In both these works he is dealing with

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[18] Ibid., p. 196.

[19] Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 135.

the social aberrations which the "Brada" book was to call his attention to nine years later; for the central theme of The Bostonians is the "avènement, or rather, the masculinization of women,"[20] a subject which, as it occurs in a number of James's tales, will receive more detailed treatment in the next chapter, and the theme of The Princess Casamassima is the contrast between an aristocracy so uncertain of its position that some of its members engage in the revolutionary activity which threatens their existence, and the black depths of the enormous misery which supplies London's active socialists.

The Princess Casamassima is of somewhat limited interest to the student of James's imagery, for it is one of the most straightforward of the novels. The original critical estimate of the book, which was largely responsible for the novel's failure to win a large reading public, has persisted almost to the present day. However, two recent reprintings of the novel have brought it to the attention of many new readers, and it is undergoing a quiet but substantial revival. Nevertheless, there is only a little which this study can say about The Princess Casamassima, although Lionel Trilling's estimate of the novel as an amazingly authentic account of revolutionary activity in Victorian England is relevant to the general subject of this chapter and a challenge to the judgment of Granville Hicks which was considered earlier.[21] Trilling regards the book as a work of great moral power in which James demonstrated his deep and serious concern with the most provocative developments in politics and social adjustment.

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[20]Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 194.

[21]Trilling, op. cit., pp. 58-92.

> And the charge that is sometimes made against the later work, that it exists in a social vacuum, clearly does not pertain here. In these novels [The Princess Casamassima and The Bostonians] James is at the point in his career at which society, in the largest and even the grossest sense, is offering itself to his mind with great force. He understands society as crowds and police, as a field of justice and injustice, reform and revolution. The social texture of his work is grainy and knotted with practicality and detail ....The Princess Casamassima is a novel which has as its very center the assumption that Europe has reached the full of its ripeness and is passing over into rottenness, that the peculiarly beautiful light it gives forth is in part the reflection of a glorious past and in part the phosphoresence of a present decay, that it may meet its end by violence and that this is not wholly unjust, although never before has the old sinful continent made so proud and pathetic an assault upon our affections.[22]

James's Preface to The Princess Casamassima is highly revealing. He was unwilling to know less than the whole London. He writes that "there are London mysteries....for every spectator, and it's in a degree an exclusion and a state of weakness to be without experience of the meaner conditions, the lower manners and types, the general sordid struggle, the weight and burden of labour, the ignorance, the misery and the vice."[23]

The fine artistic conscience of James is evident in the decision as to how best he might present the world of socialist intrigue. To realize the full effectiveness of the contrasts which provide the theme of the novel, the socialists and their spheres of activity would have to be presented in somewhat indefinite outline, for sharp

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[22]Ibid., pp. 59-61.

[23]James, The Novels and Stories, X, p. viii.

accentuation would only minimize and over-simplify the conflict between an irresponsible aristocracy and a determined proletariat. James came to this conclusion in the Preface.

> My scheme called for the suggestive nearness (to all our apparently ordered life) of some sinister anarchic underworld, heaving in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague motions and sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and general looming possibilities.[24]

One of the means by which James accomplishes his end in The Princess Casamassima is the metaphor of the novel. The contacts of his hero Hyacinth Robinson with the "sinister, anarchic underworld" are realized again and again in a water-imagery. The metaphor of water is first introduced in the initial conversation between Hyacinth and Paul Muniment, who represents most dramatically in the book the working class and its socialist activity. Paul, who says that "he lives over the water too; in the far south of London," speaks of his invalid sister Rose as being "in bed just the same as a little slippery trout's in the water."[25]

When Rose enters the story in the next chapter, James picks up the figure again. Hyacinth questions her about Paul's revolutionary activity.

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[24] Ibid., p. xxvii.

[25] Ibid., p. 106 and p. 110.

> Hyacinth stared. "But isn't he tremendously deep in —" What should he call the mystery?
> "Deep in what?"
> "Well, in what's going on beneath the surface."[26]

And when her brother enters the room a moment later, Rose says, "You must have crossed the water with her ladyship,"[27] that is, he must have gone out of his own world into the aristocratic one.

The image of the fish serves Paul on two later occasions. He tells Hyacinth that he is "as dark as a fish,"[28] and, more explicitly, in speaking of the manner in which Captain Sholto performs for the Princess, Paul calls him a cat's paw or "a deep-sea fisherman, if you like better still....He throws his nets and hauls in the little fishes — the pretty little shining, wriggling fishes. They are all for her; she swallows 'em down." Hyacinth, Paul tells him, is one of the "tadpoles."[29]

The French Revolution is spoken of in the novel as "a sunrise out of a sea of blood."[30] Mr. Vetch, the old friend of Hyacinth's tenement days, says to the young man, "I watched you as a child on the edge of a pond watches the little boat he has constructed and set afloat."[31] Questioning Paul about his motives, Hyacinth asks, "If you object for yourself to a change, and are so fond of still waters, why have you associated yourself with a revolutionary movement?"[32]

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[26] Ibid., p. 131.

[27] Loc. cit.

[28] Ibid., p. 204.

[29] Ibid., p. 229.

[30] James, The Novels and Stories, XI, p. 126.

[31] Ibid., p. 134.

[32] Ibid., p. 189.

Almost every time that Hyacinth and Paul are together James makes us conscious of water. The river is used to superb scenic advantage as they take an excursion together, and it is not extravagant to claim that the following non-metaphorical passage suggests the full richness of meaning when water is used figuratively in the novel -- water to symbolize the shimmering, indefinite currents of activity among the poverty-stricken classes.

> It was decided at last that the two young men should go down to Greenwich, and after they had partaken of bread and cheese with Rosy they embarked on a penny steamer. The boat was densely crowded, and they leaned, rather squeezed together, in the fore part of it, against the rail of the deck, and watched the big black fringe of the yellow stream. The river had always for Hyacinth a deep beguilement. The ambiguous appeal he had felt as a child in all the aspects of London came back to him from the dark details of its banks and the sordid agitation of its bosom: the great arches and pillars of the bridges, where the water rushed and the funnels tipped and sounds made an echo and there seemed an overhanging of interminable processions; the miles of ugly wharves and warehouses; the lean protrusions of chimney, mast and crane; the painted signs of grimy industries staring from shore to shore; the strange, flat, obstructive barges, straining and bumping on some business as to which everything else was vague but that it was remarkably dirty; the clumsy coasters and colliers which thickened as one went down; the small loafing boats whose occupants somehow, looking up from their oars at the steamer, as they rocked in the oily undulations of its wake, appeared profane and sarcastic; in short all the grinding, puffing, smoking, splashing activity of the turbid flood....Later as they lay in the brown crushed grass on one of the slopes of Greenwich Park and saw the river stretch away and shine beyond the pompous collonades of the Hospital, he asked him if there were any truth in what Rosy had said about his being sweet on their friend the Princess.[33]

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[33] Ibid., pp. 185-6

The chapter abounds in instances of water used figuratively. Hyacinth, lying there on the grass, has "a sudden, quick flood of association."[34] Paul, teasing him, calls him "a bloated little swell"[35] and speaks of the distant London as a "sink of iniquity."[36] Later when Paul and the Princess meet, we are told that "each seemed to drop a plummet into the other's mind,"[37] and Paul tells his guest that he knew that she would "turn on the fountains."[38] But the most sustained use of the water imagery occurs just after the beginning of the Fifth Book when Hyacinth contemplates the future and his fate.

> In these hours the poverty and ignorance of the multitude seemed so cast and preponderant, and so much the law of life, that those who had managed to escape from the black gulf were only the happy few, spirits of resource as well as children of luck: they inspired in some degree the interest and sympathy that one should feel for survivors and victors, those who have come safely out of a shipwreck or a battle. What was most in Hyacinth's mind was the idea ...that the flood of democracy was rising over the world; that it would sweep all the traditions of the past before it.... When this high, healing, uplifting tide should cover the world and float in the new era, it would be its own fault...if want and suffering and crime should continue to be ingredients of the human lot...At the same time there was joy and exultation in the thought of surrendering one's self to the wash of the wave, of being carried higher on the sun-touched crests of wind billows than one could ever be by a dry, lonely effort of one's own. That vision could deepen to ecstasy; make it indifferent if one's ultimate fate, in such a heaving sea, were not almost certainly to be submerged in bottomless depths or dashed to pieces on immovable rocks... There was no peace for him between the two currents that flowed in his nature...They continued to toss him from one side to the other.[39]

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[34] Ibid., p. 191.

[35] Ibid., pp. 192-3.

[36] Ibid., p. 193

[37] Ibid., p. 206.

[38] Ibid., p. 203.

[39] Ibid., pp. 235-7. Italics are mine.

When Hyacinth becomes convinced of his inability to serve the revolutionary movement effectively, he speaks to his friend Millicent Henning in the full operating power of the metaphor. "All this has had the effect an object has if you plunge it into a cup of water — the water overflows. Only in my case, it's not water, but a very foul liquid indeed. Pardon the bad odour."[40] In other words, Hyacinth feels dissociated from the world of poverty and distress (the world of the water image) which he had engaged to serve, and any overflowing of that world through the agency of himself can only be foul and corrupting and of no benefit to anyone.

The metaphor of the foul liquid enters the narrative again in its final pages. James writes of Hyacinth,

> In all his previous meditations the growth of his reluctance to act for the 'party of action' had not been the fear of a personal stain, but the simple growth of yearning observation. Yet now the idea of the personal stain made him horribly sick....to suffer it to start out in the life of her son was in a manner to place her own forgotten, redeemed pollution **again** in the eye of the world."[41]

And on this final day of his life, it is to the river that Hyacinth goes again, the weather being "grey and damp, though no rain fell."[42]

> He passed slowly to and fro over Westminster bridge and watched the black barges drift on the great brown river....All he had ever liked in her [Millicent Henning] came back to him now with a finer air, and there was a moment, during which he again made time on the bridge that spans the lake in the Park, seemingly absorbed in

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[40] Ibid., p. 300.

[41] Ibid., p. 372.

[42] Loc. cit.

> the pranks of a young ass in a boat, when he asked himself if at bottom he hadn't liked her better almost than any one.[43]

It might seem from the foregoing that the water imagery of The Princess Casamassima has only aesthetic and technical functions -- that it serves merely to suggest the indistinct, constantly fluctuating, fluidly vague world of the downtrodden and their attempts to relieve their misery. But the moral comment of the author is not to be missed. For James's metaphor is part of his indictment of the upper classes for their failure of perception. To be unwilling to see is always an evil in the moral universe of Henry James, and the full strength of his judgment of aristocratic society in the eighties is to be discovered in his assertion through the technique of The Princess Casamassima that society had only its self-satisfied complacency and self-righteousness to blame for its being threatened by revolutionary intrigue. The indistinctness with which James presents the underworld of Hyacinth Robinson and his socialist friends is meant to be indicative of the hazy, blurred, shimmering notion which the ruling classes of James's day had of those basic social disturbances which were the result of moral, political and economic derangement. Indeed James tells us what he intended.

> Let me at the same time not deny that, in answer to probable ironic reflexions on the full license for sketchiness and vagueness and dimness taken by my picture, I had to think myself in advance of a defence of my "artistic position." Shouldn't I find it in the happy contention that

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[43] Ibid., p. 373.

> the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what "goes on" irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast surface?[44]

The metaphor of the novel, then, operates on several levels. It supports both the structure and the tone of the work, but, more importantly, it is the agency through which James's moral view of English society is made dramatic and more obvious. Technical methods are employed to fullest advantage in the novel, with all of the novel's effects -- meaning, theme, tone, language -- coming together in a strict coherence of form.

iii

In a recent issue of Scrutiny Marius Bewley called What Maisie Knew (1897) "the most magnificent portrayal in the language of the unfolding discretionary powers of a human being."[45] It is one of the very best of James's shorter novels, a compelling study of the corrupting power of a society which has lost its capacity for self-sacrifice. The characters of the novel are mired in the idolatry of self, and their highly ingenious machinations to assure self-gratification at the same time that they attempt to clothe themselves in easy respectability create a pressure of evil which terrifies the reader. Bewley comments on the whole decaying ugliness of this society.

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[44]James, The Novels and Stories, X, p. xxix. Italics are mine.

[45]Marius Bewley, "Appearance and Reality in Henry James," Scrutiny, XVII (Summer 1950), p. 113.

> What Maisie Knew presents us with a world of horror, but the essence of that horror consists in the way we are able to isolate the grotesqueness of moral evil as it caricatures and distorts human action and motive -- to isolate it through the innocent eyes of a little girl whose vision is not sufficiently dulled by conventional experience to absorb the singularity of the irregular world in which she lives....In Maisie we have one of the most fully lighted moral worlds that James ever offered for our inspection.[46]

That is, we get a double picture in What Maisie Knew. To drive home his picture of social and moral corruption, James used the point of view of a child, and the spectacle of the horrors is thus increased for us. But at the same time, we get a picture of the effect which this world has on the child -- the child matures by seeing evil, is initiated into the realm of moral decision and responsibility, and learns that she must make her own moral choices.

Only The Spoils of Poynton is discussed in the Notebooks in more detail than What Maisie Knew.[47] James was fascinated with the possibilities of his little tale, the story of a child who "with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all...shouldn't know 'wherever' to go."[48] He called it an "ugly little comedy"[49] and wrote that the full horror of the tale could be worked out only if he made certain that "EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE."[50]

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[46] Loc. cit.

[47] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, Index entries, pp. 421-2.

[48] James, The Novels and Stories, XVI, p. 90.

[49] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 263.

[50] Ibid., p. 238.

The unpleasant parents of a little girl named Maisie have received a divorce just as the story opens, with the Court decreeing that the child is to remain six months with each parent. The parents hate one another viciously and use the child as an instrument for hatred and slander of each other. They take care of Maisie when their turns come "nor for any good they could do her, but for the harm they could, with her unconscious aid, do each other."[51]

At her mother's, Maisie comes under the supervision of Miss Overmore, an attractive governess. Meeting her father in the Park one day, Maisie is not surprised that he seems to be attracted by Miss Overmore, and when it is time for Maisie to go to her father, Miss Overmore goes along and is permanently established in Beale Farange's home. Another governess, Mrs. Wix, then takes over for Maisie's mother, and she supplies the child with the first real maternal tenderness that Maisie has ever had. Maisie warms to her, but at the end of six months she must go to her father's, where she finds that Miss Overmore has been living during the entire time of Maisie's absence. This time Maisie stays with her father beyond the six months period, Miss Overmore giving the little girl the impression that Maisie's mother does not want her. Furthermore, Miss Overmore tells Maisie that "I don't know what in the world, darling, your father and I should do without you, for you just make the difference, as I've told you, of keeping us perfectly proper."[52]

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[51] James, The Novels and Stories, XVI, p. 5.

[52] Ibid., p. 38.

However, Mrs. Wix arrives at the Farange household to tell Maisie of the forthcoming marriage of her mother and Sir Claude. This prompts Miss Overmore to reveal that she is already married to Maisie's father. It is a marriage of very brief happiness, however, and Mrs. Farange (called Mrs. Beale in the story to distinguish her from Maisie's mother) quickly develops an interest in Sir Claude, who comes to make the acquaintance of Maisie. His own marriage with Maisie's mother is soon a failure, for Lady Claude participates in a succession of love affairs, all highly tempestuous and sordid. Similarly, Maisie's father, Mr. Farange, develops an arrangement with Mrs. Cuddon, a dark-skinned and frightening Countess of great wealth.

Mrs. Beale's interest in Sir Claude is soon so intense that she begins to use Maisie as the means for bringing them together. Only Mrs. Wix protests the child's exposure to the illicit passion of the two, but when the couple are finally free of their respective partners and attempt to use Maisie as a flimsy pretext of propriety when they join one another abroad, it is Maisie herself who attempts to obstruct their plan. She wishes to remain with Sir Claude, but she will do so only if he breaks with Mrs. Beale. This he refuses to do, and so Maisie departs at the end with Mrs. Wix.

James's denunciation of the moral callousness of Maisie's parents and step-parents is not to be missed in the novel; he was apparently unable to bring himself to an unequivocal sympathy with any of the characters except Maisie, for there is even a suggestion that Mrs. Wix is absurdly in love with Sir Claude. To be sure, the

novel is more than an attack on divorce, although James, as the next chapter will demonstrate, always disapproved the practice. The major emphasis of the novel is the predicament of Maisie herself, and the obvious lesson of the shocking events we are asked to witness is that a child who must come to moral maturity in such surroundings as these is always perched hazardously on the brink of hysteria and psychological breakdown. There is a limit to what the sensitivity of a child can endure, James says in this tale, and if Maisie just barely comes through to a moral (though very lonely) safety, her success is personal and individual. Maisie manages finally to avoid personal entanglement with ugliness, but the next little girl might fail. In emphasizing, as he always does, the predicament of an individual character, however, James has not forgotten to fill in the details of his background, and it is there that we get his scorn for the much-marrying parents and step-parents.

The symbolic language of the novel supports its moral bias. The most persistent images are those of expansion, of developing outwards, of dilation, of long corridors, of endless vistas — that is, of growth and the potentiality for growth. Both the child's passivity and her unlimited receptiveness in the face of so much evil are suggested by the following figure:

> Everything had something behind it: life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors. She had learned that at these doors it was not wise to knock — this seemed to produce from within such sounds of derision.[53]

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[53] James, The Novels and Stories, XVI, p. 32.

A year of Maisie's life is spoken of as "a cup brimming over with the sense that now at least she was learning."[54] She travels along "the long telescope of Gower Street."[55] She followed Sir Claude "with the sense of an ample filling-out of any void created by symptoms of avoidance and of flight."[56] The first intimations of a developing relationship between Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude come to Maisie in the metaphor of space and distance.

> How and when and where, however, were just what Maisie was not to know -- an exclusion, moreover, that she never questioned in the light of a participation large enough to make him, while she shared the ample void of Mrs. Beale's rather blank independence, shine in her yearning eyes like the single, the sovereign window-square of a great disproportioned room.[57]

Objects constantly grow in time and space. "What she knew, what she could know is by this time no secret to us: it grew and grew at any rate, the rest of that day, in the air of what he took for granted."[58] "Only he had himself blown to a much bigger balloon the large consciousness he then filled out."[59]

The evil which Maisie's parents had the gift of "thinking or pretending to think of each other they poured into her little gravely-gazing soul as into a boundless receptable"[60] and an

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[54] Ibid., p. 61

[55] Ibid., p. 149.

[56] Ibid., p. 180.

[57] Ibid., p. 144.

[58] Ibid., p. 210.

[59] Ibid., p. 238.

[60] Ibid., p. 14.

"objurgation" of Maisie's mother's "was a missive that dropped into her memory with the dry rattle of a letter falling into a pillar-box."[61]

Equally instructive are the images of fantasy and unreality. In antithesis to the images of expansion and space which symbolize Maisie's capacity to learn the full meaning of the evil society which surrounds her, the images of shadows and strangeness suggest the child's failure to understand. She fixed "just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric -- strange shadows dancing on a sheet." [62] "She found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were attached -- images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't big enough yet to play." [63] "The great strain meanwhile was that of carrying by the right end the things her father said about her mother -- things mostly that Moddle, on a glimpse of them, as if they had been complicated toys or difficult books, took out of her hands and put away in the closet."[64]

The congruence of the metaphor of the novel to the theme of the child's expanding moral consciousness is made explicit about two-thirds through the book. The images must grow and extend and spread out to their farthest limits because Maisie must absorb the

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[61] Loc. cit.

[62] Ibid., p. 9.

[63] Ibid., p. 11.

[64] Ibid., p. 12

maximum instruction of her surroundings.

> As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as she sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything....what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn and learn?[65]

The Everything she comes to know is, specifically, the sexual irregularities of the parents and step-parents. The full meaning of their passions and intrigues is brought home to her as Sir Claude joins Mrs. Beale on the continent and Maisie learns that they are sharing the same room. The Sir Claude she has admired above all her other "protectors" is, as Mrs. Wix says, "a slave to his passions."[66] Furthermore, when Sir Claude tells her, on the morning after his arrival, that he has not yet seen Mrs. Beale, Maisie, who has every reason to believe that he has come directly from Mrs. Beale's room, has "the faintest purest coldest conviction that he wasn't telling the truth."[67] The reader's full recognition of his having been with Mrs. Beale in her quarters is assured by a clever piece of dramatization. Maisie and Sir Claude are about to go to a café for breakfast.

> Maisie was already at the door; he glanced round the room. "A moment -- my stick." But there appeared to be no stick. "No matter; I left it -- oh!" He remembered with an odd drop and came out.

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[65] Ibid., p. 249.

[66] Ibid., p. 278.

[67] Ibid., p. 284.

> "You left it in London?" she asked as they went downstairs.
>
> "Yes — in London: fancy!"
>
> "You were in such a hurry to come," Maisie explained. He had his arm round her. "That must have been the reason."[68]

The breakfast is a hideous business. Maisie, sensing again the deception of Sir Claude, realizes that he is a man afraid of himself. He betrays that he has already been in communication with Mrs. Beale, though he is not sufficiently perceptive to notice Maisie's awareness of his blunder. He stumbles on into an embarrassing request that Maisie be willing to give up Mrs. Wix and come to live with him and Mrs. Beale, indicating, as he does so, that the governess will refuse to condone their relationship and, therefore, leave them. As a matter of fact, he doubts that any governess will serve them.

> "We probably shouldn't give you another governess. To begin with we shouldn't be able to get one — not of the only kind that would do. It wouldn't do — the kind that would do," he queerly enough explained. "I mean they wouldn't stay."[69]

Maisie, however, cannot choose easily. At the repetition of Sir Claude's request, "she felt the coldness of her terror, and it seemed to her that suddenly she knew, as she knew it about Sir Claude, what she was afraid of. She was afraid of herself."[70] She is afraid, that is, of an involvement with Sir Claude which will be not at all different from the passionate associations of her parents and step-

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[68] Ibid., p. 285.

[69] Ibid., pp. 297-8.

[70] Ibid., p. 299.

parents. It is the moment of Maisie's sexual awakening — not only to her own potentiality but to the whole sordid display she has been exposed to. She can sense the dreadful possibility that Sir Claude may in time direct his passion at her; her terror results from her knowing, however hazily, the danger to herself — a danger made all the more positive because she is fully aware now of being attracted to him. Her realization of the true nature of the relationship between Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale has produced a sexual excitement in her which makes her conscious of an attraction for Sir Claude.

She gives in to that attraction; she surrenders to sexual desire. In the scene at the railway station which follows their breakfast together, Maisie yields to a delirious state which allows her, half in jest and half in earnest, to beg Sir Claude to take her at once to Paris. Sir Claude interprets her action as meaning that she is willing to give up Mrs. Wix, but he is not prepared for Maisie's condition.

> "Yes, I've chosen," she said to him. "I'll let her go if you — if you —"
>
> She faltered; he quickly took her up. "If I, if I —?"
>
> "If you'll give up Mrs. Beale."
>
> "Oh!" he exclaimed; in which she saw how much, how hopelessly he was afraid. She had supposed at the cafe that it was of his rebellion, of his gathering motive; but how could that be, when his temptations — that temptation, for example, of the train they had just lost — were after all so slight? Mrs. Wix was right. He was afraid of his weakness — of his weakness.[71]

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[71] Ibid., p. 306.

It is that weakness which saves Maisie. For there can be no doubt, it seems to me, that James, in the intensity of the events that follow, means us to believe that Maisie's declaration of love for Sir Claude is sexual love. Before Maisie is subjected to the bad-tempered dispute over her between Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix, James has told us, subtly though nonetheless specifically, the real nature of Maisie's plan. We must not fail to notice Maisie's command of the following scene:

> "If I give up Mrs. Beale —?"
> "I'll go straight out with you again and not come back till she has gone."
> He seemed to wonder. "Till Mrs. Beale —?"
> He had made it sound like a bad joke. "I mean till Mrs. Wix leaves — in that boat."
> Sir Claude looked almost foolish. "Is she going in that boat?"
> "I suppose so. I won't even bid her goodbye," Maisie continued. "I'll stay out till the boat has gone. I'll go up to the old rampart."
> "The old rampart?"
> "I'll sit on that old bench where you see the gold Virgin."
> "The gold Virgin?" he vaguely echoed. But it brought his eyes back to her as if after an instant he could see the place and the thing she named — could see her sitting there alone. "While I break with Mrs. Beale?"
> "While you break with Mrs. Beale."[72]

Sir Claude, however, does not renounce Mrs. Beale. "He can't," Mrs. Wix comments,[73] and it is Sir Claude who hurries Maisie and the governess off together. When Maisie looks back at the balcony, Sir Claude is not even there.

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[72] Ibid., pp. 308-9

[73] Ibid., p. 320.

> Maisie waited a moment; then "He wasn't there" she simply said again.
>
> Mrs. Wix also was silent a while. "He went to her," she finally observed.
>
> "Oh I know" the child replied.
>
> Mrs. Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew.[74]

What Maisie knew is that she is now a young woman and that she has just been through the first experience to make her conscious of the need for "a moral sense." She has been saved from moral danger less by the exercise of her own judgment than by the weakness of another, but, whatever her future, she will no longer be in ignorance of the true nature of the events which, as a child, she was mercilessly required to behold. She now sees the horror of life with understanding and precision, for it has come so close as almost to engulf her. Her desire to go away with Sir Claude and her insistence that he give up Mrs. Beale were the signs of the influence of evil upon her. A child thrust alarmingly into adulthood has been on the brink of moral disaster because of the evil society in which it has had to live. The metaphor of growth and expansion has shown us the expansion of Maisie's consciousness to the point of her near-destruction.

What Maisie Knew, then, is an admirable example of James's skill in fusing subject and language. The symbolic structure of the novel works dramatically to re-enforce his indictment of the decadent society which takes advantage of the innocence of a child in order to pursue its own moral delinquency. But, as Pelham Edgar says, the book

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[74] Ibid., p. 321.

attempts also to show "How Maisie developed a Moral Sense, and James is particularly anxious to give a true account of the way in which childish innocence might react in the midst of irregular and impure surroundings."[75] Appropriately, the movement of the novel is outward; the horizon of Maisie's perception is lengthened; she grows physically, intellectually, and morally at the same time that she travels and meets a larger number of people. To give fullest dramatic validity to Maisie's growth and development, James employs a metaphor which exactly matches the movement of his plot and at the same time aids in the emphasis of his moral purpose -- to write a chastisement of "the huge materialized stupidity and vulgarity"[76] of the English upper class which could only jeopardize the moral life of the child and hinder the freedom of the individual will.

iv

The Awkward Age (1899) has often been called the most dramatically objective of James's novels. Relying on dialogue almost to the exclusion of descriptive and expository passages, James constructed his story in a series of scenes, like concentric rings drawn around the theme.[77] The novel was to be composed of a number of "occasions,"[78] as James called them, and he was fully and deliberately conscious that he was invading the sphere of drama.

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[75] Edgar, op. cit., p. 123.

[76] Lubbock, The Letters, II, p. 377.

[77] James, The Novels and Stories, XIV, p. xix.

[78] Loc. cit.

> The beauty of the conception was in this approximation of the respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play — as to which it was more than ever a case for charmed capitals. The divine distinction of the act of a play — and a greater than any other it easily succeeds in arriving at — was, I reasoned, in its special, its guarded objectivity. This objectivity, in turn, when achieving its ideal, came from the imposed absence of that "going behind," to compass explanations and amplifications, to drag out odds and ends from the "mere" story-teller's great property-shop of aids to illusion: a resource under denial of which it was equally perplexing and delightful, for a change, to proceed.[79]

The result of James's technical experiment is a novel from which the author has virtually disappeared, and the meaning of the book must be garnered wholly from the happy unification of form and subject which is again James's accomplishment. Everything fuses in this novel; consequently language is functional as its metaphor accumulates to state the moral dimensions of the society in which the drama takes place.

As we have seen already, James has left no doubt in his Notebooks about his purpose in writing The Awkward Age. The entry of March 4, 1895, occurs immediately after his first mention of "Brada's" Notes sur Londres, and there can hardly be any question that James intended the novel to illustrate what Matthiessen and Murdock have called his "theory that English society showed some signs of decay."[80]

The symbolic language of the novel is one of James's greatest achievements in this respect. It is at once constructive and creative,

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[79] Loc. cit.

[80] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 193.

operating simultaneously on several levels of meaning. To miss the function of metaphor in this novel is to miss a distinguished quality of form rare in the history of fiction. To see its full working power is to be aware of the pure aesthetic scrupulosity with which James practiced his art. The Awkward Age is a truly unique novel.

It is not surprising that The Awkward Age has been one of the least popular of James's books. It has been a consistent source of bewilderment to his readers, and a letter to Miss Henrietta Reubell, dated November 12, 1899, tried to clear up some of the difficulties.

> I suppose I must at any rate mention that I had in view a certain special social (highly "modern" and actual) London group and type and tone, which seemed to me to se preter a merveille [sic] to an ironic -- lightly and simply ironic! -- treatment, and that clever people at least would know who, in general, and what, one meant. But here, at least, it appears there are very few clever people! One must point with finger-posts -- one must label with pancartes -- one must explain with conférences! The form, doubtless, of my picture is against it -- episodes architecturally combined and each making a piece of the building; with no going behind, no telling about the figures save by their own appearance and action and with explanations reduced to the explanation of everything by all the other things in the picture. Mais il parait qu'il ne faut pas faire comme ca: personne n'y comprend rien: j'en suis pour mes frais -- qui avaient été considérables, très considérables! [sic] [81]

The Awkward Age is the story of Nanda Brookenham, "the little London girl who grows up to 'sit with' the free-talking modern young modern... and though the conversation is supposed to be expurgated for

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[81] Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 333.

her, inevitably hears, overhears, guesses, follows, takes in, becomes acquainted with, horrors."[82] Her mother's drawing room is the gathering place for a group of brilliant and easy-living young people, chief of whom are Vanderbank and Mitchy, each with an interest in Nanda. To the Brookenham household comes Mr. Longdon, who remembers the manners of an older generation. He sees in Nanda the very picture of her grandmother whom he had once loved, and thus he is all the more shocked by the code of freedom which permits her to move about casually in her mother's drawing room.

Vanderbank comes to be the choice of both Nanda and Mr. Longdon for Nanda's hand, with Mr. Longdon promising to will his rich fortune to Nanda when the marriage takes place. But Vanderbank refuses to marry Nanda. "The young man hesitates," James wrote in his Notebooks, "because he thinks she already knows too much; but all the while he hesitates, she knows, she learns, more and more. He finds out somehow how much she does know, and terrified at it, drops her: all her ignorance, to his sense, is gone."[83]

Other characters give the novel exciting variety. The character of Mrs. Brookenham, Nanda's mother, James once called the best character he had ever done. Similarly the Duchess and her daughter Aggie, who marries Mitchy and makes a failure of her marriage, Nanda's brother Harold, a genial young cad, Tishy, Lady Fanny and

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[82] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 192.

[83] Loc. cit.

Mr. Cashmore -- these people provide an appalling view of social decline. Such people, say Matthiessen and Murdock, "dramatize the lack of innocence in Mrs. Brookenham's favorite society."[84]

The author's judgment of this society can be found in the symbolic language of the novel. The metaphor of The Awkward Age is almost exclusively a metaphor of seeing. Characters do not arrive or enter, they "make appearances"; they do not have idea or opinions, they "take a view"; they do not comprehend or determine, they "have a vision." The novel contains a veritable frenzy of looking about -- of glancing and watching and gazing -- as if the eyes of these people could never be at rest. Non-metaphorical sentences are weighted with the importance of sight, and our final impression is of a society desperately trying to visualize itself, trying to get some notion of how it looks, because it senses that all is not well with itself.

There are sustained and subtle examples: "The young man's acute reflexion appeared suddenly to flower into a vision of opportunity that swept everything else away. "[85] "Mrs. Brookenham's face covered him for an instant as no painted Madonna's had ever covered the little charge at the breast beneath it." "Mitchy's great goggle attentively fixed him."[86] "We're not so numerous as I could wish, and we want variety; we want just what I'm sure you'll bring us -- a fresh eye, an outside mind."[87] "Brookenham appeared for a moment to view this

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[84] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 193.

[85] James, The Novels and Stories, XIV, p. 107.

[86] Ibid., p. 77 and p. 106.

[87] Ibid., p. 110.

statement in the dry light of experience."[88] "Mr. Cushmore soundlessly glared his amusement." "Her melancholy eyes seemed, from afar, to run over the page."[89]

Non-metaphorical sentences are frequently weighted with the importance of sight. "Mitchy for a little fixed the person mentioned as he sat with his other guest, but whatever this person saw he failed just then to see his wife's companion, whose eyes he never met. "[90] " 'I like her as much as I dare to — as much as a man can like a girl from the very first of his seeing her and judging her he has also seen, and seen with all the reasons, that there's no chance for him whatever'."[91] " 'My dear man, Edward never imagined anything in life.' She still had her eyes on him. 'Therefore if he sees a thing, don't you know? it must exist'."[92]

In the milieu of the novel there is a desperation of "glancing about", an intensity of "watching" and "gazing." "She had now raised her eyes to her husband, but, turning away, he failed to meet them."[93] "The Duchess during this brief passage never took her eyes from her niece, who rewarded her attention with the sweetness of consenting dependence....Her protectress then turned around the circle."[94] "She insisted now with her absurdly pathetic eyes on him."[95] "Her inter-

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[88] Ibid., p. 62.

[89] Loc. cit.

[90] Ibid., p. 74.

[91] Ibid., p. 78.

[92] Ibid., p. 74.

[93] Ibid., p. 65.

[94] Ibid., p. 85.

[95] Ibid., p. 74.

locutor looked at her with all his bright brutality....The Duchess met his eyes, and so for an instant they sounded each other."[96]

Merging with the imagery of seeing is a concomitant metaphor of light -- of light without color, a pale brilliance, a "delicate radiance." In the novel light "flickers" or it is a "quick flare," sometimes seen only for an instant. Mrs. Brookenham, it is said, "radiated obscurity."[97] Light figures appear in bewildering associations: "And the Duchess got up -- shining, however, with a confessed light of fantasy."[98] " 'Mamma, Edward,' she brought out with a flash of solemnity -- mamma was wonderful!"[99] "The light of ignorance in the child's smile was positively golden."[100] Or there are more conventional uses: "with which there flickered in her eyes, dimly but perhaps all the more prettily, the first intimation they had given of the light of laughter."[101] "She had a pause through which there glimmered a ray from luminous hours, the inner intimacy which, privileged as he was, he couldn't pretend to share;"[102] "Little Aggie has a smile as softly bright as a Southern dawn."[103] The verb "reflected" is repeated throughout the narrative; characters have "flashes" of wit and perception; occasionally they are "dazzled" by the "brilliance" of others.

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[96] Ibid., p. 102.

[97] Ibid., p. 46-7.

[98] Ibid., p. 56.

[99] Ibid., p. 67.

[100] Ibid., pp. 211-12.

[101] Ibid., p. 119.

[102] Ibid., p. 148.

[103] Ibid., p. 84.

But the light is always ephemeral, and there is an accompanying, or antithetical, imagery of darkness, a darkness that is hidden and profound. "Vanderbank had found amusement again — it flickered so from his friend's face that, really at moments to the point of alarm, his explanations deepened darkness."[104] Characters sometimes speak "without a gleam" and their eyes have "deepening visions" of darkness.[105] " 'But I scarcely think I ought to tell you,' Vanderbank pursued, 'if she herself gave you no glimpse of the fact. Any implication that she consciously avoided it might make you see deeper depths."[106]

The society of The Awkward Age is, of course, an ugly society, as even those who are committed to it, like Mrs. Brookenham and Mr. Cashmore, willingly acknowledge. Mrs. Brookenham is cynical and resigned; she is described as having a "weary penetration";[107] the perfidy of her son Harold, the carelessness of her daughter Nanda, the easy familiarity of the young men who frequent her house are of no serious concern to her any longer. Her husband "figures in her drawing room only as one of those queer extinguishers of fire in the corridors of hotels. He's just a bucket on a peg."[108] To the continental proprieties of the Duchess she is unresponsive and offers the only

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[104] Ibid., p. 9.

[105] Ibid., p. 117.

[106] Ibid., p. 12.

[107] Ibid., p. 148.

[108] Ibid., p. 225.

defense of which she is capable. "I don't think I'm quite a monster, but I don't pretend to be a saint. I'm an English wife and an English mother -- I live in the mixed English world....Life is composed of so many things...of such mingled, intertwisted strands."[109]

From Mrs. Brookenham's questionable influence, Mr. Longdon tries to rescue her daughter Nanda, in whom he sees a reproduction of the girl's grandmother, whom he had once loved. He belongs to an older time and an older way of life, and he finds the Brookenham circle odious. The easy irresponsibility of a society which permits girls of Nanda's age to move in the freedom of conversation and behavior like that which offends him in her mother's drawing room is incomprehensible to him. He tells Nanda, "and the more one thinks of it the more one seems to see that society...can never have been anything but increasingly vulgar. The point is, that in the twilight of time -- and I belong, you see, to the twilight -- it had made out much less how vulgar it could be. "[110]If Mr. Longdon represents the "twilight" of time, then what are we to say about Mrs. Brookenham's world except that it is in total darkness? Mr. Longdon and Mrs. Brookenham represent the antipodes of the world of James's novel, with the other characters, except Vanderbank, tending to veer toward one pole or the other as they look for an illumined way out of their desolation.

Vanderbank's renunciation of Nanda is surely not to be explained exclusively on the terms announced in James's Notebooks.

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[109]Ibid., p. 50.

[110]Ibid., p. 193.

If James meant his book to say only that "He finds out somehow how much she does know, and terrified at it, drops her,"[111] then it may be argued that the character of Vanderbank is at least partly a failure. All of his decisions rest on an ambiguity of motive, for he is directly in the center of the novel's events, a victim of the charm and persuasion of Mrs. Brookenham and of the generosity and logic of Mr. Longdon. Consequently, he is unable to marry Nanda, as Mr. Longdon desires, even though Mr. Longdon promises to settle a fortune on Nanda the moment of their marriage. Vanderbank cannot accept the provision of their benefactor that such a marriage must involve renunciation of the Brookenham set. At the novel's close Vanderbank has drifted back to Nanda's mother, and Nanda is the secluded ward of Mr. Longdon.

The relationship which exists between Vanderbank and Mrs. Brookenham is surely one of the novel's principal interests. No reader of the book can be safe from the suggestion that it is this lady's influence which keeps Vanderbank unmarried to her daughter. The sympathy between the two is dramatized as a fatal and inescapable thing; they belong with one another; together they establish the outlines of their society, with Mrs. Brookenham symbolizing its cause and Vanderbank its effect. The act of Mrs. Brookenham's which helps us to see what James meant in calling her the best character he had ever done is the conquest -- or shall we say the corruption? -- of his hero.

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[111] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 192.

Furthermore, the suggestion that Nanda Knows the relation of Vanderbank to her mother should not be resisted. Probably James was deliberately vague about what it is that Nanda does know — probably he meant only to imply that she knew a great deal of the kind of information not considered proper for young ladies — but certainly we are free to speculate about whether or not she has learned of a compromising union between her mother and her fiancé, the knowledge of which causes Vanderbank to reject her. The only difficulty with this interpretation, as I see it, is that it makes something of a monster of Nanda, a girl willing to marry the lover of her mother in order to secure Mr. Longdon's wealth. It must be admitted, however, that such a view of Nanda certainly strengthens the moral condemnation of her society at the same time that it gives greater point to the seeming desperateness with which the other people of the novel study and observe her.

The relation of all these events to the imagery of the novel is, it seems to me, quite clear. James tells us plainly enough in the Preface that the arrangement of materials is on "absolutely scenic lines"[112] — the entire novel conceived as a series of one-act plays. Irritated by his publisher's insistence on an ever-increasing amount of dialogue in his stories, James set out to construct a narrative which would be formed almost exclusively in dialogue. He would thus achieve a "guarded objectivity",[113] which, when accomplishing its

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[112] James, The Novels and Stories, XIV, p. xxiv.

[113] Ibid., p. xix.

ideal, "came from the imposed absence of that 'going behind,' to compass explanations and amplifications."[114] Yet in spite of this limitation, James adds that he was "positively struck by the quantity of meaning and the number of intentions, the extent of ground for interest...that I have succeeded in working scientifically."[115]

The metaphor of seeing and the accompanying figures of light are the instruments through which the meaning and intentions of the novel are made clear. The frenzy with which these characters view themselves and the world they inhabit is our picture of a desperate society trying desperately to visualize itself, straining to see itself in as many postures as possible in order to acquire the lighted perspective which will dispel its moral darkness. Another interpretation can see this frenzy as simply a form of the self-consciousness of this society, the self-consciousness itself being a form of decadence. In any case, metaphor in The Awkward Age demonstrates the moral realism of Henry James -- this society's frantic vagueness is the product of its own moral delinquency. Language, tone, structure and form -- all merge in The Awkward Age to show James's moral response to one segment of London society in the final year of Victoria's century; the novel is an illustration of that breakdown of the distinction between "substance and form in a really wrought work of art."[116] James

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[114] Loc. cit.

[115] Ibid., p. xxv.

[116] Ibid., p. xxiv.

wrote, "I hold it impossible to say where one of these elements ends and the other begins,"[117] and the lesson of our knowing so many character emphases in the novel is that we may see the meaning of a society's total distress when its individual members can glimpse it only partially or not at all. Without vision, without the illumination by which it could see the "deeper depths" of its vulgar darkness, the society which James depicts could only fall apart, as fall apart it did. Ernest A. Baker's comment on James is helpful.

> James may have ignored many sides of human activity; but, at any rate, he did not ignore the vital problems and, as he looked to the future as well as the past and present, he may be of lasting value to mankind as a far-seeing critic and a philosophic guide. Henry James had his 'message' as much as anyone.[118]

V

The criticism of aristocratic society which appears in the two other novels belonging to the period 1881-1900 — The Tragic Muse (1890) and The Spoils of Poynton (1897) — is muted and oblique and seems not very greatly to have influenced the metaphor of the novels. The principal interest for James of The Tragic Muse was the theater and theatrical life, and the compelling imagery of the novel is related to this interest. As such, it is discussed in a later chapter. Yet the novel as a whole is also a comment on some of the failings of upper class society in England, and as such requires mention in this section of the thesis.

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[117] Loc. cit.

[118] Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel (London, 1938), Vol. 9, p. 286.

Only three characters of the novel can be said to represent in any sense the fixed order of English society in the period. They are Lady Agnes Dormer, Mrs. Julia Dallow, and Charles Carteret. Of the three James is most severe with Lady Agnes, for her attempts to bring about a marriage between her son Nick and Mrs. Dallow, in complete disregard of the values of sentiment and affection, are little less than a bribery out of which she hopes to gain a greatly improved economic security, commensurate with the social position which she considers her family to hold. She is inflexible in her opposition to Nick's interest in any but materialistic and worldly advantages, and the scene in which Nick tells her that he has renounced his seat in Parliament in order to pursue the life of a painter is one of the bitterest that James ever wrote.

> But she gave a name to the group in which Nick had now taken his place, and it made him feel after the lapse of years like a small, scolded, sorry boy again -- the time when this parent had slapped him and called him a little fool. He was a big fool now -- hugely immeasurable; she repeated the term over and over again with a high-pitched passion. The most painful thing in this painful hour was perhaps his glimpse of the strange feminine cynicism that lurked in her fine sense of injury. Where there was such a complexity of revolt it would have been difficult to pick out particular wrongs; but Nick could see that, to his mother's imagination, he was most a fool for not having kept his relations with the actress, whatever they were, better from Julia's knowledge.... Julia was certainly a combination -- she was accomplished, she was a sort of leading woman and she was rich....Yet the form in which the consequences of his apostasy appeared most to come home to Lady Agnes was the loss for the Dormer family of the advantages attached to the possession of Mrs. Dallow. The larger mortification would round itself later; for the hour the damning thing was that Nick had made that lady the gift of an unforgivable grievance....Julia would have got over the other woman, but she would never get over his becoming a nobody.[119]

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[119]James, The Novels and Stories, XIII, pp. 160-1.

Lady Agnes is equally bitter about the loss to Nick of Charles Carteret's fortune. That old gentleman, a great friend of Nick's father, who wanted to see the son active in Parliament and married to Mrs. Dallow, had offered to make Nick his heir when these arrangements should be accomplished. When Nick tells him that he has surrendered his seat in Parliament and that the marriage with Mrs. Dallow will not take place, Carteret's offer is withdrawn, and this further loss of expected wealth moves Lady Agnes to more intense scorn of her son.

> He had never been in good faith -- never, never; he had had from his earliest childhood the nastiest hankerings after a vulgar little daubing trash-talking life; they were not in him, the grander, nobler aspirations...and he had been anything but honest to lead her on...to think he would do something....Moreover what need under heaven had he to tell Charles Carteret of the cruel folly on his very death-bed? -- as if he mightn't have let it all alone and accepted the benefit the old man was delighted to confer. No wonder Mr. Carteret would keep his money for his heirs if that was the way Nick proposed to repay him.[120]

When Lady Agnes learns of the diplomatic success of Peter Sherringham, Mrs. Dallow's brother, she attempts at once to interest him, in a more positive sense than he has ever demonstrated, in her daughter Biddy. This she plainly sees as the eventuality which will be some restitution for the loss of her hopes in Nick. Peter, interested in the actress Miriam Rooth, resists the machinations of Lady Agnes, only to make an offer of marriage to Biddy when he learns,

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[120] Ibid., p. 162.

a year later, that Miss Rooth has married. Lady Agnes has another success in the renewed concern of Mrs. Dallow in the family -- the lady even acquires an interest in Nick's painting to the extent of asking to be permitted to sit for him -- and at the end of the novel there is some reason to believe that marriage between Julia and Nick is a not-too-remote possibility. Thus society seems to stand against the onslaughts of those -- even those from the inside -- who threaten it (the outsiders in the book are best represented by Miriam Rooth, "the tragic Muse", and Gabriel Nash, Nick's aesthete friend); but one can hardly assume that the author of the novel is on the side of a society which endures in such self-assured indestructibility. Independence of action, freedom of imagination, general human benevolence, as these qualities appear in Nick -- all have been threatened by a sense of social propriety not rooted in moral conviction, by a decadent social formalism which ignores the liberty of the individual intelligence. Though he sees The Tragic Muse as a novel which "relatively fails," R. P. Blackmur believes that this novel, along with several others, "constitutes a great single anarchic rebellion against society -- against the laws of society -- in the combined names of decency, innocence, candor, good will, and the passionate heroism of true vocation."[121]

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[121] R. P. Blackmur, "Henry James", Literary History of the United States, (New York: 1948), II, p. 1045.

The discussion of The Tragic Muse at this point has been prompted not by its metaphorical content, which will be discussed in another connection, but because the novel, like the other stories discussed in this chapter, makes pointed criticisms of aristocratic society. It has seemed wise not to ignore any material which attests James's interest in the social and moral difficulties of his time.

Worldly possessions are, of course, at the center of the drama of The Spoils of Poynton, and at least one skillful use of metaphor re-enforces the tragic loss which occurs when there is a too-positive attachment to material goods. Everyone loses in The Spoils of Poynton, and the multiple disappointments are all intertwined with Mrs. Gereth's shameless manipulations to keep the beautiful furnishings of her country home in the face of a law which says that they must become the property of her son when he marries. At the root of her activity is her objection to the execrable taste of her son's fiancee, whose interest in the objects is wholly possessive and not at all aesthetic, whereas Mrs. Gereth's love for Poynton is so much an attachment to beauty that she has completely lost her moral judgment and sense of fair play. Mrs. Gereth has made an ally of Fleda Vetch, a young lady who can understand the beauties of Poynton and the bad taste of Mona Brigstock without at the same time losing sight of the rights and basic decency of Owen Gereth, the son. When Mrs. Gereth carries off practically all the treasures of Poynton to her widow's cottage at Ricks, Fleda becomes the intermediary between mother and son as the son quite rightly protests his mother's plunder.

Soon Fleda discovers that she is falling in love with Owen, and he, pressed by a stubborn, demanding Mona who refuses to marry him until Poynton is once again as it was, is soon in love with Fleda, from whom he received nothing but understanding and tenderness. This seems to be exactly what Mrs. Gereth wants, and she states her willingness to return the treasures to Poynton when and if Owen and Fleda are married. But Fleda is unwilling to undertake any pursuit of Owen, inasmuch as he has already given his word to Mona. He must recognize his duty.

> "You must settle that with Mona. You mustn't break faith. Anything's better than that. You must at any rate be utterly sure. She must love you -- how can she help it? I wouldn't give you up! ....The great thing is to keep faith. Where's a man if he doesn't? If he doesn't he may be so cruel. So cruel, so cruel, so cruel!"[122]

When Fleda joins Mrs. Gereth again, she learns that the latter, convinced that Owen and Fleda are certain to be married, has sent everything back to Poynton; but she is dismayed to learn that Fleda has not pushed her advantage with the young man and does not even know his whereabouts. Both ladies telegraph to him immediately, but it is too late. Mona, placated by the return of the treasures, has agreed to the marriage and the newspapers tell Fleda and Mrs. Gereth shortly afterward that the event has taken place. Months later, Fleda receives a communication from Owen, who is now in Italy, asking her to go to Poynton and to take one object -- the most precious of

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[122]James, The Novels and Stories, XV, p. 172.

all, if she wishes — as a favor to him. "You won't refuse," he tells her, "if you'll simply think a little what it must be that makes me ask."[123]

Fleda goes, but she has only alighted from the train when she learns that Poynton is on fire and that all of its possessions have burned completely away.

James expresses the relation of Fleda to these events in a metaphor of drought and dryness, as if the entire experience of having to be involved in the struggle for ownership of the objects is barren and arid of opportunity for her. She is horrified by the perfidy of Mrs. Gereth in moving the treasures from Poynton to Ricks; she sees as something positively monstrous that lady's unwillingness to deal with her son. She serves both mother and son to the best of her ability, but James's imagery is expressive of the sterile feeling with which she does so. Fleda is conscious of "the sense of her dryness"[124] produced by a "flight into the cold air of denial."[125]

> The lady of Ricks had made a desert round her, possessing and absorbing her so utterly that other partakers had fallen away....She neither wrote notes nor received them; she indulged in no reminders nor knocked at any doors; she wandered vaguely in the western wilderness or cultivated shy forms of that "household art" for which she had had respect before tasting the bitter tree of knowledge. Her only plan was to be as quiet as a mouse, and when she failed in the attempt to lose herself in the flat suburb she resembled — or thought she did — a lonely fly crawling over a dusty chart.[126]

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[123] Ibid., p. 228.

[124] Ibid., p. 107.

[125] Loc. cit.

[126] Ibid., p. 127.

Mrs. Gereth appears to Fleda as "the vision of some tropical bird, the creature of hot, dense forests, dropped on a frozen moor to pick up a living."[127] A visit from Mrs. Brigstock convinces Fleda that that lady had "not come on purpose to be dry, but that the voice of the invaded room had itself given her the hint."[128] When she speaks of Owen after he has declared his hope of finding in his mail a letter of renunciation from Mona, Fleda makes her statement "sound as dry as possible."[129] Dryness accumulates into objects of stony and strangulating hardness as Fleda learns of the visit of Mrs. Brigstock to Mrs. Gereth.

> Fleda had listened in unbearable pain and growing terror, as if her companion, stone by stone, were piling some fatal mass upon her breast. She had the sense of being buried alive, smothered in the mere expansion of another will; and now there was but one gap left in the air.[130]

Later, when she begins to sense that the return of the possessions is not going to help Fleda after all, Mrs. Gereth speaks "with a dry and weary calm,"[131] but anticipation for a moment causes "a fever of ingenuity...to burn in her [Fleda] though she was painfully conscious, on behalf of her success, that it was visible as fever."[132]

Dryness intensifies and is rarefied until it becomes the fire which consumes Poynton almost before Fleda's eyes.

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[127] Ibid., p. 129.

[128] Ibid., p. 150.

[129] Ibid., p. 169.

[130] Ibid., p. 183.

[131] Ibid., p. 196.

[132] Ibid., p. 197.

> She passed out of the door that opened toward the village, and met a great acrid gust. She heard a far-off windy roar which, in her dismay, she took for that of flames a mile away, and which, the first instant, acted upon her as a wild solicitation.[133]

The smell of cinders and smoke is everywhere as the novelette ends to assert the loss which Mrs. Gereth's false sense of values has perpetrated into the lives of others more judicious and more kindly than she. Only the union of Owen and Fleda, made nearly impossible by Mrs. Gereth's calculated maneuverings, could have relieved the drought of Fleda's dissatisfaction, and here again James's metaphor is active. To Owen's presence in Fleda's life James regularly applies the traditional figure of water as a symbol of that which gives life and fulfillment.

> To know that she had become to him an object of desire gave her wings that she felt herself flutter in air; it was like the rush of a flood into her own accumulations. These stored depths had been fathomless and still, but now, for half an hour, in the empty house, they spread till they overflowed.[134]

Or again:

> She was meanwhile so remarkably constituted that while she refused to profit by Owen's mistake, even while she judged it and hastened to cover it up, she could drink a sweetness from it that consorted little with her wishing it mightn't have been made.[135]

Seeing Owen on the streets of London, Fleda is conscious that

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[133] Ibid., p. 234.

[134] Ibid., p. 93.

[135] Ibid., p. 96.

"two fresh waves passed quickly across her heart,"[136] and when she is at last in his arms with the secret of her love fully revealed, "something prisoned and pent throbbed and gushed; something deep and sweet surged up."[137] But it is a moment of only temporary release, and the dryness sets in again with the full realization of Mona's success. Fleda is to lose Owen, Owen is to lose Fleda, Mrs. Gereth is to surrender Poynton and the satisfaction of seeing Owen and Fleda share it together, and all are to lose Poynton in the disaster of the fire.[138]

Twice in his Preface to the tale James speaks of the "sordidness" of the situation; and the essence of this unattractiveness is the preoccupation of his age with the technical achievements of its artisans, the excessive emphasis on possession of fine furnishing and objects d'art. This tendency to collect without reference to need, to store things up, as it were, in such a way as to remind one always of how one had been able to satisfy materially the refinement of one's taste -- this practice, so common to the manners of the last years of the nineteenth century, James deplored as indicative of a want of moral fiber. The mere possession of a beautiful object or collection of beautiful objects was not quite enough; there must be a reciprocal relationship with intelligence and imagination and good will. James states the intent of The Spoils of Poynton with succinct clarity.

> One thing was "in it," the sordid situation, on the first blush, and one thing only -- though this, in its limited way, no doubt, a curious enough value: the sharp

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[136] Ibid., p. 131.

[137] Ibid., p. 165.

[138] Ibid., p. viii and p. x.

> light it might project on that most modern of our current passions, the fierce appetite for the upholsterer's and joiner's and brazier's work, the chairs and tables, the cabinets and presses, the material odds and ends of the more labouring ages. A lively mark of our manners indeed the diffusion of this curiosity and this avidity, and full of suggestion, clearly, as to their possible influence on other passions and relations.[139]

vi

Throughout the middle period of his career, then, Henry James was a social novelist of unusual perspicacity. The legitimacy of his social criticism stems from the complexity of his picture — from his determination to see his society from as many angles as possible. It is not that he was finally reluctant to commit himself morally about the abuses of his day, but rather that he held the act of commitment to be so sacred an obligation that it must be prefaced with assiduous investigation and responsible open-mindedness. There is a positive judgment of manners and morals in nearly every piece of fiction which Henry James wrote, but whereas it becomes oblique and veiled to the point of invisibility in the later novels, it can be discovered with relative ease in the books of the middle period, 1881-1900. There are explicit and categorical comments on social disorders in the novels which have received the attention of this chapter; and what Joseph Warren Beach called "the witness of the Notebooks",[140] along with selected references from the letters, will substantiate any claim made for James as a writer who felt the compulwion to take a morally strong stand against social injustices.

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[139] Ibid., p. x.

[140] Joseph Warren Beach, "The Witness of the Notebooks," Forms of Modern Fiction, edited by William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, 1948), p. 46.

But the artist in James was repelled by the blatant and obvious. He knew that the too-positive statement of a too-positive judgment carries little conviction, when it does not actually offend. It was not that he sought an artistic detachment from life, but rather that he required subtlety in the expression of his moral view. This subtlety he could accomplish through those technical methods which are the province of the writer of fiction — dramatic point of view, pictorial arrangement, fullness of character, and patterns of imagery. It was the imagery in particular which aided him in the artful though none the less certain and unwavering condemnation of a decadent society, smug and complacent in the exercise of its vulgarized prerogatives. Drawing from the whole area of human experience, he constructed careful symbols which, while operating with complete appropriateness in the narrative itself, would through their consistency make his personal moral response to his material decisive and clear. Thus Henry James served his art and his philosophy in a simultaneous process. The figurative language certifies both his vision and his taste.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Change in the Status of Woman

i

Throughout the period 1881-1900 Henry James demonstrated a growing dislike for journalism. Like the author of Martin Chuzzlewit, he could find small justification for American newspapers; the Notebooks and the Letters abound in sharp criticism of their "vulgarity". In a Notebook entry of November 17, 1887, in which he discusses the plot of what was to become The Reverberator, James is particularly direct.

> One sketches one's age but imperfectly if one doesn't touch on that particular matter: the invasion, the impudence and shamelessness, of the newspaper and the interviewer, the devouring publicity of life, the extinction of all sense between public and private. It is the highest expression of the note of 'familiarity,' the sinking of manners, in so many ways, which the democratization of the world brings with it. I was prompted to make use of the incident in question which struck me [as] a very illustrative piece of contemporary life -- the opposition of the scribbling, publishing indiscreet, newspaperized American girl and the rigid, old-fashioned, conservative, still shockable and much shocked little society she recklessly plays the tricks upon.[1]

Eleven years later, upon the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, he wrote to his brother William of his "moral and intellectual need for ignoring"[2] the newspapers; and other comments scattered here

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[1] F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, editors, The Notebooks of Henry James (New York, 1947), p. 82.

[2] Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 281.

and there link journalistic enterprise with other social developments which James regarded as unattractive — "western ugliness, newspaperism, vulgarity, and democracy" is the way he puts it once in the Notebooks.[3]

But if he was irritated by journalistic practices in general, he was particularly incensed by the presence of women in the newspaper profession. They seemed an especially odious species of female human being to him, and the Notebook comment above is only one of a number expressing his impatience and dislike. He writes to Charles Eliot Norton in 1892 of the delight of Paul Bourget and himself in having eluded an American "lady-newspaper correspondent" and of how "a single stone from that rugged old quarry would have brought [us] down."[4] In a Notebook sketch for a story never realized, he outlines a plot in which a novelist after "a considerable period...of more or less affectionate intercourse with a 'lady-writer,' a newspaperwoman, as it were" will discover that during their entire relationship she will have been publishing anonymous and vicious reviews of his work in critical journals.[5] What James must have regarded as the particular cold-heartedness of the profession is indicated by the meaning which he hoped to give to this situation.

> The point of the thing is whether there be not a little supposable theme or drama in the relation, the situation of the two people after the thing comes to light — the pretension on the part of the reviewer of having one

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[3]Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, p. 102.

[4]Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 195.

[5]Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, p. 177.

> attitude to the writer as a writer, and a totally distinct one as a member of society, a friend, a human being.[6]

That is, the newspaper woman had established a fixed and rigid dichotomy between the practice of her career and the ordinary social relationships. Love, friendship, sympathy, understanding — all these were to give way when they interfered with her search for "copy"; or, rather, all sentimental attachments which such a person might make were to be relegated to an unobtrusive area where they would not get into the way of commercial opportunity.

James saw the emergence of the unscrupulous newspaper woman as part of a major change in the status of women. Along with the New England suffragettes, she came to represent most dramatically for him "the decline of the sentiment of sex."[7] He was disturbed by the intrusion of women into areas formerly occupied exclusively by men, for he saw in this change an abrogation of those rights which are the psychological prerogative of the female sex. It was not that women were to be denied political freedom and wider professional opportunity; it was simply that a woman's demand to share responsibilities not traditionally hers could only hamper, and perhaps eventually prevent, the effective carrying out of the natural functions of her position in the home. The danger lay in woman's becoming something less than, or different from, woman. Thus James's view is not to be regarded as

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[6] Loc. cit.

[7] Ibid., p. 47.

obstructionist, unprogressive or reactionary. It was, in the best sense, psychological. James was never more modern than when he saw what Lionel Trilling calls "the conjunction of the sexual and the political life,"[8] and it is only recently that psychological investigation of sexual maladjustments in our society has placed the blame on what James called "the masculinization of the women,"[9] in which he saw "a big subject for the Novelist."[10]

However, the first newspaper woman to appear in one of James's novels is treated with kindly, though nonetheless pointed, irony. She is Henrietta Stackpole of The Portrait of a Lady, one of James's most successful minor characters. James devotes an amount of space to her in the Preface to his novel which is out of all proportion to her importance in the story. He tells us that she "exemplifies...in her superabundance, not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal."[11] She represents his determination to avoid thinness and underwriting. "Henrietta must have been at that time," he tells us, "a part of my wonderful notion of the lively."[12]

To F. R. Leavis, for whom The Portrait of a Lady is "one of the two most brilliant novels of the language" (the other is The Bostonians, which also is the concern of this chapter),[13]

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[8] Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 60.

[9] Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, p. 192.

[10] Ibid., p. 194.

[11] James, The Novels and Stories, VI, p. xxiv.

[12] Loc. cit.

[13] Leavis, op. cit., p. 153.

Henrietta Stackpole is "perfectly done -- marvelously escaping the effect of caricature, and remaining for all her portentous representativeness, sufficiently sympathetic."[14] She has, to be sure, all of the brash over-confidence and blatant self-assurance of the American newspaper woman who offended James, but her dramatic value to The Portrait of a Lady was that she be the loyal friend of Isabel, who, knowing Isabel's American background, could best see that young lady's capitulation to the questionable charm of Europe.

F. O. Matthiessen has already commented in some detail on the expressive imagery with which Henrietta Stackpole is presented to the reader.[15] Large, striking figures sufficiently assert her boldness. James wrote, "She went into cages, she flourished lashes, like a spangled lion-tamer."[16] Her voice "rang out"; she "fairly bristled with motives."[17] Her lack of regard for individual privacy is expressed in the metaphor that "this enquiring authoress was constantly flashing her lantern into the quiet darkness of his soul."[18]

The figures are consistently appropriate to her career. Though James had originally written that "she was scrupulously, fastidiously neat. From top to toe she carried not an inkstain,"[19] he changed his figure in the revision of the work to "she was as crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding. From

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[14] Ibid., p. 151.

[15] Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1944), pp. 160-1.

[16] James, The Novels and Stories, VI, p. 112.

[17] Ibid., VII, p. 248.

[18] Ibid., VII, p. 213.

[19] Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 160.

top to toe she had probably no misprint."[20]

James is wonderfully witty about Henrietta. Even his "bad" characters say amusing things about her. Gilbert Osmond's description is in full keeping with his excessive fastidiousness.

> "One hasn't a nerve in one's body that she doesn't set quivering....Do you know what she reminds me of? Of a new steel pen -- the most odious thing in nature. She talks as a pen writes; aren't her letters, by the way, on ruled paper?....I don't like at all to think she talks about me -- I feel as I would feel if I knew the footman were wearing my hat."[21]

To Isabel, Henrietta is "a light keen flame, a disembodied voice;"[22] to Ralph Touchett she "does smell of the Future -- it almost knocks one down!"[23] When Henrietta kisses, she does so "as if she were afraid she should be caught doing it."[24] She is "in the van of progress,"[25] she (figuratively speaking) "walks in without knocking at the door,"[26] she has in her garments the odor of "the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading till it stops at the green Pacific!"[27] No more sympathetic relationship exists in the novel than that between Ralph Touchett and

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[20] Loc. cit.

[21] James, The Novels and Stories, VII, p. 252.

[22] Ibid., p. 350.

[23] Ibid., VI, p. 115.

[24] Ibid., VII, pp. 343-4.

[25] Ibid., VI, p. 62.

[26] Ibid., p. 114.

[27] Ibid., p. 115.

Miss Stackpole, but when they meet for the first time, "she fixed her eyes on him, and there was something in their character that reminded him of large polished buttons -- buttons that might have fixed the elastic loops of some tense receptacle: he seemed to see the reflection of surrounding objects on the pupil."[28]

Of course, this is all great fun, and the pleasantry of James's irony is possible because Henrietta, though a constant and effusive talker, is not "in the large type, the type of 'horrid headlines'."[29] But there are non-metaphorical comments all along the way which explicitly show that a society which places a premium on grace, manners, and good taste could hardly be comfortable with a Henrietta Stackpole on its hands. "Henrietta was a literary woman," writes James, "and the great advantage of being a literary woman was that you could go everywhere and do everything,"[30] and the implication of that statement is plainly that to go everywhere and to do everything is not the proper exercise of women. "Henrietta contracted friendships, in traveling, with great freedom, and had formed in railway-carriages several that were among her most valued ties,"[31] writes James, and he might as well be saying that Henrietta was vulgarly and offensively deficient in her knowledge of the circumstances under which friendships are properly made. "But Henrietta, the Countess could see, was always closely buttoned and compactly braided; there was something brisk and

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[28] Ibid., p. 104.

[29] Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 161.

[30] James, The Novels and Stories, VI, p. 156.

[31] Ibid., VII, p. 12.

business-like in her appearance; her manner was almost conscientiously familiar,"[32] writes James, and though this view of Miss Stackpole is from the consciousness of the novel's least attractive person, the judgment of Henrietta is plain enough: to be conscientiously familiar is to violate the sanctity of the individual and private personality. Henry James has not made an ogre of his ficelle -- she was far too useful to him for that -- but his imagery has made it possible for him to give his reader the full, the comprehensive view of the character. That is to say that the imagery has made it possible for him to give us the Henry James view -- the whole view, the knowledge of "the values and significances (of these characters) in a total scheme."[33]

ii

James's portrait of the New Woman in The Bostonians is not a pleasant one; the world of this novel is one of unmitigated horrors and sinister backdrops, and before arriving at the imagery, I should like to discuss the general theme of the work. One is repelled by the hideousness of half a dozen sorceries which operate in the name of enlightened reform; the uncritical humanitarianism which floods the book is presented in a setting of charlatanism, garish publicity, and inverted sexuality masquerading as feminist idealism. An entry in the Notebooks should dispel the doubt that James intended anything so repugnant. After sketching the plot in brief detail, James concludes

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[32] Ibid., p. 200.

[33] Leavis, op. cit., p. 152.

with an announcement of his intention.

> I should like to bafouer the vulgarity and hideousness of this -- the impudent invasion of privacy -- the extinction of all conception of privacy, etc. Daudet's Evangeliste has given me the idea of this thing. If I could only do something with that pictorial quality! At any rate, the subject is very national, very typical. I wished to write a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life. The answer was: the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf.[34]

The Bostonians, as I have indicated earlier, was badly received in James's lifetime and only recently has it begun to acquire the attention which it deserves. Its principal champions in our time have been Philip Rahv, Lionel Trilling, and F. R. Leavis,[35] the last critic seeing the book as a product of that "phase when [James's] genius functioned with freest and fullest vitality."[36] All recent critics of the novel are especially insistent that we must not miss the surprisingly modern outlook of the work. Leavis puts it this way.

> And James's genius comes out in a very remarkable piece of psychological analysis, done in the concrete (and done, it is worth noting, decades before the impact of Freud had initiated a general knowingness about the unconscious and the subconscious).[37]

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[34] Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, p. 47.

[35] Rahv, of course, in the introduction to his edition of the novel; Trilling, in his essay on The Princess Casamassima, and Leavis in The Great Tradition.

[36] Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 127.

[37] Ibid., p. 135.

There are only three characters of major importance in The Bostonians: Olive Chancellor, Verena Tarrant and Basil Ransom, and the central drama of the tale is provided by the conflict between Olive and Basil for possession of Verena. Ransom is a somewhat impoverished Southerner of conservative views who has come to New York to practice law. Stopping off at Boston to visit a distant cousin who had invited him to call on her, he finds that she, Olive, is active in the impassioned movement for emancipation of her sex. He meets also Olive's sister, Mrs. Luna, a frivolous lady of the world, who takes a decidedly sentimental interest in him. He then has dinner with Olive and afterwards accepts her invitation to attend a female suffrage meeting at the home of Miss Birdseye, the acknowledged leader of the feminist group. He does so, however, only after acquainting Olive fully with his opposite views on the woman question.

At the meeting, the announced speaker of the evening, Mrs. Farrinder, refuses to perform, and at the last moment the guests prevail upon an attractive red-haired girl, Verena Tarrant, to take her place. Miss Tarrant is accompanied by her parents, who talk boastfully of her great inspirational powers, which develop from an eloquence produced by her father's laying his hands on her in the best manner of the faith-healing profession, of which, indeed, he is a member. The speech flows out effortlessly in an effective emotional tone, but it is essentially vague and insignificant. However, Olive Chancellor is tremendously affected by the performance and asks the girl to visit her. Encouraged by her ambitious parents, who know Olive's wealth and social

position, Verena calls the next day, where she finds Ransom, who had anticipated that he would find her there. The visit of Verena to Olive's home is the first of many, and soon Olive has developed a strong and possessive attachment to the girl.

Basil returns to his law practice in New York as Olive's infatuation for Verena grows. She tells the younger girl that it is their obligation to work together for the cause and that all their energies and interests must be directed toward pursuing the cause of greater freedom for womanhood. Olive literally buys Verena from her grasping and sordid parents and takes her into her own household. To remove Verena from the attention of wealthy young suitors Olive takes her to Europe on what she calls a trip to complete the girl's education.

In New York Basil hears of the trip from Mrs. Luna, who approves neither of Verena nor of her sister's conduct. However, Basil's curiosity to see Verena is stimulated -- he has never been able to explain her fascination for him -- and he goes at once to Boston hoping to encounter her there. Pelham Edgar's summary of the final events of the novel will be helpful here.

> It now becomes a tug-of-war between Basil and Olive for the possession of the girl. Basil eventually dominates, and demonstrates the truth of his theory that Verena's devotion to the cause of women's rights is the unconsciously insincere aberration of a nature fashioned for love. When she asks him why her gift has been bestowed upon her if only to be wasted, he tells her that her genius can be put to better use in making one many happy than in deluding a gaping multitude. An uncompromising lover this, but that such blunt wooing should break down her defenses

> gives point to his contention. He eventually bears her off from a crowded meeting that had gathered to hear her, and her tears as she drives away from the hall were, as the author admits, not the last that she was destined to shed.[38]

There can be no doubt, it seems to me, about where Henry James stands in the conflict between Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom. It is, as we have said, extremely hazardous to assume that the views expressed by a character in a novel of James are ever those of the author himself, for James practiced his art with a scrupulous objectivity resulting from an intellectual ease in the whole range of human culture, and this intellectual ease made indiscriminate enthusiasms impossible for him. But in The Bostonians he obviously has little sympathy for the "advanced" views of Olive Chancellor and her friends. The entire feminist movement is treated ironically but with James demonstrating in the action of his novel that its dangers were not political but personal. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that James saw his New England women as deficient in sensibility, not in political acumen; but it is his particular courage to have investigated the uncertain area of reciprocal effect -- the point, that is, at which it can be assumed that the projection of the female will into public dispute begins to deprive her of security and control in the functions of her sex. When and how, that is, does a woman become a George Eliot, a George Sand, or -- to return to The Bostonians -- a Mrs. Farrinder, a Miss Peabody, a Doctor Prance? The dry, painful sterility of these

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[38]Pelham Edgar, op. cit., p. 262.

women is the strongest impression that we take from the novel, and we rejoice in the stubbornness of Ransom which prevents a similar fate for Verena Tarrant.

Henry James, then, is unquestionably on the side of Basil Ransom. Mr. Leavis reminds us that so perceptive a reader of the novel as Miss Rebecca West could find nothing to say in favor of it because she could not forgive James's ironic treatment of the "religion of humanity."[39] Mr. Leavis is confident that we will find the author in the novel. "We are not to identify him with Ransom, but we don't suspect him of enthusiasm for that religion, and it is made very plain that he shares Ransom's ironical vision of the 'reformers'."[40]

Throughout the novel the views of Ransom are given exceptional dramatic advantage; occasionally the tempo of the novel slows as James permits the expression of them. And they come through with power and certainty -- they are virtually the only pieces of memorable talk in so crowded a book. Perhaps the most explicit statement of Ransom's objection to the feminists comes in his first definite attempt to remove Verena from their influence.

> "Oh, I suppose you want to destroy us by neglect, by silence!" Verena exclaimed, with the same brightness.
>
> "No, I don't want to destroy you, any more than I want to save you. There has been far too much talk about you, and I want to leave you alone altogether. My interest is in my own sex; yours evidently can look after itself. That's what I want to save."
>
> Verena saw that he was more serious now than he had been before, that he was not piling it up satirically, but

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[39] Leavis, op. cit., p. 135.

[40] Loc. cit.

> saying really and a trifly wearily, as if he were tired of much talk, what he meant. "To save it from what?" she asked.
>
> "From the most damnable feminisation! I am so far from thinking, as you set forth the other night, that there is not enough woman in our general life, that it has long been pressed home to me that there is a great deal too much. The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, a hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is -- a very queer and partly base mixture -- that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!"[41]

The speech is exactly right for the dramatic situation at this point in the novel; it is precisely what we expect a man of Ransom's background and temperament to say. Yet one is scarcely able to resist the conviction that the author is speaking at least partly in his own person — the speech is so carefully prepared for and, as it were, high-lighted in the narrative. However, it is not to be supposed that it represents James's whole view. He saw a gulf widening between the sexes and he speculated in the Notebooks about the cause; and though Ransom's views would seem to absolve men from guilt in the matter, James knew that the problem was far too socially complex to admit of so limited an interpretation. He saw the emergence of woman into public life as the inevitable result of her boredom, which was

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[41]James, The Novels and Stories, IX, pp. 137-8.

itself the result of the male's almost total immersion in affairs of business and commerce.

> This opens up...the whole subject, or question, about which Godkin, as I remember, one day last summer talked to me very emphatically and interestingly -- the growing divorce between the American woman (with her comparative leisure, culture, grace, social instincts, artistic ambitions) and the male American immersed in the ferocity of business, with no time for any but the most sordid interests, purely commercial, professional, democratic and political. This divorce is rapidly becoming a gulf -- an abyss of inequality, the like of which has never before been seen under the sun. One might represent it, picture it, in a series of illustrations, of episodes -- one might project a lot of light upon it. It would abound in developments, in ramifications.[42]

It is precisely this willingness to look at a difficult social problem from numerous angles which exonerates Henry James from the charges made by critics like Parrington and Hicks that his work exists in a social vacuum. James's fiction is the most responsible kind of attention to social disorders in that it is unwilling to accept any single analysis too readily. "The social texture of his work is grainy and knotted with practicality and detail," writes Trilling, and "his social observation is of a kind which we must find startlingly prescient when we consider that it was made some sixty years ago."[43]

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[42]Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, pp. 129-30.

[43]Trilling, op. cit., p. 60.

iii

The imagery of The Bostonians operates to establish Olive Chancellor's stultifying domination of Verena Tarrant, and Basil Ransom's persistent attempts to break down that domination. Thus it is supplemental to the main theme which is, as we have seen, larger than the conflict over Verena. However, it is through the drama of this conflict that the larger issues are apprehended, and the importance of the image is not, therefore, to be minimized.

The figures which James employs leave us in no doubt about how all-encompassing Olive Chancellor wants her authority over the girl to be. Several images are used repeatedly: Verena is spoken of as being in a box or under the cloak of Olive. But most interesting is the repeated metaphorical emphasis on coiled wire, strands of steel, entangled metal cords. We are told first in the novel that Olive saw things "not simply and sharply, but in perverse relations, in inter-twisted strands."[44] After Verena comes to live with Olive, James writes that "the fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail."[45] In permitting Verena to see young Mr. Burrage, Olive is spoken of as "steeling herself against uneasiness."[46] Verena, living with Olive, is soon able to work without the stimulus of her father.

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[44]James, The Novels and Stories, VIII, p. 172.

[45]Ibid., p. 201.

[46]Ibid., p. 203.

There was no need of putting pressure on her; her own springs were working."[47]

Miss Birdseye, describing the relationship between Olive and Verena to Ransom, says, "You would say so if you were to see Miss Chancellor when Verena rises to eloquence. It's as if the chords were strung across her own heart; she seems to vibrate, to echo with every word."[48] The wire here has become the strings of a harp or some other stringed instrument. The project in which Olive and Verena are united is spoken of as "the tension of their common purpose,"[49] and Olive is twice described as having fallen into the trap [one can surely assume a steel trap] of fate."[50]

With Verena's first demonstration of impatience under the yoke which Olive has imposed on her, James uses the figure to dramatic advantage. Verena has just protested Olive's apparent lack of trust in her.

> The habit of public speaking, the training, the practice, in which she had been immersed, enabled Verena to unroll a coil of propositions dedicated even to a private interest with the most touching, most cumulative effect.[51]

The same metaphor is used as Ransom begins a more active opposition to Olive Chancellor for possession of Verena. James writes

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[47] Ibid., p. 204.

[48] Ibid., p. 262.

[49] Ibid., p. 77.

[50] Ibid., p. 79.

[51] Ibid., p. 97.

that he "unrolled a string of queer fancies."[52] Ransom's activity, coupled with Verena's emerging rebellion, represents an uncoiling of the strands which Olive had twisted tight about Verena; he has "unrolled" the "queer fancies" which Verena had learned from Olive, just as Verena has "unrolled a coil of propositions" in her first step toward independence. When Ransom declares that he sees the public Verena Tarrant as a mere puppet, there is a shift in emphasis from wire that surrounds to wire that manipulates.

> "You always want to please some one, and now you go lecturing about the country, and trying to provoke demonstrations, in order to please Miss Chancellor, just as you did it before to please your father and mother. It isn't you, the least in the world, but an inflated little figure (very remarkable in its own way too) whom you have invented and set on its feet, pulling strings, behind it, to make it move and speak, while you try to conceal and efface yourself there."[53]

The figure is applied to all of the New England reforming ladies. "They had no wish to be wound up when they went out of town; they were sufficiently wound up at all times by the sense of all their sex had been through."[54] But it is to Olive that the image is most frequently applied, and in her most impassioned outburst of opposition to Ransom, recorded by James as an indirect quotation, she does not fail to put it into use.

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[52] Ibid., p. 118.

[53] Ibid., p. 141.

[54] Ibid., p. 152.

> Olive flung herself over the couch, burying her face in the cushions, while she tumbled in her despair, and moaning out that he didn't love Verena, he never had loved her, it was only his hatred of their cause that made him pretend it; he wanted to do that an injury, to do it the worst he could think of. He didn't love her, he hated her, he only wanted to smother her, to crush her, to kill her -- as she would infallibly see that he would if she listened to him. It was because he knew that her voice had magic in it, and from the moment he caught its first note he had determined to destroy it. It was not tenderness that moved him -- it was devilish malignity; tenderness would be incapable of requiring the horrible sacrifice that he was not ashamed to ask, of requiring her Verena to commit perjury and blasphemy, to desert a work, an interest, with which her very heart-strings were interlaced, to give the lie to her whole young past, to her purest, holiest ambitions.[55]

Olive's use of the image here is, to be sure, a conventional and traditional one -- the reader recalls Othello's first suspicions of Desdemona:

> If I do prove her haggard
> Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings
> I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind.[56]

But the figure is nonetheless related to the pattern of metaphor which has preceded it and which it reinforces.

Also in the novel there is an imagery of cover or concealment, and once again the application is to Olive's domination of Verena. Watching the interest of the Burrages in Verena, Olive thinks, "'Why in the world can't they let her alone?' and prepared to throw a fold of her mantle, as she had done before, over her young friend."[57]

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[55] Ibid., pp. 191-2. Italics are mine.

[56] Othello, III, iii, 260-62.

[57] Ibid., VIII, p. 185.

When Verena's father agrees to permit Verena to live with Olive, he asks the latter not to obstruct the display of Verena's talents. " 'Don't shut down the cover, Miss Chancellor; just let her overflow! [58] "

In speaking of the position of women, Verena uses the metaphor -- it becomes a matter of considerable self-consciousness to her -- of a box in which all members of the female sex are imprisoned. The figure enables her to conclude her speech with considerable effect on her hearers.

> We require simply freedom; we require the lid to be taken off the box in which we have been kept for centuries. You say it's a very comfortable, cozy, convenient box, with nice glass sides, so that we can see out, and that all that's wanted is to give another quiet turn of the key. That is very easily answered. Good gentlemen, you have never been in the box, and you haven't the least idea how it feels!"[59]

Verena has only one secret from Olive -- the incident of one of Ransom's visits, and she clings to it pathetically as virtually the only thing that is all her own. But under Olive's questioning, the chance for concealment seems slight. "She felt that her friend's strange, uneasy eyes searched very far; a little more and they would go to the very bottom."[60]

It is Ransom's perception which sees that Verena's use of the figure of the box in a general or universal application is really a subconscious revelation of her private and individual predicament.

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[58] Ibid., p. 199.

[59] Ibid., IX, p. 57.

[60] Ibid., p. 83.

It is not the box of her sex that she wants to escape from quite so much as the box or trap (in this respect, the two metaphorical patterns come together) of Olive's domination.

> He kept talking about the box; he seemed as if he wouldn't let go that simile. He said that he had come to look at her through the glass sides, and if he wasn't afraid of hurting her he would smash them in. He was determined to find the key that would open it, if he had to look for it all over the world; it was tantalising only to be able to talk to her through the keyhole.[61]

From her false position Basil Ransom rescues Verena Tarrant, and, of course, the whole function of James's metaphor in The Bostonians, insofar as that metaphor applies to Olive and Verena, has been to make clear to us that Verena's position is a very false one indeed. Olive has not, perhaps, practiced a conscious deception on the girl, but one can hardly escape the conclusion that The Bostonians is intended as a study of uncertain human motivation, and of how "the masculinization of women"[62] to the extent of their vigorous participation in public debate must result in their being subjected to private ambiguity and ambivalence. As much as anything else, The Bostonians is a parable of self-deception, with both Olive and Verena, though more especially the former, figuring as the victims of their own lack of understanding. James's reformers do not know themselves as women, and consequently they do not know themselves as human beings. This is

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[61] Ibid., pp. 118-19.

[62] Matthiessen and Murdock, eds., The Notebooks, p. 192.

not the place for a discussion of James's wit, but a few examples of it will show how utterly devoid of personality, appetite and understanding he considered the New England women of the feminist movement to be. Henry James was probably never more unkind to a character than when he wrote of Miss Birdseye that "she belonged to any and every league that had been founded for any purpose whatever."[63]

> This did not prevent her from being a confused, entangled, inconsequent, discursive old woman, whose charity began at home and ended nowhere, whose credulity kept pace with it, and who knew less about her fellow-creatures, if possible, after fifty years of humanitarian zeal, than on the day she had gone into the field to testify against the iniquity of most arrangements.[64]

And as if that were not enough, there follows a few pages later a comment on the same lady which must have seemed to James the most damning castigation of which a novelist was capable. " Miss Birdseye neither knew what she smelled nor tasted what she ate."[65]

Dr. Prance, Miss Birdseye's medical friend, comes in for an equally severe drubbing. We see her through the eyes of Basil Ransom, but the picture has James's critical understanding of cultural history.

> The little medical lady struck him as a perfect example of the "Yankee female" -- the figure which, in the unregenerate imagination of the children of the cotton-States, was produced by the New England school system, the Puritan code, the ungenial climate, the absence of chivalry. Spare, dry, hard, without a curve, an inflexion or a grace, she

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[63] James, The Novels and Stories, VIII, p. 31.

[64] Loc. cit.

[65] Ibid., p. 36. Readers of Charles Dickens will notice a marked similarity between Miss Birdseye and Mrs. Jellyby in Bleak House. The details of description are remarkably alike, even to the matter of the failure of these two ladies to appreciate their food.

> seemed to ask no odds in the battle of life and to be prepared to give none.... She looked like a boy, and not even like a good boy. It was evident that if she had been a boy, she would have "cut" school, to try private experiments in mechanics or to make researches in natural history. It was true that if she had been a boy she would have borne some relation to a girl, whereas Doctor Prace appeared to bear none whatever. Except her intelligent eye, she had no features to speak of.[66]

What a warning to the centuries, and what a tragedy that American civilization has failed to heed it!

Of George Sand, Henry James once said, "She was a man: a woman can transform herself into a man, but never into a gentleman!"[67] The remark is pertinent to a discussion of The Bostonians. The imagery of James's novel helps to reveal the lack of genuine sentiment, refined taste, psychological certainty and moral firmness in one particular section of New England life. The women of that section would never fully comprehend the devastating penetration of James's comment on Madame Sand.

iv

It is to a household of appalling sordidness that James introduces us in his novelette A London Life (1888). Marital infidelities have so disordered the Berrington home that Laura Wing, Mrs. Berrington's eighteen-year-old sister, feels the intensity of its power to corrupt. Intrigue, scandal, imminent divorce, the violation

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[66] Ibid., pp. 48-9.

[67] Simon Nowell-Smith, The Legend of the Master (New York, 1948), p. 74.

of the innocence of the children of the marriage -- these are presented as real terrors against which Laura must struggle in all the vigor of her youthful moral constancy in order to save her family name from dishonor and prevent the social repudiation of her sister. James's criticism of the world of the novel is mercilessly pejorative, the serpent in its bosom being shown as the extension of woman's power and influence through the social frivolity which makes her morally irresponsible. For Selina Berrington who, in the excitement of clandestine meetings with her lover and attachment to fashionable luxuries, has ceased to be a parent, James has only an unmitigated scorn; he is obdurate in his condemnation of her insensitiveness to the sanctity of family.

James at no point in his work permits himself to question the ideal of family. Divorce enters his stories very infrequently, and when it does, the divorced parties are subjected to long and inflexible social disapproval. In the world of James's novels, the family is a bulwark against the various disintegrations outside it, and although the disagreements between husband and wife may be bitter and irreconcilable -- although, as sometimes happens in the novels, one of the parties has been criminally victimized by the other -- the old admonition, in a revised Henry James-version still stands: what man has joined together, let no man put asunder. Readers who like to see hints of a writer's biography in his work would probably conclude that James's sense of the inviolability of family life came from the harmony of the relations of the James family, as beautifully demonstrated

in their letters to one another, in Henry James's autobiographical volumes, and in the records of their constant associations. In any case, James saw in the middle period of his career the widespread disregard of the values of family life as one of the indications of the general rottenness of the old social structure, and in A London Life he is at pains to show us the effect of family breakdown on the status of women.

Summarized briefly, the novelette is the account of the attempts of Laura Wing, a young American girl who lives in London with her sister and brother-in-law, Selina and Lionel Berrington, to prevent the collapse of their marriage. She is incensed at their way of life, at their passionate hatred of one another, at Selina's sentimental alliance with another man, at Lionel's drunken offensiveness, and at their general disregard of their children, a pair of appealing but somewhat bewildered little boys. Laura begs both her sister and her brother-in-law to adjust their differences or at least to give up the attachments which are threatening the household with public scandal, but to no avail. They pursue their individual interests solidified in their hatred of one another.

At the Berrington home Laura makes the acquaintance of Mr. Wendhover, another American, and he becomes her devoted escort as she shows him the sights of London. He takes both Laura and Selina to the opera one night and is distressed by Selina's restlessness. Leaving their box during one of the intervals of the performance, Selina bolts with Captain Crispin, her lover, deserting her husband

and children. When she realizes what has happened, Laura, in a state of desperation, makes several rather thinly-disguished overtures to Wendhover, plainly indicating her willingness to accept a proposal of marriage from him. He is too obtuse, however, to catch the full significance of her advances, and in bitter humiliation Laura hurries to the home of her friend Lady Davenant where she is ill for several days. Wendhover comes for her there, eager now to declare his love, but she turns him away and flees to Brussels, where Selina has gone. There is a crushing horror in the final scene between Laura and her brother-in-law.

> It came to her that he really liked the idea of the public letting-in of light — the fresh occupation, the bustle and importance and celebrity of it...."I haven't the least objection at present to telling you what you want to know. I shall have my little arrangements very soon and you'll be subpoenaed."
>
> "Subpoenaed?" the girl repeated mechanically.
>
> "You'll be called as a witness on my side."
>
> "On your side?"
>
> "Of course you're on my side, ain't you?"
>
> "Can they force me to come?" asked Laura in answer to this.
>
> "No, they can't force you, if you leave the country.
>
> "That's exactly what I want to do."
>
> "That will be idiotic," said Lionel, "and very bad for Selina. If you don't help me you ought at least to help her."
>
> She sat a moment with her eyes on the ground. "Where is she — where is she?" she then asked.
>
> "They're at Brussels, at the Hotel de Flandres. They appear to like it very much."
>
> "Are you telling me the truth?"
>
> "Lord, my dear child, I don't lie!" Lionel exclaimed. "You'll make a jolly mistake if you go to her," he added. "If you've seen her with him how shall you be able properly to lie for her?"
>
> "I won't see her with him."
>
> "That's all very well, but he'll take care of that. Of course if you are ready for family perjury --!" Lionel subjoined.

"I'm ready for anything."

"Well, I've been kind to you, my dear," he continued, smoking, his chin in the air.

"Certainly you've been kind to me."

"If you want to defend her you had better keep away from her," said Lionel. "Besides, for yourself, you see, it won't be the best thing in the world -- to be known to have been seen in it."

"I don't care for myself," Laura returned musingly.

"Don't you care for the children, that you're so ready to throw them over? For you would, my dear, you know. If you go to Brussels, you never come back here -- you never cross this threshold -- you never touch them again!"

She appeared to listen to this last declaration, but made no reply to it; she only observed after a moment with a certain impatience, "Oh the children will do anyway!" Then she added passionately: "You won't, Lionel; in mercy's name tell me you won't!"

"I won't what?"

"Do the awful thing you say."

"Divorce her? The devil I won't!"

"Then why do you speak of the children -- if you've no pity for them?"

Lionel stared an instant. "I thought you said yourself they'd do anyway!"

Laura bent her head, resting it on the back of her hand and over the leathern arm of the sofa. So she remained, while Lionel stood smoking; but at last, to leave the room, she got up with an effort that was physical pain. He came to her, to detain her, with a little good intention that had no felicity for her, trying to take her hand persuasively. "Dear old girl, don't try and behave just as she did! If you'll stay quietly here I won't call you, I give you my honour I won't; there! You want to see the doctor -- that's the sort of person you want to see. And what good will it do you, even if you bring her home in pink paper? Do you candidly suppose I'll ever look at her -- except across the court-room?"

"I must, I must, I must!" Laura cried, jerking herself away from him and reaching the door.[68]

But Laura's stay in Brussels is a very short one. She writes to Lady Davenant from Antwerp that she is returning to Virginia, and there, as the divorce case of "Berrington vs. Berrington and Others"

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[68] James, The Novels and Stories, XV, pp. 374-76.

begins in London, the story takes leave of her.

To match the disorder of the household in his story James has equipped the tale with a disordered natural world outside. Rain, dampness, wind, storms, and mud prevail throughout the narrative, with the most dramatic scene of the novelette being acted, as in Lear, against a background of tempest. Rain enters the story with the first sentence, but it is not a beneficent rain. James uses the water-symbol to better dramatic advantage here than in The Princess Casamassima and The Spoils of Poynton. In A London Life the disturbance in nature is exactly congruent with the disturbances in social and family life. Rain is unsettling and ominous in the story -- like the natural disorders which, in Shakespeare's plays, presage dire events in the human world. "It seemed to be raining, but she [Laura] didn't mind -- she would put on stout shoes and walk over to Plash,"[69] and the name of Lady Davenant's place of residence strikes us with its suggestion of falling water. The rain, however, is nothing after all: "there was only a grayness in the air, covering all the strong rich green, and a pleasant damp earthy smell."[70] It is at Plash that Lionel's mother also resides, and Laura speculates on the British custom of requiring a widowed mother to surrender the family estate when the son comes into his rights (the situation in The Spoils of Poynton) "but her condemnation of this wrong forgot itself when so many of the

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[69] Ibid., p. 237.

[70] Loc. cit.,

consequences looked right — bearing a little dampness."[71] Her interview with Lady Davenant finished, Laura, who has been told by her older friend that she must get out of the Berrington home, "walked back to Mellows in the rain, which had now come on, and through the gray blurred park."[72] Coming in to see the children in their nursery, Laura meets her brother-in-law and tells him that she must change her clothes because "I've been out in the rain — I've been to Plash — I'm decidedly damp,"[73] but upon Lionel's revelation that Laura has gone to Paris with a rather disreputable Lady Ringrose, Laura, in her room "had more than ever her sense of impending calamity; a draught of misfortune seemed to blow through the house; it chilled her feet under her chair. The letter she had had in her head went out like a flame in the wind and her only thought now was to wire to Selina the first thing in the morning."[74] She must bring her sister to her senses for "frivolity that was never ashamed was like a neglected cold — you could die of it morally as well as of anything else."[75]

Reprimanded by her sister, Selina "tried to splash her sister with the mud into which she herself had jumped,"[76] and Laura later feels certain that Wendhover "could lift her out of the mire if he would."[77] But it is Lady Davenant, almost at the novel's conclusion,

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[71] Ibid., p. 238.

[72] Ibid., p. 252.

[73] Ibid., p. 267.

[74] Ibid., p. 271.

[75] Ibid., p. 270.

[76] Ibid., p. 347.

[77] Ibid., p. 348.

who must spell out for Wendhover the meaning of Laura's behavior.

> "It seemed to her, with what was becoming so clear to her, that an honest man might save her from it, might give her his name and his faith and help her to pick her steps in the mud. She exaggerates the force of the splash, the stigma of her relationship."[78]

There is an extension of the dampness into a general metaphor of water and liquids. Selina's addiction to telegraphing, which she saw as the only way not to get into trouble, ought to have assured that her "career should have flowed like the rivers of Eden."[79] Laura's position in the Berrington household is defended as James writes, "It is not to be wished she shall sail under false colors. It must even be related of her that since she couldn't escape and live in lodgings and paint fans...she determined to try and be happy in the given circumstances, to float in shallow and turbid water....So she floated",[80] although her brother-in-law's behavior sometimes "even gave her a sense of deeper dangers."[81] There is one moment in the novel, however, when Laura's remonstrances with her sister touch the latter.

> Her arms were about our young woman, they clung tight and the checked tears again became a flood. She besought Laura to save her, to stay with her, to help her against herself, against <u>him</u>, against Lionel, against everything — to forgive her also all the horrid things she had said to her. She melted, liquefied, spread like a tide, and the room was deluged with her repentance, her desolation,

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[78] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 364.

[79] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 263.

[80] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 292-3.

[81] <u>Loc. cit.</u>

> her confession, her vain vows and the articles of apparel detached from her and that might have been floating out to sea.[82]

In their play the two children several times represent themselves in the act of drowning -- certainly an action of dramatic symbolic significance, but the scene which must engage our greatest attention is that in which Laura and Wendhover, visiting an out-of-the-way museum during a violent thunder storm, come upon Selina and her lover, Captain Crispin.

> They had been there half an hour -- it had grown much darker -- when they heard a tremendous peal of thunder and became aware the storm had broken. They watched it a while from the upper windows -- a violent June shower with quick sheets of lightning and a rainfall that danced on the pavements. They took it sociably, they lingered at the window, inhaling the odour of the fresh wet that drenched the sultry town. They would have to wait till it had passed, and they resigned themselves easily to this idea, repeating very often that it would pass very soon. One of the keepers told them of other rooms to see, of objects of high interest in the basement. They made their way down -- it grew much darker and they heard a great deal of thunder -- and entered a part of the house which presented itself to Laura as a series of dim, irregular vaults, passages, and little narrow avenues, encumbered with strange vague things ... "It's very fearful -- it looks like a cave of idols! she said to her companion; and then she added, "Just look there: is that a person or a thing?" As she spoke they drew nearer the object of her reference -- a figure half blocking a small vista of curiosities, a figure that answered her question by uttering a short shriek as they approached. The immediate cause of this cry was apparently a vivid flash of lightning, which penetrated into the room and cleared up both Laura's face and that of the equivocal person. The girl recognized her sister, as Mrs. Lionel had unguardedly recognized hers. "Why, Selina!" broke from her lips before she had time to check the sound. At the same moment the figure turned quickly away, and then Laura saw it accompanied by another,

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[82] Ibid., p. 232.

> a tall gentleman with a tawny beard that shone in the dusk. These wanderers retreated together -- melted away as it were, disappearing in the gloom or in the labyrinth of wonders.[83]

The symbol does excellent service here, endowing the scene with dynamic portent and framing the revelation with the sharp boundaries of the meaning which the novel, through its central symbol as much as through anything else, has been attempting to state. Selina's assignation is the ultimate design and picture of the meaning of the book; it brings to focus the moral nihilism of her frivolity. Earlier in the novelette Laura had reflected on "that perfection of machinery that can still at certain times make English life go on of itself with a stately rhythm long after corruption is within it,"[84] and it has been the function of James's metaphor to suggest by its very nature -- a disordered natural world -- that at least one source of that corruption was the change in the social status of women which, through the resultant social disorder, so facilitated Selina's dalliance as to make its later disapprobation of her indefensible. Just as in the Elizabethan plays which accepted the Great Chain of Being, with disturbances in the world of man's affairs, so the generally unsettled climatic conditions in A London Life establish the tone of a novel which has as its theme the fundamentally unsettled moral conditions of a society which does not know how to deal with its Selina Berringtons.

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[83] Ibid., pp. 314-5.

[84] Ibid., p. 257.

Thus James saw the problem of Selina and of all modern women in its proper perspective -- as part of the larger moral problem of doctrine and ideology; and an analysis of his imagery is essential to our discovery that James again has demonstrated a moral responsibility unsurpassed in the nineteenth-century novel and equalled in the century only by the most serious practitioners of the art of fiction -- Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens.

V

It is to a story outside the middle period that we must turn for a view of a woman who behaves with maximum discretion, understanding of her position, and resolution, and who struggles so unremittingly against the powers of evil, within the confines of the traditional status assigned to her, as to come to a level of moral rigidity which gives her final command over her assailants. For purposes of contrast with the preceding pictures, it has seemed justifiable to comment on the earlier story here. The story of "Madame de Mauves" (1874) is this: Euphemia Cleve, a wealthy young American girl studying in France, falls in love with and marries Richard de Mauves, the brother of her best friend at school, because she has wanted to marry "a man of hierarchical rank -- not for the pleasure of having herself called Madame la Vicontesse ...but because she had a romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling."[85]

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[85]James, The Novels and Stories, XVIII, p. 201.

She is cautioned against her romantic sentiment by the cold, hard realism of her prospective mother-in-law.

> "Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life you must -- I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbor won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear -- I beseech you don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbor peeping don't cry out; only very politely wait your own chance."[86]

Actually the story details Euphemia's gradual perception of how to apply this advice, for her marriage is a nightmare. Euphemia learns that Richard has married her only for her money and that he is a confirmed profligate who, pursuing his own extra-marital love affairs, makes clear to his wife that he would not at all be distressed if she were to take a lover. Nevertheless, she suffers with dignity and maintains a household of impeccable taste and efficiency.

A young American named Longmore sees Madame de Mauves and is convinced that she is unhappy. Struck by her beauty, he desires to help her but finds that his interest is swiftly going beyond the bounds of friendship. When he sees Richard de Mauves in the company of a dissolute woman in Paris, Longmore feels privileged to announce the real character of his concern for Euphemia, but she rejects his love and sends him back to America. Moved by his wife's remarkable resolution and learning to appreciate her beauty all over again, Richard de Mauves detaches himself from dissipation and begs his wife's forgiveness. This she refuses with an implacable obduracy. The story concludes with Longmore's learning of Richard de Mauves' fate.

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[86] Ibid., p. 206.

> "He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be readmitted to favour. All in vain! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him; he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One day they discovered he had blown out his brains."[87]

Longmore is not moved to seek out Madame de Mauves again, however; "the truth is that, in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling -- a feeling of wonder, of uncertainty, of awe."[88]

For his heroine in this tale James has a symbolism drawn from the world of music and harmony. "Harmony " becomes in the narrative a persistent term of description for Euphemia. Visiting her French friends for the first time, she wonders "if a right harmony with such a place mightn't come by humble prayer."[89] Later it seems to Longmore "that her whole being was pitched in a lower key than harmonious Nature had designed; she was like a powerful singer who had lost her high notes. "[90] Old Madame de Mauves speaks of the "key of [Euphemia's] conscience"[91] and, in a double application of the figure (the mechanical musical toy) of her being "wound up by some key."[92] It is as a charming singer that she first attracts Richard.

> To beguile his confinement the accomplished young stranger was repeatedly induced to sing for him, which she did with a small natural tremor that might have passed for

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87 Ibid., p. 296.

88 Ibid., p. 297.

89 Ibid., p. 204.

90 Ibid., p. 219.

91 Ibid., p. 206.

92 Ibid., p. 205.

> the finish of vocal art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unfailing attention, remembered all her melodies and would sit humming them to himself.[93]

Responding to Euphemia's charms, Richard finds his own life pleasantly harmonious; "he was very fond of music and he now seemed to give easy ear to some of the sweetest he had ever heard."[94]

But there is a shift of tone after the marriage, and Richard, commenting on his wife's preference for seclusion, tells Longmore "that it was not a man's fault if his wife's love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key."[95] Richard himself, having no sense of morals, seems to Longmore "to range the whole scale of the senses."[96] "He could be highly polite and damnably impertinent, but the life of the spirit was a world as closed to him as the world of great music to a man without an ear."[97]

Richard's discussion of his wife almost always slips into a reference to music.

> "But I've not met one of the rarest of women without recognising her, without making my reflection that, charm for charm, such a manière d'être is more 'fetching' even than the worst of Theresa's songs sung by a dissipated duchess."....
> He wouldn't especially have desired perhaps that his wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchess in question...but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it.[98]

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[93] Ibid., p. 209.

[94] Ibid., p. 212.

[95] Ibid., p. 226.

[96] Ibid., p. 227.

[97] Loc. cit.

[98] Ibid., pp. 228-9.

And as he speaks to Longmore, the latter, watching faintly golden motes in the air, fancies them "a swarm of humming insects, the chorus of a refrain."[99]

Equally as unattractive as her brother is Madame Clarin, Euphemia's school friend, who, having driven her husband to ruin and death, now resides with Richard and his wife. But in contrast with Madame de Mauves, Marie Clarin was "like a brassy discord in a maze of melody."[100] Nevertheless, she has her sense of music. Euphemia, she tells Longmore, is not behaving in the great tradition of the women of the French family who "when they had a headache...put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual, and when they had a heartache they touched up that quarter with just such another brush....She should fall into line, she should keep up the tone."[101]

But Euphemia's tone is not Marie Clarin's. Using the key symbol in another way, James writes of his heroine, "For the present she was proposing to live with [her trouble] peaceably, reputably and without scandal — turning the key on it occasionally as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity."[102] Longmore tells his friend Mrs. Draper that Madame de Mauves "has her consolation in herself...she needs none that any one else can offer her."[103] The full compelling richness of her harmony is obvious in her demand on Longmore.

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[99] Ibid., p. 238.

[100] Ibid., p. 257.

[101] Ibid., p. 259.

[102] Ibid., p. 219.

[103] Ibid., p. 295.

> She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly. She must have "liked" him indeed, as she said, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her tenderness still in her dreadful consistency, his spirit rose with a new flight and suddenly felt itself breathe clearer air.[104]

Yet James denies charity to his heroine; she cannot forgive the perfidy of her husband and is thus the cause of his suicide. The endurance with which James's wronged women meet their adversity is itself a form of revenge and punishment — one thinks of Isabel Osmond and Maggie Verver, and even of Catherine Sloper and Milly Theale.[105] Rewards and punishments are solely of this world in the novels of James, and one's capacity to merit the one and mete out the other is, more than anything else, a matter of knowing one's place and accepting the destiny which one's sentiment has made inescapable. James's married women choose their mates wilfully, and generally for reasons of opportunity — that is, marriage to a particular man offers an additional possibility for self-development. Certainly this is true of Isabel Osmond, Euphemia de Mauves and Maggie Verver, to mention only three. Therefore, when the marriage proves a disillusioning experience, they are honor-bound, in the world of the novels, not to flee. They must suffer the agony and "stick it out."

Their recompenses for doing so are manifold, not the least of which is the comfort of knowing that, in the fixity of their wills,

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[104] Ibid., p. 282.

[105] Isabel Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady, Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl, Catherine Sloper in Washington Square, and Milly Theale in The Wings of the Dove.

they have arrived at an intellectual and moral lucidity which carries them beyond the discussion of social status and public rights. In that remote region James's heroines are secure; their status is their womanliness, and womanliness means power and control.

CHAPTER FIVE

James's Attitude Toward His Art

i

The commonly accepted notion of James's devotion to the life of art is most felicitously phrased, perhaps, by Percy Lubbock in his introduction to the first volume of James's letters.

> [James's] belief was in the sanctity and sufficiency of the life of art....It was absolute for him that the work of the imagination was the highest and most honourable calling conceivable, being indeed nothing less than the actual creation of life out of the void. He did not scruple to claim that except through art there is no life that can be known or appraised....This was the standard below which Henry James would never allow the conception of his office to drop, and he had the reward of complete exemption from any chill of misgiving. His life as a creator of art, alone with his work, was one of unclouded happiness. It might be hampered and hindered by external accidents, but none of them could touch the real core of his security, which was his faith in his vocation and his knowledge of his genius. These certainties remained with him always and he would never trifle with them in any mood.[1]

That Henry James **was**, in the most meaningful sense of the term, a dedicated spirit, that he practiced his craft with the maximum seriousness, and that, above all other writers of Anglo-American fiction, he asserted repeatedly by his example the unquestionable dignity of the craft, no student of James is likely to deny. But that "he had the reward of complete exemption from any chill of misgiving" is open to some doubt. There are indications in various of his non-fictional pieces that he may occasionally have questioned whether or not the rewards of the life of art were worth the tremendous sacrifices demanded of the artist. At least it can be said that he was often painfully conscious of those sacrifices,

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[1]Lubbock, The Letters, I, pp. xv-xvi.

and if we go to conclude, as seems legitimate, that he willingly surrendered certain opportunities and advantages in order to practice an unequivocal integrity toward his profession, we must be sure to note that he was always aware that devotion of this sort, to whatever profession, must sometimes have the effect of limiting the sphere of one's availability. This is not to say James believed that dedication to his art made him incapable of understanding the true nature of reality or that it deprived him of the capability to participate in community life. It is not, of necessity, the public man who suffers in such an intensity of commitment, for subject of the work itself can always contribute to the needs and exigencies of social harmony; rather, it is the private man, who must exist in some isolation from the joys and pleasures which serve his personality and physical existence. The emphasis is more ascetic than anchoritic, though there is something of the latter quality, too. Logan Pearsall Smith tells an interesting anecdote concerning the advice which James gave to him when he (Smith) was just beginning his literary career.

> About the profession of letters in general, the desire to do the best one could with one's pen....he made one remark which I have never forgotten. "My young friend," he said, "...there is one thing that, if you really intend to follow the course you indicate, I cannot too emphatically insist on. There is one word — let me impress upon you — which you must inscribe upon your banner, and that...word is **Loneliness.**"[2]

The note of loneliness is sounded every now and then in the

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[2]Simon Nowell-Smith, The Legend of the Master (New York, 1948), p. 126.

letters. The oft-quoted passage from the letter to William Dean Howells of January 22nd, 1895, has an almost terrifying directness. James wrote, "I have felt, for a long time past, that I have fallen upon evil days — every sign or symbol of one's being in the least wanted, anywhere or by any one, having so utterly failed."[3] The letters to his brother William and to Robert Louis Stevenson have frequently a tone of plaintive wistfulness which could easily be mistaken for self-pity were it not for the evidence of how courageously and honestly James faced his disappointments and went on to make the most intelligent adjustment to them. Personal distress could always be dispelled by a renewed declaration of artistic fervor. The letter to Howells from which the previous quotation has been taken contains also James's admonition to himself as to how he is to be released from the predicament of the "evil days": "Produce again -- produce; produce better than ever, and all will yet be well."[4] And on the day after the letter to Howells, one of the darkest days of James's life since he had been subjected the night before at the conclusion of his play Guy Domville to the boos and cat-calls of the audience in the gallery, James made an entry of quiet, heart-warming bravery in his Notebooks.

> I take up my own old pen again -- the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself -- today -- I need say no more. Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life. And I will. I have only to face my problems. But all that is of the ineffable -- too deep and pure for any utterance. Shrouded in sacred silence let it rest.[5]

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[3]Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 230.

[4]Ibid., p. 231.

[5]Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 179.

Only a man who knew the perils and vicissitudes of the life of art could have written such a paragraph as that, and undoubtedly it is a manifestation of what Lubbock means by "his faith in his vocation and his knowledge of his genius," which was "the real core of his security."[6] To be sure, he had noticed the difficulties of other artists and the extent to which their general comfort was limited by an unswerving attachment to aesthetic discipline. In an essay on the published correspondence of Flaubert, James wrote of the letters that "their great interest is that they exhibit an extraordinary singleness of aim, show us the artist not only disinterested but absolutely dishumanised. They help us to perceive what Flaubert missed almost more than what he gained."[7] Flaubert had confessed to Madame Sand, James tells us, that "it was his own view of his career that as art was the only thing worth living for, he had made immense sacrifices to application -- sacrificed passions, joys, affections, curiosities and opportunities."[8] A series of rhetorical questions in James's essay is immensely revealing, showing as it does that James's acceptance of the life of art was something other than a tranquil, unquestioning one.

> Why may, why must indeed in certain cases, the effort of expression spend itself, and spend itself in success, without completing the circle, without coming round again to the joy of evocation? How can art be so genuine and yet so unconsoled, so unhumorous, so unsociable? When it is a religion, and therefore an authority, why should it not be, like other authorities, a

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[6]Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. xvi.

[7]Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert," Essays in London (London, 1893), p. 132.

[8]Ibid., pp. 149-50.

> guarantee? How can it be such a curse without being also a blessing? What germ of treachery lurks in it to make it, not necessarily but so easily that there is but a hair-line to cross, delusive for personal happiness? Why in short when the struggle is success should the success not be at last serenity?[9]

A sense of the narrowing effect of art had been instilled into James at an early age. When, in the last years of his life, he came to write the three autobiographical volumes -- A Small Boy and Others (1913), Notes of a Son and Brother (1914), and The Middle Years (published posthumously in 1917) -- he told of how the advisability of his brother William's turning to painting as a career was questioned by their friends; then as now the career of art was "deprecated and denounced" because it was a departure from the more regular career of business, which alone was assumed to offer "industry and respectability."[10] However, this sort of opposition did not come from William and Henry's parents. Henry James, Sr., objected only to a too-severe absorption of his sons in any single interest. When William was later to abandon himself to the pursuit of science, his father cautioned against the narrowing effects of this activity as well. He wanted in his offspring an expansion rather than a restriction of interests, and Henry Junior's decision to try the literary life was treated with similar discrimination. "When I myself, later on, began to 'write' it was breathed upon me with the finest beweildering eloquence, with a power of suggestion in truth which I fairly now count it a gain to have felt play over me, that this

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[9] Ibid., pp. 133-4.

[10] Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother, (New York, 1914), p. 51.

too was narrowing."[11]

Possibly, however, James's desire to write was more disturbing than his father thought parentally wise to demonstrate. James quotes from a letter which his father wrote to Emerson in 1849 -- a refreshingly fretful statement of his general impatience with the too-narrowed practitioner of literary art.

> There is nothing I dread so much as literary men, especially our literary men; catch them out of the range of mere personal gossip about authors and books and ask them for honest sympathy in your sentiment, or for an honest repugnancy of it, and you will find the company of stagedrivers sweeter and more comforting to your soul. In truth the questions which are beginning to fill the best books, and will fill the best for a long time to come, are not related to what we have called literature and are as well judged — I think better — by those whom books have at all events not belittled. When a man lives, that is lives enough, he can scarcely write. He cannot read, I apprehend, at all. All his writing will be algebraicised, put into the form of sonnets and proverbs, and the community will feel itself insulted to be offered a big bunch of pages, as though it were stupid and wanted tedious drilling like a child.[12]

This comment by the father of the man who was to become the most conscious literary artist that American literature has produced is surely as pleasantly ironic a circumstance as the biography of James can show, but one is even more pleased by Henry James's reproduction of the comment, a gesture which is additional testimony of his eagerness to promote the expression of conflicting evaluations.

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[11] Ibid., p. 52.

[12] Ibid., pp. 194-5.

However, if there are occasional misgivings about the life of art in James's non-fictional writings, there are also reverent tributes to its joys, tributes which, in their intensity, verge on rapture. James, so far as one is able to determine from all his published writings, had no coherent body of religious principles, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find him writing of his art now and then in a state of near-mystical excitement. Dedication became almost an autonomy; competence of craft, a facet of moral responsibility. Skill in one's art must, of course, be fed constantly from the rich substance of the outer world — James complains in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton on December 6th, 1886, of the "studio existence" of Burne-Jones, "with doors and windows closed, and no search for impressions outside"[13] — but the great reality was the labor of accomplishment, the struggle for success.

> The soothing, the healing, the sacred and salutary refuge from all...vulgarities and pains is simply to lose myself in this quiet, this blessed and uninvaded workroom in the inestimable effort and refreshment of art, in resolute and beneficient production....Purchased by disgusts enough, it is at any rate a boon that now that I hold it, I feel I wouldn't, I oughtn't, to have missed. Ah, the terrible law of the artist -- the law of fructification, of fertilization, the law by which everything is grist to his mill — the law, in short, of the acceptance of all experience, of all suffering, of all life, of all suggestion and sensation and illumination. To keep at it -- to strive toward the perfect, the ripe, the only best; to go on, by one's own clear light, with patience, courage, and continuity, to live with the high vision and effort, to justify one's self -- and oh, so greatly! -- all in time: this and this alone can be my only lesson from anything. Vague and weak are these words, but the experience and the purpose are of welded gold and adamant. The consolation, the

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[13]Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 125.

> dignity, the joy of life that are discouragements and lapses, depressions and darknesses come to one only as one stands without -- I mean without the luminous paradise of art. As soon as I really re-enter it -- cross the loved threshold -- stand in the high chamber, and the gardens divine -- the whole realm widens out again before and around me -- the air of life fills my lungs -- the light of achievement flushes over all the place, and I believe, I see, I do.[14]

The moral tone of such a passage is unmistakable and is indicative again of the consummate seriousness with which James practiced the art of fiction. It is not too much to say that whenever he wrote of the life of art James was investigating specifically moral aspects of the artist's commitment: he was concerned, that is, with defining good and evil within the sphere of the artist's activity as a man in society. The discussion of good and evil is not one which limits itself to problems of method, technique, craft and selection of subject and materials. Instead, it is a sustained consideration of what kinds of moral, intellectual, and emotional behavior best serve art. James's dedication, unlike Wilde's, is no mere celebration of all that is visually beautiful and/or morally esoteric; rather it is a persistent inquiry into the whole realm of experience in order to isolate those interests, compulsions, and objectives which, in disciplining and strengthening the moral responsiveness of the man, at the same time enrich and expand his art.

Of all dangers and abominations, the amateur spirit in art was easily the worst. James tells us specifically in the Notebooks that his intention in "The Real Thing" was an attack on the non-professional.

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[14] Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 111.

> What I wish to represent is the baffled, ineffectual, incompetent character of their attempt, and how it illustrates once again the everlasting English amateurishness — the way superficial, untrained, unprofessional effort goes to the wall when confronted with trained, competitive, intelligent, qualified art — in whatever line it may be a question of."[15]

Similarly, he was impatient with any condescension to the trivial and to the judgments of popular critics. Nor was the artist to to permit himself to be compromised by the inconsequential demands of existence; he was to avoid the contaminating interference of petty associations and details. In a letter of January 2nd, 1888, he reprimands Howells for having inappropriate concerns: "I am surprised, sometimes, at the things you notice and seem to care about. One should move in a diviner air."[16] One should, above all, as a serious writer not concern oneself "with the imbecility of babyish critics."[17] James believed that the writer should adopt fixed standards and principles of creation, and that if he adhered to these with a secure faith, he would be able to dismiss the tedious judgments of popular critics and reviewers as wholly irrelevant commentary. The short essay titled "Criticism", which James wrote in 1891, is a stringent castigation of the practice of "reviewing" — a practice, wrote James, "that in general has nothing in common with the art of criticism."[18] Writers were taking the reviews of popular periodicals much too seriously, thought James, and the result must surely be a vitiated art.

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[15] Ibid., p. 103.

[16] Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 136.

[17] Loc. cit.

[18] James, Essays in London (London, 1893), p. 271.

That his fiction should demonstrate his absorption in the problems of the artist's proper attitudes and qualifications is to be expected, and one of the most persistent themes in James's stories is that of the position of the artist in modern society. What must be insisted upon is that James's interest in the problem is moral at the same time that it is professional: the life of art involves a refinement and purification not only of one's technique but also of one's soul, and this implies knowing all that one must surrender, as well as the doubts that one must welcome and overcome. The good artist, in the world of James's novels, can hardly be otherwise than a good person, for art, requiring a full-scale discipline in matters of selection, order, and refinement, is a means of salvation. Consequently it is incumbent upon the serious artist to be morally sure of himself, to know the form and dimension of good and evil as these concepts apply both to the kind of moral life he deems it best to lead as a man communicating daily with other men and to the realization of his aesthetic ambition. The greatest good, of course, was an absolutely unqualified dedication — to all that was best for the artist both as a man and as a craftsman — a dedication which, nevertheless, it would be the artist's prerogative, somewhat ambiguously, occasionally to question the wisdom of. Under no circumstances must the artist become self-righteous in his dedication. Dencombe, the protagonist of the short story "The Middle Years", phrases James's attitude exquisitely. "We work in the dark — we do what we can — we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the

madness of art."[19]

For James, the highest kind of artistic integrity could be a means of release rather than confinement. The essence of his belief is that technical achievement of the highest order makes inevitable a maximum perfectability for the individual moral consciousness. Art, that is, becomes opportunity -- it opens the door to the good life, for how could it escape having to make moral discriminations if its subject was to be all of experience? and if making such discriminations required that one be able to recognize excellence, what better preparation than having arrived at excellence in the practice of one's art? There was, quite simply, no limit to the range of art and, consequently, to its efficacy.

> It appears to me that no one can ever have made a seriously artistic attempt without becoming conscious of an immense increase -- a kind of revelation -- of freedom. One perceives in that case -- by the light of a heavenly ray -- that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision.[20]

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Virtually all of James's fiction dealing with the life of art and the position of the artist in modern society belongs to the middle period of his career. The exceptions are his first novel, Roderick Hudson (1876), the short story "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), and

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[19]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 92.

[20]James, "The Art of Fiction," Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, Schorer, Miles, McKenzie, editors, (New York, 1948), p. 52.

a few comparatively unknown short stories published after the beginning of the 20th century -- "Broken Wings" (1900), "The Tree of Knowledge" (1900), "The Beldonald Holbein" (1901), "The Story in It" (1903), "Mona Montravers" (1910) and "The Velvet Glove" (1910). However, it seems doubtful that all of these can be thought of as stories in which the central emphasis is the artistic consciousness and its relation to society; the mere fact that the central personage of the story happens to be an artist does not guarantee that the dramatic situation is built around the problems emanating from his attachment to an artistic career.

But in the stories of the middle period the author's practical concern is exactly one of dealing with the problems specific to the artistic life. The major work here is, of course, James's full-length novel The Tragic Muse (1890). The short stories include some of the author's best-known pieces: "The Author of Beltraffio" (1893), "The Middle Years" (1893), "The Death of the Lion" (1894), "The Next Time" (1895), and "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896). I follow the lead of F. O. Matthiessen in rejecting "The Coxon Fund" (1895), for, as Matthiessen says, it is primarily a psychological study of "a peculiarly helpless artistic temperament represented by Coleridge" and that, therefore, its center of reference is not "the problems of the writer and his audience, of the lack of intelligent appreciation and of the demands of his craft."[21]

It seems desirable to review briefly the situation and events of each of these tales before going on to discuss the imagery, in order that we may get some notion of how the work as a whole substantiates the

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[21]Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, (New York, N.D.), p. 1.

contentions of the preceding section of this chapter. Let us, that is, arrive through summary at a conclusive idea of what general areas of the artistic experience James is interested in and what various fates he permits his artists to have.

In another connection The Tragic Muse has already been discussed -- the book deals as much with the subject of the aristocratic world which resists art as it does with the attempts of Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth to fulfill themselves through artistic expression, and it is to the former subject that an earlier chapter of this thesis has already given some attention. Our interest here is the artistic aspirations of Nick and Miriam. Of the two persons, Miriam has the greater dedication, Nick being presented as little more than an amateur of minor talent and ability. Nevertheless, Nick has the major struggles and temptations in the novel, since he does abandon brilliant political prospects in order to pursue a career as a painter. This choice deprives him of the sympathy of his fiancée, Mrs. Dallow, of his mother, who has hoped that he would follow in the footsteps of his distinguished father, and it deprives him as well of a considerable fortune which it was the intention of Charles Cartaret, a wealthy old bachelor friend of his father's, to bestow on Nick when the young man's political success should be imminent. Nick is undisturbed by these losses, for he has seen the superficiality and insincerity of the political world; but in his studio he gradually begins to doubt his talent, and the end of the novel finds him willing to make the concessions to and compromises with the world of affairs which will almost certainly assure a reconciliation of differences to the mutual

satisfaction of himself and the personages of the outer world who are interested in him.

Miriam, on the other hand, never for a moment doubts her talent, even in the face of assertions that she does not have any. She is determined from the outset to be an accomplished actress and she demonstrates a willingness to suffer any slight, any humiliation, any affront, in the realization of her ambition. She rises from incompetency to astonishing success, and she holds on to her achievement in refusing the proposal of Peter Sherringham, although marriage to this young man who has always been devoted both to the theater and to her would have provided her with the dignity and splendor of being an ambassador's wife. The contrast between Nick and Miriam is plainly the contrast between the amateur and the professional, and the resolution of their fortunes in the novel assigns defeat to Nick and success to Miriam. There is an immense irony in a young man's having surrendered all the advantages of the world of affairs in order to pursue a career for which he does not have more than an amateur's aptitude, and James exploits the ambivalence of the circumstance. He makes Nick's mother, Mrs. Dallow, and Mr. Carteret into formidable opponents; they are firm and secure in their practical convictions. Pelham Edgar discusses the unity of their force.

> Superficially different by the mere accident of circumstance or sex, in opinion they are fundamentally one, and their opinion is simply that of the great normal majority in any civilized community who are clear-sighted enough for all the practical contingencies of life, but whose minds are sealed to the subtler suggestions of beauty and significance by which the artistic imagination is nourished. Any traffic or commerce with beauty offends their severe sense of duty

> and rectitude, and is to be condoned only if it is the amiable weakness of leisure hours. As a serious pursuit nothing could be more criminal.[22]

Together the three characters represent a highly successful dramatization of the hostility to art, and help to establish the magnitude of Nick's resistance. His failure, therefore, would seem a peculiar twist of the narrative except in terms of the author's impatience with that kind of commitment to the life of art and surrender of worldly advantage which does not begin with the artist's making an accurate estimate of his ability. We are led finally to believe that Nick's turning away from Parliament was, perhaps, more a matter of dissatisfaction with the methods and procedures of that august body — with, that is, the whole shameless spectacle of modern political display — than of overwhelming belief in his artistic powers.

In Miriam's case, however, we have an exactly opposite situation. Miriam has nothing but a belief in her talent, which the most respectable representative of the world of art who is introduced into the story — Madame Carré — tells her is virtually non-existent. But in the most genuinely professional sense, Miriam works with what she has, her industry is phenomenal, and eventually she has won the admiration and tribute of Madame Carré herself. As Pelham Edgar says, "her genius is developed only by the severest discipline of labour,"[23] and so it is not at all surprising to see her renunciation of the wealth

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[22]Edgar, op. cit., p. 291.

[23]Ibid., p. 298.

and position which Peter Sherringham can offer her. Miriam's renunciation, unlike Nick's, is final; she will not go back later to the world outside art; she solidifies and makes permanent her position as an actress by marrying someone of the theater, someone who takes the liveliest interest in the continuation of her career. It is Miriam who, speaking of Peter, utters the statement of purest dedication in the novel.

> "He's such a curious mixture," she luxuriously went on; "sometimes I quite lose patience with him. It isn't exactly trying to serve both God and Mammon, but it's muddling up the stage and the world. The world be hanged! The stage, or anything of that sort -- I mean one's artistic conscience, one's true faith -- comes first."[24]

It is no wonder, then, that James called his novel The Tragic Muse after Miriam, even though the major portion of the book is taken up with Nick's story. Her attitude is the one which he most approves; from the outset Miriam is fully informed about what her art will demand of her and, as a consequence, she never swerves from her objectives. Like her author, she practices her craft with maximum seriousness.

Mark Ambient in "The Author of Beltraffio" goes much too far. He is so supremely and self-righteously the aesthete (so definitely a portrait of Pater, it has sometimes been assumed) that the very quality of his excess made personal failure of some deeply tragic kind dramatically imperative for him. His wife cannot endure the precise fastidiousness of his books; she resents the pagan sensuality which she finds in them. Beatrice Ambient sincerely believes that the books of her husband have the power to corrupt; consequently she tries to keep her child,

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[24]James, The Novels and Stories, XIII, pp. 39-40.

Dolcino, as far out of the father's influence as possible. When she finally reads a new manuscript of Mark's, she is so overcome by what she considers its horror that in order to protect her son from the contamination of the father, she permits the boy to die by failing to give him his medicine when he lies ill.

Matthiessen thought the character of Mark Ambient unreal, partly because James had undertaken "to dramatize the aesthetic gospel of the eighties without quite indicating, perhaps without being quite sure at this stage of his development, exactly how much of it he accepted for himself."[25] But surely the speeches of Mark Ambient about his new book are intended to indicate his fear that art has removed him too far from the often unaesthetic proportions of actuality. He admits that he cares too much for beauty. "I delight in it, I adore it, I think of it continually, I try to produce it, to reproduce it."[26] But the new book, polished and smoothed as it is, will stay close to life.

> "I want to give the impression of life itself... I've always arranged things too much, always smoothed them down and rounded them off and tucked them in -- done everything to them that life doesn't do.... This new affair must be a golden vessel, filled with the purest distillation of the actual; and oh how it worries me, the shaping of the vase, the hammering of the metal! I have to hammer it so fine, so smooth; I don't do more than an inch or two a day. And all the while I have to be so careful not to let a drop of the liquor escape! When I see the kind of things Life herself, the brazen hussy, does, I despair of ever catching her peculiar trick.... Ah polishing one's plate -- that's the torment of execution. My dear fellow, if you could see

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[25]Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 2.

[26]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, pp. 39-40.

> the surface I dream of as compared with the one with which I've to content myself. Life's really too short for art -- one hasn't time to make one's shell ideally hard. Firm and bright, firm and bright is very well to say -- the devilish thing has a way sometimes of being bright, and even of being hard, as mere frozen pudding is hard, without being firm. When I rap it with my knuckles it doesn't give the right sound. There are horrible sandy stretches where I've taken the wrong turn because I couldn't for the life of me find the right... Such things figure to me now base pimples and ulcers on the brow of beauty!"[27]

The remarkable ambiguity of the speech affirms James's regard for the aesthetic principle at the same time that it reveals his insistence that artifice must be controlled by a sense of the unpredictable in life itself. The devotion to execution of the perfect art object could go too far, and something wholly lifeless and shell-like would result. Pelham Edgar sees "The Author of Beltraffio" as an indication of James's dualism in the matter of artistic creation.

> The solicitude for precision and harmony guarantees the artist's respect for the scope of his instrument of expression, but as an exclusive doctrine it has its dangers. If it operates to the destruction of variety, vigour and spontaneity, if it substitutes the literary for the characteristic phrase, degenerates into preciousness or swells into grandiosity, we have a fallacious perfection purchased at too great a price, and one that James was certainly not willing consciously to pay.[28]

This seems an excellent summary of James's view. Devoted to his art as he was, believing in its power to serve the moral needs of the individual personality, and never accepting as final and inevitable the

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[27] Ibid., pp. 36-38.

[28] Edgar, op. cit., p. 204.

cleavage between the artist and society, James could nevertheless see that the artist must continually take his inspiration from his perceptions of reality, that, as he wrote in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, "there is no more nutritive or suggestive truth...than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerened in producing it."[29] Artifice must be brilliant, finished, technically fine, but the matter of one's service to the creation of the perfect object of art required, first of all, a genuineness of substance upon which the artistic conscience might work. In a sense, it is Mark Ambient's realization that his work lacks such substance which prepares for the catastrophe of his son's death.

"The Lesson of the Master" is a little parable about an author's sacrifices. Paul Overt, a young novelist with a future, meets at a weekend party in the country Henry St. George, the most distinguished writer of his day. At the same affair he becomes acquainted with a Miss Fancourt, who shares with him a strong enthusiasm for St. George's work. However, both believe that St. George's later fiction is deficient in quality, not at all on a par with the magnificent artistic achievement of the earlier novels, and Paul Overt is soon aware that this deterioration is to be accounted for by the influence of St. George's wife, who has insisted that her husband write only that kind of novel which will bring them the wealth of popular success. The center of the story is a midnight conversation between St. George and Paul, in which the former emphasizes that no

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[29]James, The Novels and Stories, VI, pp. x-xi,

rewards are equal to the satisfaction of knowing the job well done -- that no aim is praiseworthy except that of perfection -- and that the artistic life exacts tremendous penalties of self-denial which the dedicated artist must be willing to embrace. Overt is convinced, so much so that he relinquishes a sentimental interest in Miss Fancourt in order to devote himself for two years on the continent to the writing of a new book. When he returns to London he discovers that Mrs. St. George has died and that St. George himself is soon to marry Miss Fancourt. Overt is angered at first, thinking that the older novelist has been guilty of deception, that his intention in advising abstemiousness for the younger man was only in order to get him out of the way so that his own suit with Miss Fancourt might prosper; but St. George tells him that such suppositions are without foundation in fact. In marrying Miss Fancourt, the older man will actually be "saving" Overt, for St. George plans never to write again anyhow and will spend the rest of his life reading only the books of Overt. The young man is partly appeased and goes on to his work, though not without a sense of uneasiness.

> He had been saying to himself that he should have been "sold" indeed, diabolically sold, if now, on his new foundation, at the end of a year, St. George were to put forth something of his prime quality -- something of the type of "Shadowmere" and finer than his finest. Greatly as he admired his talent Paul literally hoped such an incident wouldn't occur; it seemed to him just then that he shouldn't be able to bear it. His late adviser's words were still in his ears -- "You're very strong, wonderfully strong." Was he really? Certainly he would have to be, and it might a little serve for revenge. Is he? the reader may ask in turn, if his interest has followed the perplexed young man so far. The best answer to that

> perhaps is that he's doing his best, but that it's too soon to say. When the new book came out in the autumn Mr. and Mrs. St. George found it really magnificent. The former still has published nothing, but Paul doesn't even yet feel safe. I may say for him, however, that if this event were to occur he would really be the very first to appreciate it: which is perhaps a proof that the Master was essentially right and that Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion.[30]

In other words, Paul's devotion to his art -- or, rather, to art in general -- is complete, and he can even rejoice in the production of that art which would be a mockery of him, testifying, as a splendid new book by St. George would do, to his innocence and gullibility. His devotion is above personalities, above self, above the common gratifications of human intercourse. Consequently his art prospers, rooted as it is in his acceptance of sacrifice.

"Greville Fane" (1893) has both amusing and pathetic aspects. James tells the story of a highly successful female novelist who under the pseudonym of Greville Fane turns out a prodigious quantity of fiction dealing with the love intrigues of an aristocratic society to which, of course, she does not belong. Her one saving grace is her unselfish devotion to her children, a boy and a girl, who take outrageous advantage of her generosity. The son, Leolin Stormer, is particularly offensive, for he has deluded his mother, just as he attempts to delude the first person narrator of the story, a professional and serious man of letters, by asserting that he intends to practice the art of fiction just as soon as he will have been visited by the "inspiration" which will make it possible for him to turn out the beautiful works of art his mother has been incapable of. Meanwhile,

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[30]James, The Novels and Stories, p. 83.

the demand for his mother's novels begins to diminish, and she is forced to produce desperately in order to supply his extravagant wants. The effort is too exhausting and Greville Fane dies, leaving the son and daughter to quarrel over the rights to the work which she has left behind her.

This brief tale, which James called "a minor miracle of foreshortening",[31] contains a double attack, first, as Matthiessen says, "on the vulgarization of taste accomplished by a lady who contributes volumes 'to the diversion of her contemporaries,' but who 'couldn't write a page of English,'"[32] and, second, on the aesthetic pretensions of the son, who claims to be hamstrung in his literary production because he "had been obliged to recognize the insuperable difficulties of the question of form — he was so fastidious."[33] James is merciless in his treatment of Leolin, presenting his fraudulent claims to the life of art as despicable and immoral.

The theme of "The Real Thing" (1893), as James said in his Notebooks, is "the way superficial, untrained, unprofessional effort goes to the wall when confronted with trained, competitive, intelligent, qualified art."[34] Major and Mrs. Monarch are society people reduced to poverty who apply for employment to an artist who has been commissioned to do the illustrations for a novel dealing with society life. They want to serve as his models, convinced that since they are "the real

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[31]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. vii.

[32]Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 5.

[33]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 116.

[34]Matthiessen and Murdock, The Notebooks, p. 103.

thing" he will find them admirably suitable. But the artist discovers that the real thing in life and the real thing in art are not at all the same, and after the artist is told by the publisher of the novel that his sample illustrations are unsatisfactory, he is forced to replace the Monarchs with the Cockney girl who has been a combination model and housekeeper for him and an Italian young man who had formerly been an ice-cream pedlar. Major and Mrs. Monarch are at first shocked and resentful that the artist should find these professional models more useful than themselves, but their financial situation is so unfortunate that they begin to assume the chores of the studio which their rivals had previously performed -- they serve the tea, wash the dishes and tidy up the place. Taking pity on them, the artist retains them in this embarrassing position, but at the end of a week he can stand it no longer, pays them a sizeable sum of money, and bids them farewell. Osborn Andreas sees the tale as James's "pertinent commentary on photographic naturalism and reportorial art: it is so much less realistic than is representational art,"[35] but it is also true, it seems to me, that James is cautioning against the belief on the part of non-professionals that art can offer a casual refuge whenever one finds himself in economic distress. Major and Mrs. Monarch are severely judged for their conviction that the life of art must take them in and for the condescension which allows them to conclude that no preparation or effort other than that of their personal charm is necessary to

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[35]Andreas, op. cit., p. 147.

artistic competence. "The Real Thing" is James's diatribe against fashionable dilettantism.

Both Edgar and Matthiessen have speculated about the possible autobiographical content in "The Middle Years" (1893). The story is a deeply moving one, the account of the last months in the life of brilliant novelist, Dencombe, who, trying to recuperate at Bournemouth and feeling a tremendous desire for another chance to do the work which he has not accomplished, is greatly cheered by the appreciative attentions of a young doctor. Neglecting a wealthy patient who would have made his fortune, Dr. Hugh chooses to give his time to the man whose work he has inordinately admired, hoping that Dencombe can be restored to health and creative capacity. But Dencombe is not to have another chance. He dies in Dr. Hugh's presence with the statement of James's own credo on his lips: "We work in the dark -- we do what we can -- we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."[36]

The temptation to see James himself in the story arises, as Matthiessen indicates,[37] from a combination of factors: first, the author-narrator is of James's own age at the time he was writing the story; second, like James, Dencombe is "a passionate corrector" of his text; and, third, though James's own health had improved somewhat at this point in his life, he had been greatly affected by the death of his sister the year before, an event which had greatly increased his

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[36]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 92.

[37]Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 6.

sense of the job well done and the zealous admiration of those qualified to appreciate one's endeavor. A conversation between Dencombe and Dr. Hugh brings the central theme of the story into the open.

> Doctor Hugh returned...Presently he added: "You seem very much alone."
>
> "That often happens at my age. I've outlived, I've lost by the way."
>
> Doctor Hugh faltered; then surmounting a soft scruple: "Whom have you lost?"
>
> "Every one."
>
> "Ah no," the young man breathed, laying a hand on his arm.
>
> "I once had a wife -- I once had a son. My wife died when my child was born, and my boy, at school, was carried off by typhoid. "
>
> "I wish I'd been there!" cried Dr. Hugh.
>
> "Well -- if you're here!" Dencombe answered with a smile that, in spite of dimness, showed how he valued being sure of his companion's whereabouts.
>
> "You talk strangely of your age. You're not old."
>
> "Hypocrite -- so early!"
>
> "I speak physiologically."
>
> "That's the way I've been speaking for the last five years, and it's exactly what I've been saying to myself. It isn't till we are old that we begin to tell ourselves we're not."
>
> "Yet I know I myself am young," Doctor Hugh returned.
>
> "Not so well as I!" laughed his patient, whose visitor indeed would have established the truth in question by the honesty with which he changed the point of view, remarking that it must be one of the charms of age -- at any rate in the case of high distinction -- to feel that one has laboured and achieved. Doctor Hugh employed the common phrase about earning one's rest, and it made poor Dencombe for an instant almost angry. He recovered himself, however, to explain, lucidly enough, that if, ungraciously, he knew nothing of such a balm, it was doubtless because he had wasted inestimable years. He had followed literature from the first, but he had taken a lifetime to get abreast of her. Only to-day at last had he begun to see, so that all he had hitherto shown was a movement without a direction. He had ripened too late and was so clumsily constituted that he had had to teach himself by mistakes.
>
> "I prefer your flowers then to other people's fruit, and your mistakes to other people's successes," said gallant

> Doctor Hugh. "It's for your mistakes I admire you."
> "You're happy -- you don't know," Dencombe answered.[38]

"The Death of the Lion" (1894) shows what the successful artist must suffer from his public. A young newspaperman, delegated to write the story of an interview with Neil Paraday, a middle-aged novelist who has suddenly become famous, reacts to the vulgarity of his task and decides, instead, to attach himself to the novelist as a means of protection against the curiosity of the members of the public who would exploit the writer. Paraday, however, seems to want to enjoy part of his fame and permits himself to be taken in hand by Mrs. Weeks Wimbush, a brewer's wife, who predatorialy persuades him to remain indefinitely at her home in the country so that she can use him as an attraction for other distinguished guests. His principal performance will be to read from the manuscript of a new work, and to hear him Mrs. Wimbush has brought to her place a plethora of guests, among them a foreign princess and two very popular novelists, Guy Walsingham, who is a lady, and Dora Forbes, who is a man with a red-mustache. "I was bewildered," writes the first-person narrator of the tale, "it sounded somehow as if there were three sexes,"[39] giving us, with this reflection, one of the most useful terms for the sexual ambivalence of our own day. The tone of the story is sharply satirical. Paraday becomes ill with pneumonia and lies dying in Mrs. Wimbush's house while the guests downstairs gradually forget him in their excitement to meet the newest "lion."

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[38]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, pp. 81-3.

[39]James, The Novels and Stories, XX, p. 102.

Through the inexcusable carelessness of one of the members of the party the manuscript of his last great novel is lost, and his death then comes as a double tragedy. Thus James makes a damning indictment not only of the vulgar public which inflicts its caprice on the artist but also on the artist who permits himself to be lionized.

"You can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse,"[40] is the way the critic-narrator of "The Next Time" (1895) sums up the writing career of Ralph Limbert, and the statement nicely conveys the meaning of James's story. No matter what he does, Limbert cannot write a popular success. Though he tries every popular device, he continues to turn out masterpieces. His sister-in-law, Mrs. Highmore, a very popular novelist, longs to publish just once "an exquisite failure", as Limbert has so frequently done, and he, in order to meet the demands of an ever-growing and somewhat grasping family, would like for once to duplicate her kind of success. The positions of the two characters remain fixed to the end: every story of Limbert's has a brilliant critical reception but remains unpurchased by the reading thousands, and every new book of Mrs. Highmore's is ignored by the critics and purchased in great quantities. Finally Limbert dies of the overwork by means of which he has tried to turn out a pot-boiler while increasing with each publication the quality of his work. The story is told with soft irony -- the tone, Matthiessen says, "is that of high comedy"[41] -- but, once again, James

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[40] Ibid., p. 183.

[41] Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 5.

has been at some pains to convince us of the importance of integrity in the life of art. Be satisfied to remain what you are and to accept the limited rewards of truly accomplished art, leaving the popular acclaim and the profit to the hacks is James's message in "The Next Time," and it may very well be an indication of how he resolved for himself the chagrin which he felt in the nineties at the neglect of his own work.

Hugh Vereker is the artist in "The Figure in the Carpet", a novelist of considerable critical reputation, who tantalizes a young critic, again the narrator of the story, by telling him that there is a central thread of meaning in all his novels which no critic has yet been intelligent enough to see. The young man tries diligently to find it but finally gives up in exasperation. Meanwhile, he has communicated Vereker's information to his friend Corvick, also a persistent reader of Vereker, and Corvick and his fiancée Gwendolen Erme undertake to discover "the figure in the carpet." Corvick departs for India shortly thereafter, only to cable to his friends soon that he has succeeded in his search for the "figure." He goes on at once to Rapallo to visit Vereker, who confirms his discovery. The marriage of Corvick and Gwendolen takes place, and he reveals the secret to her shortly before his accidental death; this death makes impossible his revelation of the secret to the world. In the meantime, Vereker dies. Gwendolen remarries -- this time a writer wholly incapable of appreciating the preciousness of Gwendolen's knowledge of Vereker's work. When Gwendolen herself dies, the critic-narrator, who has never lost interest

in the problem and hopes to give the secret to the world, goes to visit the husband Gwendolen has left behind only to learn that Gwendolen had never discussed the matter with him. "The figure in the carpet" remains a mystery.

Matthiessen sees the tale as a very meaningful one to James — a protest against the failure of critics to analyze his work with sufficient acumen.

> This was the story which James himself called "a significant fable"; and he said that what had stimulated him to write it was his acute impression of the Anglo-American's "so marked collective mistrust of anything like close or analytic appreciation." This story was designed as a plea for such mature criticism, as the prefaces were to be another. In it the ideal readers are those for whom "literature was a game of skill," since "skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life."[42]

It is only in recent years that the Anglo-American critic of literature has engaged in "close or analytic appreciation," and it is a solid confirmation of the foresight of James's preface that much of the kind of analysis and mature criticism he pleaded for has been devoted to his own work.

iii

The contrast in the temperaments and fortunes of Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth in The Tragic Muse is carried out in the symbolism of the novel. An imagery of domestic gardens and growing things is

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[42] Ibid., p. 6.

repeatedly associated with Nick, as if to state the greater appropriateness for him of the homely affairs of family life and public career rather than the uncertain and somewhat exotic attachments of the life of art. Nick introduces the figure into the narrative in speaking to Peter Sherringham of Gabriel Nash.

> "I like him, therefore, because in dealing with him you know what you've got hold of. With most men you don't; to pick the flower you must break off the whole, dusty, thorny, worldly branch; you find you're taking up in your grasp all sorts of other people and things, dangling accidents and conditions. Poor Nash has none of those encumbrances: he's the solitary fragrant blossom."[43]

To which statement Peter replies, "My dear fellow, you'd be better for a little of the same pruning!"[44]

Mrs. Dallow, the lady to whom Nick is engaged for a portion of the novel and with whom he re-establishes a cordial relationship at the novel's conclusion -- the person who, next to his mother, offered the most formidable opposition to his choosing an artistic career -- is spoken of in the garden-metaphor.

> "The lady with whom you were so good as to make me acquainted is a beautiful specimen of the English garden-flower, the product of high cultivation and much tending; a tall, delicate stem with the head set upon it in a manner which, as a thing seen and remembered, should doubtless count for us as a gift of the gods. She's the perfect type of the object raised or bred."[45]

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[43] James, The Novels and Stories, XII, pp. 71-2.

[44] Ibid., p. 72.

[45] Ibid., p. 149.

Trying to understand why he prefers painting to a political career, Nick applies the symbol of the garden not only to himself but to his forebears as well.

> "There has never been anything of the sort among us; we're all Philistines to the core, with about as much asthetic sense as that hat. It's excellent soil -- I don't complain of it -- but not a soil to grow that flower. From where the devil then has the seed been dropped? I look back from generation to generation; I scour our annals without finding the least little sketching grandmother, any sign of a building or versifying or collecting or even tulip-raising ancestor."[46]

The scene in which Nick asks Julia to be his wife takes place in her garden; the Dormer home in London is located in Calcutta Gardens, and when Nick acquires a studio somewhat later in the narrative, we learn that it is situated in Rosedale Road. Remembering some advice which Gabriel Nash has given him, Nick uses the symbol of the garden to suggest the activities of his proper destiny.

> Gabriel's saying them at such moments appeared to make them true, to set them up in the world, and tonight he said a good many, especially as to the happiness of cultivating one's own garden, growing there, in stillness and freedom, certain strong, pure flowers that would bloom forever, bloom long after the rank weeds of the hour were withered and blown away.[47]

The casual metaphor of the novel as it relates to Nick is drawn from the experience and products of the garden and gardening. Doubting his talent for painting, Nick tells Julia that "it's too late

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[46] Ibid., p. 161.

[47] James, The Novels and Stories, XIII, p. 47.

for it to flower,"[48] although Peter Sherringham, Julia's brother, eager to see some of Nick's work, says "Haven't you something more to show me then -- some other fruit of your genius?"[49] To make certain of the security of his foundation in the world of art, Nick "plants his supports",[50] and when he goes occasionally to visit the art galleries of London, we are told that "as he strolled through them, he plucked right and left perfect nosegays of reassurance."[51]

The rift caused between Nick and his mother, Lady Agnes, is described as a divided garden with Nick's sister Biddy communicating between the divisions.

> They had no intimate talk, for an impenetrable partition, a tall, bristling hedge of untrimmed misconceptions, had sprung up between them. Poor Biddy had made a hole in it through which she squeezed from side to side, to keep up communications at the cost of many rents and scratches; but Lady Agnes walked straight and stiff, never turning her head, never stopping to pluck the least little daisy of consolation.[52]

And when Nick feels the necessity of admonishing his mother and sisters that they should not continue to accept the hospitality of Julia Dallow, James writes, "He had already, several weeks before, picked a little at the arid tract of that indicated surrender, but in the interval the soil appeared to have formed again to a considerable thickness."[53] Once in the novel Nick calls himself "a broken reed",[54] twice he is

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[48] Ibid., p. 62.

[49] Ibid., p. 243.

[50] Ibid., p. 235.

[51] Ibid., p. 340.

[52] Ibid., pp. 323-4.

[53] Ibid., p. 330.

referred to as a nightingale, a bird often associated in literature with the English garden, and Miriam Rooth says of him that "He's quite exalté; living on nectar and ambrosia -- what he has to spare for us poor crawling things on earth is only a few dry crumbs."[55]

What we are to get from all this, it seems to me, is the conviction that the note of compromise on which the book ends is its proper final tone. Nick is to go on painting -- as a matter of fact, Julia herself sits for him as he executes a masterly portrait of her, and there are indications that many commissions will be forthcoming from other members of Julia's social set. But Nick's attachment to the life of art is to lose something of its original intense dedication, it is to be shorn of bohemianism and to become tranquil and well-behaved. Presumably, it will soon be little more than avocation, as Nick settles down to the quiet -- and perhaps once again to the political -- life of the English country-side. The garden, therefore, becomes a fitting symbol for his destiny; the amount of art which his life can justifiably support is equivalent to that of the peaceful, well-planned and serenely-controlled English garden. Nick's proper domain is the country soil.

But not Miriam Rooth's. The symbolism surrounding her is of the purest kind of dedication -- she is a high priestess of art. The imagery of ritual and ceremony is constantly associated with her appearance in the novel, and the distinction between her and Nick is

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[55]James, The Novels and Stories, XIII, p. 222.

underscored when Peter Sherringham tells her that she can't be "both a consummate actress and a flower of the field."[56]

Miriam's first attempts at acting are described in the imagery of ritualistic practice. "The Heroine of the occasion evidently was losing her embarrassment; she was the priestess on the tripod, awaiting the afflatus and thinking only of that,"[57] and her recitation of some poems before the same audience a few moments later is said to have been performed in a "solemn, droning, dragging measure suggestive of an exhortation from the pulpit."[58] Peter Sherringham fully understands the function of the priestess.

> He winced a little at this coarser view of the actress; he had somehow always looked more poetically at that priestess of art. Yet what was she, the priestess, when one came to think of it, but a female gymnast, a mountebank at higher wages? She didn't literally hang by her heels from a trapeze and hold a fat man in her teeth, but she made the same use of her tongue, of her eyes, of the initiative trick, that her muscular sister made of leg and jaw.[59]

Miriam's father had been a collector of altar-cloths; Peter is spoken of as a "ministering angel"[60] to her; when Madame Carré attempts to instruct Miriam in the technique of acting "Miriam took it all as a bath, a baptism....an imitation, a discipline that nothing could undo,"[61] and as Miriam's talent is finally developed "she was now the finished statue lifted from the ground to its pedestal. It was as if the

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[56] Ibid., p. 186.

[57] Ibid., p. 112.

[58] Ibid., p. 116.

[59] Ibid., pp. 168-9.

[60] Ibid., p. 190.

[61] Ibid., p. 175.

sun of her talent had risen above the hills and she knew she was moving and would always move in its guiding light."[62]

> "Did you wake up one morning and find you'd grown a pair of wings?" Peter asked. "Because that's what the difference amounts to -- you really soar. Moreover, you're an angel. "[63]

The full significance of the symbol as applied to Miriam can be seen in Peter's noting in her "from the moment she felt her strength an immense increase of this good-humored inattention to detail -- all detail save that of her work, to which she was ready to sacrifice holocausts of feelings when the feelings were other people's."[64] When she attends the theater with Peter she is convinced "that her eyes would be opened in the holy of holies,"[65] and Madame Carré employs the figure of the church in asking Miriam if she wants "to look like the portico of the Madeline when it's draped for a funeral?"[66]

Miriam sees herself in the role of priestess. When Peter asks her to marry him and give up the stage, she refuses him, only to have him ask, "Haven't you any gratitude?" Miriam's answer places her in the most dramatic moment of ceremonial sacrifice. "Gratitude for kindly removing the blest cup from my lips? I want to be what she is -- I want it more than ever."[67]

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[62] Ibid., p. 298.

[63] Ibid., p. 304.

[64] Loc. cit.

[65] Ibid., p. 310.

[66] Ibid., p. 307.

[67] Ibid., p. 328.

Like that of the true priestess, her faith is strong and unshakeable, and as we have seen, she contrasts her dedication with the unpredictable attitude of Peter.

> "He's such a curious mixture," she luxuriously went on; "sometimes I quite lose patience with him. It isn't exactly trying to serve both God and Mammon, but it's muddling up the stage and the world. The world be hanged! The stage, or anything of that sort — I mean one's artistic conscience, one's true faith — comes first."

Even the cynical Gabriel Nash bows to the priestly aspects of Miriam. "Nash went a step further and regarded her, irresponsibly and sublimely, as a priestess of harmony, a figure with which the vulgar ideas of success and failure had nothing to do."[68] And probably the boldest use of the figure is that in which Miriam says of Nick Dormer to her mother, "He has his moments — when he seems to say his prayers to me."[69]

Thus the symbol of the priestess operates to affirm the adamantine quality of Miriam's devotion. For her, art is an exercise of piety and sanctity, making her sacrifice of all other comforts and ambitions dramatically necessary. The life of art is life enough for Miriam, as it was not for Nick, and the juxtaposition of the symbolic themes of garden and priestess supports the meaning of James's tale which, as we have said, is a declaration in favor of the professional spirit as contrasted with the amateur, since in the resolution of the fortunes of his two major characters, James assigns artistic success to Miriam and artistic frustration to Nick.

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[68] Ibid., p. 127.

[69] Ibid., p. 273.

iv

Coldness, gloom and death pervade the atmosphere of "The Author of Beltraffio"[70] while a faint and flickering sense of warmth tries to dispel the general cheerlessness. Much of the action of the tale occurs in the grounds surrounding the Ambient country home, and our introduction to the place is accomplished with a note of scenic or theatrical arrangement in dark colors.

> The limits of the place, cleverly dissimulated, were muffled in the great verdurous screens. They formed, as I remember, a thick loose curtain at the further end, in one of the folds of which, as it were, we presently made out from afar a little group.[71]

The metaphor of coldness enters the story when Mark Ambient speaks for the first time to his visitor, the narrator of the story, of his son. The young American critic writes that the words of his host "weren't petulant; they expressed rather a sudden coldness, a mechanical submission."[72] It is to Mrs. Ambient, however, that the

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[70]I approach a discussion of the imagery of "The Author of Beltraffio" with trepidation and am willing to write only very tenuous conclusions about the relation of image to meaning. As we have seen, Matthiessen felt that James himself may have been uncertain about the character of Mark Ambient. I favor reading the story as an indictment of the self-righteousness of Ambient and his disciple, the young American who tells the story. I feel confident that James intended that we should regard Mark as the destroyer of his son's life. But I am unable with full personal satisfaction to relate the imagery of the story to this view and, therefore, offer my conclusions with caution. The diligence with which I have made an effort to join image and theme makes me less sure of the success of "The Author of Beltraffio" than of the other tales of writers and artists.

[71]James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 8.

[72]Ibid., p. 9.

figure of coldness is most frequently applied. "She shone with a certain coldness,"[73] the young man remarks upon seeing her for the first time.

Throughout the narrative Mrs. Ambient has a chilling effect on her husband's guest. "She seemed a bit frigidly amused at my glow."[74] "It was only after a while that her air of incorruptible conformity, her tapering monosyllabic correctness, began to affect me as in themselves a cold thin flame."[75] "She might have been...the very angel of the pink of propriety -- putting the pink for a principle, though I'd rather put some dismal cold blue."[76] In conversation with her, he finds that her responses "chilled my flow of small talk"[77] and that "she gave me a great cold stare."[78]

Running counter to the metaphor of coldness is an opposite imagery of warmth. As a matter of fact, it unites with the figure of coldness in several of the images specified above: "shone with... coldness," frigidly amused at my glow," "a cold thin flame." There is, in effect, a struggle between the two forces, with a combination of the two causing the boy's death: he is ill of a fever, but the "cold" Mrs. Ambient directly brings about his end. Warmth is generally applied to Mark Ambient and his devoted young follower, the narrator of

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[73] Ibid., p. 10.

[74] Ibid., p. 15.

[75] Ibid., p. 42.

[76] Loc. cit.

[77] Ibid., p. 47.

[78] Ibid., p. 50.

the story, but not in altogether natural associations. Mrs. Ambient studies her husband's friend to see "what would become of the exposure of a candid young American to a high aesthetic temperature."[79] Mark Ambient's sister, experiencing a deep sympathy for him," gazed at him from afar -- as if he had been a burning ship on the horizon."[80] Rejecting his wife's limited notion of what a novel should be, Ambient says, "It's a thing so hollow, so dishonest, so lying, in which life is so blinked and blinded, so dodged and disfigured, that it makes my ears burn. "[81] And the Ambient child, trying so desperately to surround himself with warmth and kindness "gradually kindled the spark of my inspiration. What helped it to glow were the other influences."[82]

The fever which attacks the boy is not a surprise; for, as the young American had seen from the start, the lad was marked for death.

> There was something that deeply touched, that almost alarmed in his beauty, composed, one would have said, of elements too find and pure for the breath of this world ....I grasped the truth of his being too fair to live, wondering at the same time that his parents shouldn't have guessed it and have been in proportionate grief and despair. For myself I had no doubt of his evanesence, having already more than once caught in the fact the particular infant charm that's as good as a death-warrant.[83]

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[79] Ibid., p. 24.

[80] Ibid., p. 29.

[81] Ibid., p. 41.

[82] Ibid., p. 50.

[83] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

We have already glanced at the speech of Ambient in which momentarily he decries the failure of his work to come to grips with life and in which he questions the wisdom of his long passion for beauty. This passion has determined the nature of his subject, the content of the books to which his wife so strongly objects, a content producing in her the coldness toward his work and friends that makes her unnatural deed possible. Ambient's desire to instill a sense of life in his new work is symbolized by the flickering and abortive heat of the story, but obviously he fails in the attempt, for Mrs. Ambient's midnight reading of the proof sheets of the first few chapters confirms her in her coldness and motivated her criminal neglect of the ailing child, who dies. Ambient's "warmth" has been ineffectual and misdirected; it has been easily smothered by his wife's opposition. The warmth is the symbol of his attempts to dispel the self-righteousness of his aestheticism, but, in the end, as the blind devotion of the narrator of the story affects and pleases Mark, the aestheticism solidifies and the effort at reform is abandoned. Warmth is relinquished; it becomes, in the child's fever, an agent of destruction. The imagery of "The Author of Beltraffio" thus seems to carry James's judgment on an excessive aestheticism; Mark Ambient has literally destroyed life.

What little pattern of metaphor there is in "The Lesson of the Master" has as its function to underscore Mrs. Henry St. George's domination of her writer-husband. She is introduced to us by means of a figure relating to theatrical trickery: she is a magician or sleight-of-hand artist.

> Overt numbered her years at first as some thirty, and then ended by believing that she might approach her fiftieth. But she somehow in this case juggled away the excess and the difference -- you only saw them in a rare glimpse, like the rabbit in the conjuror's sleeve. She was extraordinarily white, and her every element and item was pretty; her eyes, her ears, her hair, her voice, her hands, her feet -- to which her relaxed attitude in her wicker chair gave a great publicity -- and the numerous ribbons and trinkets with which she was bedecked.[84]

St. George, in speaking of his wife to Overt, expands the figure so that we enter the world of the circus and see the public display coupled with the domination. He says of his study, "Isn't it a good big cage for going round and round? My wife invented it and she locks me up here every morning."[85] St. George's talent has been publicly exploited; in an effort to please his wife and provide her with material comforts and the pleasantries of wealth, he has written inferior books. "I've led the life of the world, with my wife and my progeny; the clumsy conventional expensive materialised vulgarised brutalised life of London."[86] Two instances of an altar metaphor continue St. George's discomfort in the position of public display. He tells Overt that, as an artist, he married for money, but he is quick to make the young man understand that he is not referring to his wife. "I refer to the mercenary muse whom I led to the altar of literature. Don't my boy, put your nose into that yoke. The awful jade will lead you a life."[87]

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[84]James, The Novels and Stories, XX, p. 9.

[85]Ibid., p. 54.

[86]Ibid., p. 63.

[87]Ibid., p. 58.

However, it is true, St. George tells Paul, that no woman can take part in the sacrifice of art. "How can they take part? They themselves are the sacrifice. They're the idol and the altar and the flame."[88] Even the admirable Miss Fancourt is likely, for Overt, to be "as a millstone round its neck."[89] All of these figures operate to re-enforce the central lesson of the story, which is explicitly stated by St. George in response to Overt's distress when he hears St. George's advice that he must be willing to surrender everything for his art.

> "What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!" Paul went on with a trembling voice.
>
> "Ah, you don't imagine by chance that I'm defending art? 'Arraignment' — I should think so! Happy the societies in which it hasn't made its appearance, for from the moment it comes they have a consuming ache, they have an incurable corruption in their breast. Most assuredly is the artist in a false position!"[90]

The only way to escape the cage — to escape the yoke of public exhibition in a vulgar world — is through abnegation and self-denial. "The Lesson of the Master" is Henry James's most pointed affirmation of the rigors of the life of art.

"Greville Fane" is almost too short to permit a pattern of metaphor. There are some brilliant single figures. Mrs. Stormer's daughter Ethel is spoken of in her arrogance as being "surrounded with

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[88] Ibid., p. 65.

[89] Loc. cit.

[90] Ibid., p. 67.

a spiked iron railing"[91] and the narrator of the story cannot imagine that anyone "would be inspired to clamber over that bristling barrier."[92] The development of the image forces our awareness of the inhuman and predatory selfishness of Mrs. Stormer's children. "What flower of tenderness or of intimacy would such an adventurer conceive as his reward?"[93]

James's thrust at the popular fiction of Greville Fane is deadly. "With no more prejudices than an old sausage-mill, she would give forth again with patient punctuality any poor verbal scrap that had been dropped into her. "[94]

> She carried about her box of properties, tumbling out promptly the familiar tarnished old puppets. She believed in them when others couldn't, and as they were like nothing that was to be seen under the sun it was impossible to prove by comparison that they were wrong. You can't compare birds and fishes; you could only feel that, as Greville Fane's characters had the fine plumage of the former species, human beings must be of the latter.[95]

Mrs. Stormer's workroom "seemed indeed a barren place to grow flowers for the market, and I wondered...by what desperate and heroic process she dragged them out of the soil. "[96] The reader is made to feel kindly toward Greville Fane's unselfish though stupidly blind submission to the will of her children, but James's comment on the quality of her writing is devastating.

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[91] James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 103.

[92] Loc. cit.

[93] Ibid., p. 103.

[94] Ibid., p. 101.

[95] Ibid., p. 106.

[96] Ibid., p. 114.

Of the remaining five tales of the middle period which deal with the life of art and the position of the artist in society, only three — "The Middle Years," "The Next Time" and "The Death of the Lion" — have a sustained symbolic structure; the metaphor of the other two stories — "The Real Thing" and "The Figure in the Carpet" — is incidental. The imagery of "The Real Thing" instructs us in the "unreality" of the Monarchs. They are "a pair of feather-beds";[97] Mrs. Monarch has a smile like a moist sponge, her face is a mask, and she constantly hides her head ostrich-fashion. Major Monarch, who hasn't "the stray sixpence of an idea,"[98] had, in their youth, called his wife "the Beautiful Statue"[99] and it is this fixed, concrete kind of unreality which makes them both unsuited for the kind of employment they seek. At the end of the story, their gesture is the dramatization of what James intended the story to mean: "They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal."[100] In "The Figure in the Carpet" the single symbol is that which begins in the title: the theme which "like a complex figure in a Persian carpet"[101] runs through all of Hugh Vereker's work. There is a constant intensification of the figure in the narrative. Vereker says that the theme is

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[97]Matthiessen, Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 188. For the text of "The Real Thing" I have used Matthiessen. The volume which contains this story in the Macmillan Edition that I am using is not available at the University of Cincinnati Library.

[98]Ibid., p. 179.

[99]Ibid., p. 172.

[100]Ibid., p. 191.

[101]James, The Novels and Stories, XX, p. 217.

"the very string that my pearls are strung on."[102] Or, as he has put it earlier: "The thing's as concrete there as a bird in a cage, a bait on a hook, a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap. It's stuck into every volume as your foot is stuck into your shoe."[103] James's story would seem to be an indictment of the criticism which can fail to see something as obvious as Vereker insists his "figure" is, but there is some justification for viewing the story in a less serious light -- as a jeu d'esprit which satirizes critics who go about looking for "figures in the carpet." The justification for this interpretation is the character of Corvick, who discovers the figure. He is presented as obtuse and socially objectionable and of an understanding so limited as scarcely to make his act of heroic perception possible.

Brief as it is, "The Middle Years" has a particularly interesting metaphorical plan. There is, first of all, the symbol of flight. The exhorbitant Countess, on whom the young Dr. Hugh is in attendance, impresses Dencombe just after the story opens as offering "a confused resemblance to a flying-machine that has broken down,"[104] and the suggestion colors the whole narrative, inasmuch as Dencombe's predicament is that of having been brought to earth since the publication of his novel "The Middle Years," in which he had "taken his flight."[105] Now, in his illness, "he felt as if he had fallen into a hole too deep to descry any little patch of heaven,"[106] although under

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[102] Loc. cit.

[103] Ibid., p. 210.

[104] James, The Novels and Stories, XXI, p. 69.

[105] Ibid., p. 80.

[106] Ibid., p. 79.

the ministrations of Dr. Hugh he soon finds himself "soaring again a little on the weak wings of convalescence."[107]

But the flight is to be very brief. Dencombe is to have no second chance; he dies at the conclusion of the story, and for this outcome assorted images are employed to suggest the agony of his predicament. "He had done all he should ever do, and yet hadn't done what he wanted. This was the laceration -- that practically his career was over; it was as violent as a grip at his throat."[108] His only consolation is contemplation of his art. "He dived once more into his story and was drawn down, as by a siren's hand, to where, in the dim underworld of fiction, the great glazed tank of art, strange silent subjects float."[109] Realization that true achievement has come only at the very end of his career is something that "he felt as a nail driven in"[110] for his progress in his art had been long and slow.

> It hadn't come to him easily, it had been backward and roundabout. It was the child of time, the nursling of delay; he had struggled and suffered for it, making sacrifices not to be counted, and now that it was really mature was it to cease to yield, to confess itself brutally beaten?[111]

He acknowledges at last that the second chance was only a delusion and that his disease is "definitely mortal, of an action as relentless... as a leak in a great ship."[112] For the artist, says the symbolism of

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[107] Ibid., p. 85.

[108] Ibid., p. 70.

[109] Loc. cit.

[110] Ibid., p. 71.

[111] Loc. cit.

[112] Ibid., p. 90.

James's tale, there is only the one great chance and everything else is frustration and loneliness, save the voice of informed appreciation which, like the young voice of Dr. Hugh at Dencombe's bedside as the writer dies, had "the ring of a marriage-bell."[113] The work, the art, the dedication is enough, and "frustration's only life.... it's what passes."[114]

James's customary severity with members of the journalism profession is evident in the initial metaphor of "The Death of the Lion." He is even more than usually caustic; the young reporter who tells the story and who later breaks from the profession feels that he can't "be concerned to straighten out the journalistic morals of my chief, feeling them indeed to be an abyss over the edge of which it was better not to peer."[115] The chief, Mr. Pinhorn, sending the young man out to interview the rising celebrity Neil Paraday, "had smelt the coming glory as an animal smells his distant prey."[116] The process of interviewing and the consequent preparation of the news story are sharply outlined in imagery which makes James's derogation clear. "Mr. Pinhorn supposed us to put our victims through on the gallop. It was later, in the office, that the rude motions of the jig were set to music."[117] When a rival newspaper, The Empire, the most blatant of the London dailies, descends upon Paraday, James's language is even more pointed.

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[113] Ibid., p. 91.

[114] Ibid., p. 92.

[115] James, The Novels and Stories, XX, p. 89.

[116] Ibid., p. 90.

[117] Ibid., p. 91.

> The big blundering newspaper had discovered him, and now he was proclaimed and anointed and crowned. His place was assigned him as publicly as if a fat usher with a wand had pointed to the topmost chair; he was to pass up and still up, higher and higher, between the watching faces and the envious sounds -- away up to the dais and the throne.[118]

Our young reporter-narrator tells us that "the poor man is to be squeezed into his horrible age";[119] Mr. Morrow, The Empire's correspondent, subjects him to a brutal penetration: his eyes "suggested the electric headlights of some monstrous modern ship, and I felt as if Paraday and I were tossing terrified under his bows."[120] The young man himself is useful to Morrow: "As a 'surrounding' I felt how I myself had already been taken in; I was a little fish in the stomach of a bigger one."[121] Mr. Morrow, however, has a sense of propriety; he waits until the most propotious moment to bring out his notebook, "which...he at first kept slightly behind him, even as the dentist approaching his victim keeps the horrible forceps."[122]

But all this is only random metaphorical humor preliminary to the major symbolic structure of the story which sees the home of Mrs. Weeks Wimbush as a circus and the entrapped celebrities as circus performers. Mrs. Wimbush is "the proprietess of the universal menagerie,"[123] a place where "when the rush is great, the animals rub

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[118] Ibid., pp. 97-8.

[119] Ibid., p. 98.

[120] Ibid., p. 99.

[121] Ibid., p. 100.

[122] Ibid., p. 101.

[123] Ibid., p. 109.

shoulders freely with the spectators and the lions sit down for whole evenings with the lambs."[124] Mrs. Wimbush is inflexible in the management of her star attractions. "She was constructed of steel and leather, and all I asked of her for our tractable friend was not to do him to death. He had consented for a time to be of india-rubber, but my thoughts were fixed on the day he should resume his shape or at least get back into the box."[125]

The circus symbol carries over to various other persons and agencies which surround Mrs. Wimbush's world: for example, to the studio of Mr. Rumble, a young painter, "whose little game was to be the first to perch on the shoulders of renown."[126]

> Mr. Rumble's studio was a circus in which the man of the hour...leaped through the hoops of his showy frames almost as electrically as they burst into telegrams and "specials." He pranced to the exhibitions on their back; he was the reporter on canvas.[127]

Neil Paraday must, of course, submit to the artistic ministrations of Mr. Rumble, since they are part of Mrs. Wimbush's great show, which must operate with the efficiency of a large machine.

> Paraday had been promptly caught and saddled, accepting with characteristic good humour his confidential hint that to figure in his show was not so much a consequence as a cause of immortality....There were moments when I fancied I might have had more patience with them [the people of Mrs. Wimbush's world] if they hadn't been so fatally benevolent. I hated

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[124] Loc. cit.

[125] Loc. cit.

[126] Ibid., p. 121.

[127] Loc. cit.

> at all events Mr. Rumble's picture, and had my bottled resentment ready when, later on, I found my distracted friend had been stuffed by Mrs. Wimbush into the mouth of another cannon. A young artist in whom she was interested, and who had no connexion with Mr. Rumble, was to show how far he could make him go....She played her victims against each other with admirable ingenuity, and her establishment was a huge machine in which the tiniest and the biggest wheels went round to the same treadle.[128]

Mrs. Wimbush can number among her attractions even a famous foreign Princess, and this lady "in her gilded cage, with her retinue of keepers and feeders, was the most expensive specimen in the good lady's collection."[129] The image of Paraday as a prancing horse comes back into the narrative once again: "I positively feel my own flesh sore from the brass nails in Neil Paraday's social harness,"[130] and as Mrs. Wimbush's various guests gather for Paraday's reading they are, in all of their eccentric finery, reminiscent of circus spectacle and display.

The use of the circus symbol, certainly conscious and deliberate in this instance, serves James's purpose with particular cogency. For one thing, it retains the comic tone of the story without diminishing in any way the horror of Paraday's fate in the grotesque arena of Mrs. Wimbush's country house. Furthermore, it helps to convey James's judgment not only on the kind of society which "lionizes" or makes a fool of the artist but also on the weakness of the artist who,

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[128] Ibid., pp. 121-2.

[129] Ibid., p. 123.

[130] Ibid., p. 125.

in his need for understanding and encouragement, permits himself to be made a fool of. James is again asserting the necessity of a self-imposed loneliness for creative activity, and a casual metaphor in the story contrasts life at Mrs. Wimbush's country house with what had been the order of Neil Paraday's existence: "The monastic life, the pious illumination of the missal in the convent-cell were things of the gathered past."[131]

The figure is used again in "The Next Time." Discussing Ralph Limbert's willingness to turn from the production of genuine art in order to make money with popular literature, the critic-narrator who tells the story reveals that he "used to talk about his work, but he seldom talks now: the brotherhood of the faith have become, like the Trappists, a silent order,"[132] and Limbert himself employs the figure in a conversation about his work, although in a somewhat contrasting connection more appropriate to his distress at being unable to make his work pay: "We've sat here talking of 'success'...like chanting monks in a cloister, hugging the sweet delusion that it lies somewhere in the work itself."[133]

However, the dominant symbol of "The Next Time" is that of the trapped animal and the reference is, of course, to Ralph Limbert. He is trapped not only by the excellence of his art for which there is no public demand but also by his attempting to serve both his art and

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[131] Ibid., p. 110.

[132] Ibid., p. 148.

[133] Ibid., p. 168.

the public at the same time. He is trapped in not being willing to accept what he is. His most deliberate effort to write a popular work fails, and when the first person narrator of the story can only say that he has once again written "a pure gem," Limbert realizes that in the production of the work he was trapped by his art. "His danger appeared to have acted on him as the anaconda acts on the rabbit; fascinated and paralyzed, he had been engulfed in the long pink throat."[134] An extension of the metaphor allows Limbert to see himself as the pursuer of the animal, in this case the reading public, but the figure is turned back somewhat ambiguously on Limbert as the sentence ends: "He talked as much as ever, with monstrous arts and borrowed hints, of the traps he kept setting, but we all agreed to take merely for granted that the animal was caught."[135]

Writers like Limbert and the narrator of the story are mice who try to determine the next movement of the cat which is their audience. "He didn't care how often he printed me, for wasn't it exactly in my direction Mr. Bousefield held the cat was going to jump?"[136] The figure recurs again in the story with the failure of Limbert's project to publish a literary quarterly.

> [Mr. Bousefield] came to the house and let poor Ray have it. Ray gave it him back -- he reminded him of his own idea of the way the cat was going to jump."

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[134] Ibid., p. 159.

[135] Ibid., p. 189.

[136] Ibid., p. 170.

> I gasped with dismay. "Has Bousefield abandoned that idea? Isn't the cat going to jump?"
> Mrs. Highmore hesitated. "It appears she doesn't seem in a hurry. Ray at any rate has jumped too far ahead of her.[137]

The kind of work of which both Limbert and the narrator are capable "produced no tremor of the public tail."[138] Limbert is the mouse trapped by the cat (the public), but it is Mrs. Highmore who, with her popular fiction, can master the animal and make it behave. "They straightway rose...to the morsel she had hoped to hold too high, and, making but a big cheerful bite of it, wagged their great collective tail artlessly for more."[139]

"The Next Time" is rich in metaphor, with only the images we have isolated resolving into a symbolic pattern. Yet the richness itself is instrumental in stating the meaning of thetale. In no other story is the desperation of the artist more intense; he is faced here, as he almost never is in James, with the dilemma of how to keep body and soul together and of how to provide for a wife and children. The wealth of metaphor is parallel to the luxury of his art which, richly beautiful as it is, cannot be of practical assistance to him in a world of vulgarized tastes. Since "you cannot make a sow's ear out of a silk purse," his catastrophe is inevitable, and James has attacked in the story not so much the artist who compromises his talent (although this

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[137] Ibid., p. 178.

[138] Ibid., p. 144.

[139] Loc. cit.

judgment is certainly there) as he has the quality of the public response to genuine literary endeavor.

Plainly, then, the symbols of the stories dealing with the position of the artist in modern society are symbols of morality. Certain judgments are constant in the tales: the sanctity of artistic integrity, the ineludible occasions of personal sacrifice, the loneliness of dedication, and yet, notwithstanding all these, the healing and informing power of sincere and laborious artistic enterprise.

For the non-artist the moral instruction is implicit; for surely the stories are as much about the art of life as they are about the techniques of various artistic crafts. Vulgarity, whether within or without the precincts of aesthetic creation, is always odious in these stories; it is predicated as an absence of the moral sense. The vulgar people of the stories -- the Countess in "The Middle Years", Mrs. Wimbush in "The Death of the Lion" -- aggressively attempt a vicious control of the wills and destinies of other individuals. The general plea of these stories is for a refinement of the individual moral sensibility with a resultant improvement in the character of public taste. Then the artist will need fear no longer the danger to himself and to his art which exposure to the public entails, in an age of vulgar display and greed. It can be seen now that James used the predicament and subject with which he was most familiar for the purpose of making a more widely applicable comment on modern society, for in all of James's work, as Yvor Winters points out, though at a given moment he may not be examining the whole of a society, "he is

examining the mathematical center of a society -- the ethical consciousness of a society."[140] The artist, thought James, could be both the consciousness and the conscience of an ever-improving, ever-expanding civilization.

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[140] Yvor Winters, "Maule's Well, or Henry James and the Relation of Morals to Manners," Maule's Curse (Norfold, 1938), p. 181.

CHAPTER SIX

The Great Good Life

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In 1910 Harper and Brothers published an interesting little volume titled In After Days, Thoughts on the Future Life.[1] It was a symposium on the immortality of the soul and included contributions from a number of the most distinguished personalities of the time: William Dean Howells, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Julia Ward Howe, and Henry James. Old American family names are represented in the other contributors: Henry M. Alden, John Bigelow, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps -- and the book as a whole, illustrated with rather formal portraits of the essayists, has a decided charm, as if it had come out of the New England of "plain living and high thinking" when distinguished minds could be expected to give public evidence of their perpetual concern over the great questions.

James's offering is titled "Is There a Life After Death?", and its great importance to the reader and James is that it is the only sustained consideration in print of what may be regarded as James's religious views. His comments are phrased in the involved manner of the last novels where style seems to become rather than to convey the message, but there is, nevertheless, a specific statement of belief, and it is one which the critic who hunts for a coherent moral position in the novels must not be without.

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[1] In After Days, Thoughts on the Future Life, W. D. Howells, Henry James, John Bigelow, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Henry M. Alden, William Hanna Thomson, Gugliemo Ferrero, Julia Ward Howe, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (New York, 1910).

However, its contents are not surprising to someone who has read the fiction carefully. The essay bears out what the perceptive reader had already deduced: that James's sights were fixed almost exclusively on this world and that he stands, as very few other English-speaking writers have stood, wholly outside the traditional moral position of Christianity. Few writers, wittingly or otherwise, are as thoroughly secular and mundane as Henry James; for him the personality is the soul.

There may be some doubt that an essay written as late in James's career as 1910 can throw helpful light on fiction which belongs to the period to which this thesis has limited itself -- the moral view of Henry James in 1910 may have changed greatly, it is true, from what it was during the years 1881 to 1900. But it seems not to have done so. As a matter of fact, the best illustration of the opinions of James's contribution can be found, it seems to me, in some of the earliest stories, particularly in his first great novel -- perhaps the greatest novel in the English language -- The Portrait of a Lady.

The central thought of James's essay is this: perhaps the soul is immortal if you happen to have a soul, but very few people do have souls because they have not lived in this world the kind of existence which provides them. The soul is not something given, it is acquired -- through a conscious and meticulous serving of the individual's highest moral good, which is nothing less than an insatiable and exquisite curiosity about the universe. "The contemplative critic," writes James, "scarce sees why the universe should be at the expense of a new start for those on whom the old start appears

so to have been wasted."[2]

> How can there be a personal and a differentiated life "after," it will then of course be asked, for those for whom there has been so little of one before? -- unless indeed it be pronounced conceivable that the possibility may vary from man to man, from human case to human case, and that the quantity or the quality of our practice of consciousness may have something to say to it.[3]

The evils which he saw about him were the inglorious record of man's failure to make the most of his opportunity in this world; to what extent, then, had brutalized insensitivity a right to an existence beyond the merely temporal. The human being who had been an insensate clod in his earthly actuality — what expectation should he dare to have of being endowed with the splendor of wings?

> All the ugliness, the grossness, the stupidity, the cruelty, the vast extent to which the score in question is a record of brutality and vulgarity, the so easy non-existence of consciousness, round about us as to most of the things that make for living desirably at all, or even for living once, let alone on the enlarged chance -- these things fairly rub it into us that to <u>have</u> a personality need create no presumption beyond that which this remarkably mixed world is by itself amply sufficient to meet.[4]

The world, to James, was indeed so full of a number of things, its potentiality so varied and huge, that one who had explored it with a discriminating temperament could hardly desire a further experience. When living was rich and full, a constantly alert response to the challenge of one's vision, then living was a great good in itself. In

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[2]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 203.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 201.

[4]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 207.

The Portrait of a Lady, Ralph Touchett phrases the sentiment in admirable brevity, in speaking of his hopes for Isabel. "I call people rich," he says, "when they're able to meet the requirements of their imagination."[5] If Touchett can be presumed to have spoken for his author here, then James, twenty-nine years later, speaking in his own person, gave voice only to an expansion of the earlier belief.

> Living, or feeling one's exquisite curiosity about the universe fed and fed, rewarded and rewarded -- though I of course don't say definitely answered and answered -- becomes thus the highest good I can conceive of, a million times better than not living (however that comfort may at bad moments have solicited us); all of which illustrates what I mean by the consecrated 'interest' of consciousness.[6]

James saw that his view had much in common with the traditional Christian one, which requires that man earn in this world an eternal reward in the next, but he differed in not accepting that a future life is irrevocable. For him, it was only the rare personality which would be granted the boon of continuity, and then not a reward but only a perpetuation of a neutral opportunity to deal with as best it could.

> I like to think that we here, as to soul, dangle from the infinite and shake about in the universe; that this world and this conformation and these senses are our helpful and ingenious frame, amply provided with wheels and replete with the lesson for us of how to plant, spiritually, our feet. That conception of the matter rather comes back, I recognize,

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[5]James, The Novels and Stories, VI, p. 230.

[6]Ibid., pp. 222-3.

> to the theory of the spiritual discipline, the purification and preparation on earth for heaven, of the orthodox theology -- which is a resemblance I don't object to, all the more that it is a superficial one, as well as a fact mainly showing, at any rate, how neatly extremes may sometimes meet.[7]

To a philosopher these speculations of James may seem little more than elaborate nonsense, an imaginative exercise with its basis in literary fiction rather than in truth; and certainly we should always discount the artistic manner when the artist strikes the pose of the seer. But James's novels and stories are, in fact, dramatized testimonies -- in his sympathetic characters, that is -- of the will to live such lives as James's reflections would encourage. For these characters, there is no appeal to any authority outside themselves; their own personalities are their consolation, their refuge and their strength; the way and the truth and the life for each of them is the security of a perpetually augmented sensibility and a faultless taste. The best of his people demonstrate an imaginative realism -- what James himself, in speaking of two real personalities whom he greatly admired, Clover Hooper (later Mrs. Henry Adams) and "Minny " Temple, called "intellectual grace and moral spontaneity."[8] Very few of James's male characters exhibit service to "the consecrated interest of consciousness"[9] but quite a number of his heroines do. There is, for example, Fanny Knocker, or Mrs. Tregent (one prefers the second name; probably no writer ever had a less euphonious sense of names than Henry James), in "The Wheel of Time"

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[7]Ibid., p. 230.

[8]Lubbock, The Letters, I, p. 26.

[9]James, In After Days, p. 223.

(1893) who, after being deserted by the young man who had encouraged her love for the possible material advantage which marriage to her would bring, develops by means of an imaginative tenderness and an "intensity of fidelity"[10] out of an almost repulsive plainness into a great beauty. Middle-aged, Maurice Ganvil returns to her to wonder at the great transformation.

> He seemed to understand now by what miracle Fanny Knocker had been beautified — the miracle of heroic docilities and accepted pangs and vanquished egotisms. It had never come in a night but it had come by living for others. She was living for others still; it was impossible for him to see anything else at last than that she was living for him. The time of passion was over, but the time of service was long....He bowed his head before such charity and seemed to see, moreover, that Mrs. Tregent's desire to befriend him was a feeling independent of any prospect of gain and indifferent to any chance of reward.[11]

In other words, the fidelity to others and to oneself which grew out of the willingness to respond to many varieties of experience kept one safe through adversity. One would not be spared the world's anguish just out of respect to one's wanting very richly to live; indeed, an exquisite curiosity might lead one into alleys of particular sorrow and bitterness, but a firm belief in the power of a constantly expanding consciousness would finally see one through and greatly enrich the personality in the process.

On July 28, 1883, Henry James wrote from Boston a letter to his friend Miss Grace Norton, advising her in a moment of distress and doubt. The letter is one of the most beautiful documents in the entire

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[10]James, The Novels and Stories, XXVII, p. 143.

[11]Ibid., pp. 143-4.

production of James, and it is so relevant to the present matter that I take the liberty of reproducing it in its entirety. All of the characteristic artifice of James is missing here, and there remains a warm, genuine, and happy readiness to serve.

131 Mount Vernon St., Boston
July 28th [1883]

My dear Grace,

Before the sufferings of others I am always utterly powerless, and your letter reveals such depths of suffering that I hardly know what to say to you. This indeed is not my last word — but it must be my first. You are not isolated, verily, in such states of feeling as this — that is, in the sense that you appear to make all the misery of all mankind your own; only I have a terrible sense that you give all and receive nothing — that there is no reciprocity in your sympathy — that you have all the affliction of it and none of the returns. However — I am determined not to speak to you except with the voice of stoicism. I don't know what source or for what purpose; but I believe we can go on living for the reason that (always of course up to a certain point) life is the most valuable thing we know anything about, and it is therefore presumptively a great mistake to surrender it while there is any yet left in the cup. In other words consciousness is an illimitable power, and though at times it may seem to be all consciousness of misery, yet in the way it propagates itself from wave to wave, so that we never cease to feel, and though at moments we appear to, try to, pray to, there is something that holds one in one's place, makes it a standpoint in the universe which it is probably good not to forsake. You are right in your consciousness that we are all echoes and reverberations of the same, and you are noble when your interest and pity as to everything that surrounds you, appears to have a sustaining and harmonizing power. Only don't, I beseech you, generalize too much in these sympathies and tendernesses — remember that every life is a special problem which is not yours but another's, and content yourself with the terrible algebra of your own. Don't melt too much into the universe, but be as solid and dense and fixed as you can. We all live together, and those of us who love and know, live so most. We help each other — even unconsciously, each in our own effort, we lighten the effort of others, we contribute to the sum of success, make it possible for others to live. Sorrow comes in great waves — no one can know better than you — but it rolls over us, and though it may almost smother us it leaves us on the spot, and we know that if it is strong we

> are stronger, inasmuch as it passes and we remain. It wears us, uses us, but we wear and use it in return; and it is blind whereas we after a manner see. My dear Grace, you are passing through a darkness in which I in my ignorance see nothing but that you have been made wretchedly ill by it; but it is only a darkness, it is not an end, or the end. Don't think, don't feel, any more than you can help, don't conclude or decide -- don't do anything but wait. Everything will pass, and serenity and accepted mysteries and disillusionments, and the tenderness of a few good people, and new opportunities and ever so much of life, in a word, will remain. You will do all sorts of things yet and I will help you. The only thing is not to melt in the meanwhile. I insist upon the necessity of a sort of mechanical condensation -- so that however fast the horse may run away there will when he pulls up be a somewhat agitated but perfectly identical G. N. left in the saddle. Try not to be ill -- that is all; for in that there is a failure. You are marked out for success, and you must not fail. You have my tenderest affection and all my confidence. Ever your faithful friend --
>
> Henry James[12]

Almost the whole moral canon of the novels of James is in that letter. It is the code by means of which his "good women" live, the set of standards they judge themselves by. Essentially, of course, it is a philosophy of will, of strict unhesitating celebration of the individual's power to control his moral destiny. It seems never to have been noticed that there are no neurotics in Henry James, though there are, to be sure, evil and vulgar people. But their deficiencies are always a matter of deliberate choice; they are not sick or emotionally unstable. Sickness is a kind of failure, James's letter says, and he must have meant sickness of whatever variety. "There's no beauty without health," comments

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[12]Lubbock, The Letters, I, pp. 100-102.

Mrs. Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady,[13] and she is not commenting on physical beauty but on the quality of her son's life. The novels insist on decision; James's characters can elect to do right or wrong, and that is why he is particularly solemn about the consequences of choice. Having chosen, one is bound to the dignity of honoring his choice by not trying to shirk its results and implications even when one has discovered that he has chosen unwisely. Rigidly stoical as it is, James's view is a categorical antithesis to the literary naturalism which he saw and deplored in some of his contemporaries. In his essay on Zola he has written one of the best analyses of the naturalistic method.

> Of course, we definitely remind ourselves, the whole long chronicle is explicitly a scheme, solidly set up and intricately worked out, lighted, according to the author's pretension, by "science," high, dry and clear, and with each part involved, and necessitated in all the other parts, each block of the edifice, each "morceau de vie," physiologically determined by previous combinations.[14]

James could not believe that Zola's method was a legitimate artistic procedure. "When an artist answers for science," he wrote, "who at the least answers for art?"[15]

The celebration of the human will with such intensity is both the virtue and the defect of James's art, for obviously the excess of attention left a limited space for other matters. There is more to life

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[13] James, The Novels and Stories, VII, p. 354.

[14] James, "Emile Zola," Notes on Novelists (New York, 1914), p. 53.

[15] Ibid., p. 54.

than will: there are reason, emotion and faith; and though what appears to be a startling absence of sentiment in the novels is really only an unprecedented refinement of sentiment, one must acknowledge that James's people think very little and believe even less. I note that a forthcoming article on James in PMLA is to be titled "Henry James: The Poetics of Empiricism,"[16] and I can only say that I wish I had thought of it first. The phrase is perfectly apt as a descriptive term for James's moral view. Few writers have been as directly empirical as he; he limits himself to decision within the realm of the real and the actual, and within that area he constructs a dialectic of poetic vision. But, like the characters of Hemingway, James's men and women seem to abjure thought and sustained rational examination, and their one belief is in the strength of will, which is, after all -- in the world of James's novels -- wholly demonstrable.

The mental element in James is supplied not by the exercise of reason but by the display of imagination, and one of the major excitements of his art is the dexterity with which he brings together the "metaphysics" of his imagination and the solidity of his empirical observation. The agency which accomplishes this task for James is always his impeccable taste, and if, in trying to get at the substance of James we keep in mind the three words will, imagination and taste, we shall have come within sight of James's morality. The essay on Zola is again instructive.

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[16]John Henry Raleigh, "Henry James: The Poetics of Empiricism," PMLA, LXVI (March, 1951), pp. 107-123. This article appears just as I complete my study of James.

> "The matter with" Zola then, so far as it goes, was that, as the imagination of the artist is in the best cases only clarified but intensified by his equal possession of Taste...so when he has lucklessly never inherited that auxiliary blessing the imagination itself inevitably breaks down as a consequence. There is simply no limit, in fine, to the misfortune of being tasteless; it does not merely disfigure the surface and the fringe of your performance — it eats back into the very heart and enfeebles the sources of life. When you have no taste, you have no discretion, which is the conscience of taste, and when you have no discretion you perpetrate books like "Rome," which are without intellectual modesty, books like "Fécondité," which are without a sense of the ridiculous, books like "Vérité," which are without the finer vision of human experience.[17]

Will, imagination, taste — these, then, thought James, are sufficient considerations for the novelist; he would not have subscribed to the Tolstoyan concept of the novel as an entity of record — the full and complete view of a civilization at a critical moment of its history. He did not live to see the time when the novelist would usurp the prerogatives of the poet, the essayist, the editorialist, the political statesman and the priest; he was spared the critical distress of having to deal with problems of definition in the face of such immensities as The Magic Mountain and Men of Good Will. James hewed close to the line of the novel's origin, that is, as a record of manners, with functions of instruction for whoever might find the instruction useful. The novel was something — something specific and definable — or it was chaos. In a book like The Portrait of a Lady it is the instrument which conveys the kind of imaginative comment on social manners which is instruction in the good life.

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[17] James, Notes on Novelists, p. 49.

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The Portrait of a Lady is only one of a number of nineteenth-century novels in which the author has taken it upon himself to censure a spirited young lady for an excess of romantic sensibility. In his essay on The Princess Casamassima, Lionel Trilling sees the book as one which deals with the story of the Young Man from the Provinces who, as in such other nineteenth-century novels as Stendhal's The Red and the Black, Balzac's Pere Goriot and Lost Illusions, Dickens's Great Expectations and Flaubert's Sentimental Education (and by extension Tolstoi's War and Peace and Dostoevski's The Idiot), comes to the great city in order to test his will against the resistance of society.[18] There is also, it seems to me, a group of novels treating the theme of the romantically imaginative heroine with a common emphasis, and the list would include Jane Austen's Emma, George Eliot's Middlemarch, Flaubert's Madame Bovary, James's The Portrait of a Lady, and by extension Dostoevski's The Idiot in its treatment of Nastasia Philipovna. What these novels have in common is the author's readiness to render judgment, with, however, varying degrees of severity, on the surplus of spirit which caused their young ladies to misinterpret reality and to misunderstand human motivation. Emma Woodhouse undertakes to devise a genteel utopia for Harriet Smith without a genuinely realistic regard for that young lady's capabilities; Dorothea Brooke, in an amplitude of humanitarian zeal, marries the scholar Casaubon and denies the reality of the demands of her heart; poor, foolish, little Emma Bovary childishly dreams herself

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[18]Trilling, op. cit., pp. 61-5.

into sordidness and agony; Isabel Archer, who feels that in marrying Lord Warburton she will be trying to escape the unhappiness and suffering which is her lot, goes on in a romantic blindness to allow herself to be victimized by the schemes of Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle; Nastasia Philipovna, bitter because she has been outraged by her guardian, piles excitement on excitement in a Manfred-like demonic urge to the self-destruction which Rogogin eventually makes possible. These novels are a rebuke to uncontrolled exuberance and flighty ambition, Flaubert, then, and Dostoevski going so far as to destroy their heroines in violence, Austen, Eliot and James bringing their young women to personal and social maturity.

Since Isabel, like Emma and Dorothea, is always presented sympathetically, James's judgment takes the form of casual irony, with the author himself stepping into the story occasionally to make sure that we understand the fundamental soundness of his bewildered young lady. There is never any doubt in our minds that she is going to be "saved" by her author, in the way which seems most impressive to him.

Isabel comes to Gardencourt, the palatial English estate of her aunt Mrs. Touchett, who has rescued her from the drabness of Albany after the death of Isabel's father. There Isabel meets old Mr. Touchett, James's charming representation of the genial and distinguished type of American magnate, and her cousin Ralph Touchett, an ailing but alert young man who becomes devoted to Isabel. Indeed, she is the delight of the entire family, and in no time at all a young aristocratic neighbor, Lord Warburton, had offered her marriage. Isabel refuses him

as she had refused the young Bostonian Caspar Goodwood before leaving America: she does not want to surrender her freedom yet and she wants to expose herself further to opportunity and experience. Neither Lord Warburton nor Goodwood, however, takes her word as final.

Through the offices of Ralph, old Mr. Touchett is persuaded in his last illness to change his will, leaving a large share of Ralph's inheritance to Isabel — seventy thousand pounds, to be exact. Thus Isabel has the independence of a very large fortune. Just before Mr. Touchett's death Isabel meets at Gardencourt the unusual Madame Merle, a friend of her aunt's, and as the scene shifts to Italy, Isabel and Madame Merle are often together. Through Madame Merle Isabel meets Gilbert Osmond, a fastidious and nearly penniless dilettante, and though Isabel is warned against Osmond by Ralph and though her other suitors are almost always present in the background, Isabel is captivated by Osmond. Pelham Edgar says, "his noble poverty, so exquisitely defeated by his unerring taste, prevails over the more solid virtues and the more substantial claims of the other suitors."[19] Isabel speaks a vigorous defence of Osmond to Ralph, displaying the extent to which she has been misled by her romantic enthusiasm.

> "I can't enter into your idea of Mr. Osmond; I can't do it justice, because I see him in quite another way. He's not important — no, he's not important; he's a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent. If that's what you mean when you call him 'small,' then he's as small as you please. I call that large -- it's the largest thing I know....Do you complain of Mr. Osmond because he's not rich? That's just

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[19]Edgar, op. cit., p. 248.

> what I like him for. I've fortunately money enough; I've never felt so thankful for it as today. There have been moments when I should like to go and kneel down by your father's grave: he did perhaps a better thing than he knew when he put it into my power to marry a poor man -- a man who has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference. Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled -- he has cared for no worldly prize. If that's to be narrow, if that's to be selfish, then it's very well....Mr. Osmond makes no mistakes! He knows everything, he understands everything, he has the kindest, gentlest, highest spirit.... Your mother has never forgiven me for not having come to a better understanding with Lord Warburton, and she's horrified at my contenting myself with a person who has none of his great advantages -- no property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It's the total absence of all these things that pleases me. Mr. Osmond's simply a very lonely, a very cultivated and a very honest man -- he's not a prodigious proprietor."[20]

Marriage to Osmond, however, turns out badly. Her bitterest discovery is that he has no respect for her mind, and he is increasingly curt in his addresses to her. Furthermore, Osmond's attempts to make a brilliant marriage for his daughter Pansy create a further strain. Pansy is in love with a young man named Rosier who strikes Isabel as an excellent choice for her step-daughter, but Osmond is determined that the girl will marry Lord Warburton, who has come to Italy with Ralph Touchett and has been frequenting the Osmond home. Osmond asks Isabel to help bring the marriage about, and she is at first inclined to please him, but she soon realizes that Lord Warburton's interest in Pansy has been merely his disguise for continuing the old interest in herself. She

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[20] James, The Novels and Stories, VII, pp. 63-4.

drops her support of the project then, Lord Warburton returns to England without having spoken to Osmond for Pansy, and Isabel's husband accuses her of having deliberately subverted the marriage. His resentment turns to hate, and when Isabel learns that Ralph is dying in England and wants to visit him on his deathbed, Osmond refuses his permission. Isabel, however, goes in defiance of him, after having learned from Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, that Pansy is not the daughter of Osmond's first wife but of Osmond and Madame Merle, who had been lovers for many years. Isabel sees now the trickery whereby Madame Merle arranged that Osmond should have the use of her fortune. In England, she talks with Ralph just before his death in one of the most beautiful scenes that James ever wrote. After the funeral Caspar Goodwood, who has sensed Isabel's unhappiness, pleads with her to leave her husband permanently. Pelham Edgar brings his summary of the events of the story to a close by writing of Goodwood, "His passion has an energy scarcely to be denied: she feels herself carried along on the torrent of his impetuous love, and realises that here is the protective strength, the devotion and the refuge that her heart craves. Yet knowing and feeling this, she masters her inclination and returns to Rome."[21] In going back to her husband she has indicated her determination to abide by the act of will which was her choice of him in the face of Ralph's opposition and she has demonstrated that she is no longer the dupe of romantic illusions which would cause her to

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[21]Edgar, op. cit., p. 249.

sacrifice herself endlessly to whim and fancy. Like Madame de Mauves, Isabel knows now that "Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality we happen to be in for."[22] The redemption of Isabel has been accomplished by means of her willingness to explore and endure all the implications of her chosen and self-asserted destiny and by the moral earnestness of her accepting without protest the full consequences of her decisions. Will, imagination, and taste have been the factors dominant in her history, and they operate together at the end of the novel to preclude for her any other action than that of returning to Gilbert Osmond.

iii

The symbol which James uses as his means of comment on Isabel's romantic confusion is the most conventional one of all: literature, or the book, comes to represent Isabel's false notions of reality. She is a tireless reader, and, like Emma Bovary, she has come through her reading to entertain great expectations of life which life is under no compulsion to fulfill. When alone, Isabel is scarcely ever without a book, and the experience of literature repeatedly provides the metaphorical vocabulary. In addition, James has furnished the novel with an unusual number of explicit comments on Isabel's reading, as if he had been at pains that we should not miss the full point of her activity. The romantic character of Isabel's reading is indicated very early in the novel when James tells

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[22]James, The Novels and Stories, XVIII, p. 251.

us of the old house in Albany in which Isabel had been reared.

> The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces, which she used to cling upon a chair to take down. When she had found one to her taste -- she was guided in her selection chiefly by the frontispiece -- she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office.[23]

Isabel's eagerness to know more of life -- the boundless enthusiasm which is the source of both her later embarrassment and her restraint -- is first called into play as the girl tells Mrs. Touchett that "I like places in which things have happened -- even if they're sad things. A great many people have died here; the place has been full of life....I mean full of experience -- of people's feelings and sorrows."[24]

Edmund Ludlow, Isabel's brother-in-law, applies the book image to Isabel in speaking of her to his wife, who has accused him of not caring for Isabel because "she's so original." "Well, I don't like originals; I like translations," Mr. Ludlow had more than once replied. "Isabel's written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out."[25] We are told, however, that Isabel hated to be thought bookish and used to do her reading in secret and that her experience in literature had taught her that the unpleasant had been left out of her instruction.[26] There is delightfully conscious irony in one of James's earliest comments on

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[23]James, The Novels and Stories, VI, p. 26.

[24]Ibid., p. 30.

[25]Ibid., p. 34.

[26]Ibid., p. 39.

his heroine.

> She had had everything a girl could have: kindness, admiration, bonbons, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, plenty of new dresses, the London Spectator, the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot.[27]

To indicate a lack of real experience, the book-metaphor is extended to Ralph Touchett, also. This is the way James indicates Ralph's physical incapacity. "Living as he now lived was like reading a good book in a poor translation -- a meagre entertainment for a young man who felt that he might have been an excellent linguist."[28]

Isabel is spoken of as "a prodigy of learning, a creature reported to have read the classic authors -- in translations",[29] and a paternal aunt, Mrs. Varian, "having a reverence for books" had "once spread the rumour that Isabel was writing a book."[30] In one of her earliest conversations with her uncle, old Mr. Touchett, Isabel wants to know whether or not the English "corresponded with the descriptions in the books," to which the old man replies, "The books? well, I don't know much about the books. You must ask Ralph about that. I've always ascertained for myself -- got my information in the natural form,"[31] plainly establishing for the novel the antithesis between the life of Isabel's books, which is the life of her romantic illusion, and the life of reality. Still, the scene makes clear Isabel's eagerness to know

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[27] Ibid., p. 40.

[28] Ibid., p. 46.

[29] Ibid., p. 58.

[30] Loc. cit.

[31] Ibid., p. 66.

reality -- she wants to compare what she has read with what really is. Later, when Isabel tells Mr. Touchett that the English are not very nice to young girls in the novels, he corrects her quick judgment. "I believe the novels have a great deal of ability, but I don't suppose they're very accurate," and he goes on to tell her of a lady writer, a friend of Ralph's, who had put him in a book with complete lack of understanding.[32] Isabel had "read in some ingenious author that they [the English] are at bottom the most romantic of races."[33]

But as Isabel's experience begins to accumulate at Gardencourt and she is faced with the problem of dealing with her two insistent suitors, Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood, she notices that her interest in reading lags.

> It seemed to her at last that she would do well to take a book; formerly, when heavy-hearted, she had been able, with the help of some well-chosen volume, to transfer the seat of consciousness to the organ of pure reason. Of late, it was not to be denied, literature had seemed a fading light, and even after she had reminded herself that her uncle's library was provided with a complete set of those authors which no gentleman's collection should be without, she sat motionless and empty-handed, her eyes bent on the cool green turf of the lawn.[34]

In other words, now that her real experience has begun, the romantic illusion, which is symbolized by her interest in books, has begun to lose its hold on her imagination.

Early in the narrative there is a remark which is unusual for

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[32] Ibid., pp. 67-8.

[33] Ibid., p. 99.

[34] Ibid., p. 123.

Henry James and would almost certainly never have occurred in the later novels. Stepping into the narrative in his own person, the author tells us not to smile at Isabel's folly, and he promises her redemption. "If there was a great deal of folly in her wisdom," he writes, "those who judge her severely may have the satisfaction of finding that, later, she became consistently wise only at the cost of an amount of folly which will constitute almost a direct appeal to charity."[35] Isabel's ability to mature, to grow in wisdom, through her determination to know an abundance of life, is the essence of her eventual moral and intellectual security.

The image of the book continues to occur with marked frequency. Lord Warburton, telling Isabel how he fell in love with her, says "It was at first sight, as the novels say; I know now that's not a fancy-phrase, and I shall think better of novels for evermore."[36] For Isabel "to read between the lines was easier than to follow the text,"[37] and as Isabel and Henrietta plan a trip to London, James brings together her literary interests and her romantic view of life.

> They would stay at some picturesque old inn — one of the inns described by Dickens — and drive over the town in those delightful hansoms....They would dine at a coffee-house and go afterwards to the play; they would frequent the Abbey and the British Museum and find out where Doctor Johnson had lived, and Goldsmith and Addison.[38]

In London they meet the ever-accommodating Mr. Bantling who, with great un-romantic efficiency, attaches himself to Henrietta, and

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[35] Ibid., p. 127.

[36] Ibid., pp. 129-30.

[37] Ibid., p. 150.

[38] Ibid., pp. 156-7.

tells them, in describing his sister, "She's tremendously fond of distinguished people and writers. She writes herself, you know; but I haven't read everything she has written. It's usually poetry, and I don't go in much for poetry. "[39] Impatient with Isabel because of her second refusal of Caspar Goodwood, Henrietta tells her that she is "like the heroine of an immoral novel,"[40] and it is interesting that Isabel receives the news of her uncle's death — the event which is to launch her public career as a young lady of fortune — while she is reading in the library.

In the scene in which we meet Gilbert Osmond for the first time, he employs the book-metaphor. Answering the nun who says that the education of his daughter Pansy, which has included gymnastics, has not made the girl "big," Osmond says, "I'm not sorry. I prefer women like books -- very good and not too long."[41] To Isabel, however, Pansy "was like a sheet of blank paper -- the ideal jeune fille of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text."[42] Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, is another matter. "She was by no means a blank sheet; she had been written over in a variety of hands."[43] Osmond, who will be the agent of Isabel's disillusionment, is projected as someone who interferes with Isabel's reading. In the scene in which he tells her that he loves her, he interrupts her reading of a romantic history.

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[39] Ibid., p. 171.

[40] Ibid., p. 208.

[41] Ibid., p. 291.

[42] Ibid., p. 354.

[43] Loc. cit.

Isabel tells no one of the interest of either Lord Warburton or Osmond, not even her sister Lily, for "It was more romantic to say nothing, and, drinking deep, in secret, of **romance**, she was as little disposed to ask poor Lily's advice as she would have been to close that rare volume forever,"[44] and in the days prior to her marriage to Osmond, Isabel is spoken of as discovering that "her sense of the romantic...was more active than it had ever been."[45] Another declaration of Osmond's love is spoken in terms of the symbol of the book; Isabel has revived his interest in **life**.

> It's just as when one has been trying to spell out a book in the twilight and suddenly the lamp comes in. I had been putting out my eyes over the book of life and finding nothing to reward me for my pains; but now that I can read it properly I see it's a delightful story.[46]

But it is not long after their marriage that Isabel realizes that "she had not read him right."[47] She learns very quickly of how little Osmond values her intellect. "Isabel read all this as she would have read the hour on a clock-face."[48] Lord Warburton's motives as he seeks the hand of Isabel's stepdaughter are only too obvious to Isabel. She "read, more or less, between the lines of what he said himself."[49] Of the other suitor, Caspar Goodwood, James writes that "all the first year of her marriage he had dropped out of her books."[50]

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[44] James, The Novels and Stories, VII, p. 30.

[45] Ibid., p. 35.

[46] Ibid., pp. 70-1.

[47] Ibid., p. 168.

[48] Ibid., p. 177.

[49] Ibid., p. 235.

As her knowledge of the deception that has been practiced on her deepens, Isabel is forced to consider realities not previously known. She wonders about the true character of Madame Merle. "She [Isabel] asked herself, with an almost childlike horror of the supposition, whether to this intimate friend of several years the great historical epithet of wicked were to be applied. She knew the idea only by the Bible and other literary works,"[51] and when Osmond and Madame Merle quarrel, he tells that lady that she talks of revenge "like a third-rate novelist."[52]

After the bitter and intense scene in which Osmond forbids her to go to England to see the dying Ralph Touchett, Isabel finds the Countess Gemini in "the open doorway of a little parlour in which a small collection of heterogeneous books had been arranged."[53] Her education in the perfidy of the world now complete, Isabel is able to renounce the books of her illusion.

> The Countess had an open volume in her hand; she appeared to have been glancing down a page which failed to strike her as interesting. At the sound of Isabel's step she raised her head.
>
> "Ah my dear," she said, "you, who are so literary, do tell me some amusing book to read! Everything here's of a dreariness —! Do you think this would do me any good?"
>
> Isabel glanced at the title of the volume she held out, but without reading or understanding it. "I'm afraid I can't advise you."[54]

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[51] Ibid., p. 288.

[52] Ibid., p. 294.

[53] Ibid., p. 313.

[54] Ibid., pp. 313-14.

That Isabel has no further use for false instruction is indicated by the manner in which Ralph Touchett disposes of his fine library in his will, and his gesture is that of bequeathing romance to the one person in the novel who needs it most, since her contact with reality is already full and strong. Mrs. Touchett tells Isabel what he has done.

> "And what do you think he has done with his library? It sounds like a practical joke. He has left it to your friend Miss Stackpole -- 'in recognition of her services to literature.' Does he mean her following him up from Rome? Was that a service to literature? It contains a great many rare and valuable books, and as she can't carry it about the world in her trunk he recommends her to sell it at auction."[55]

But Isabel herself at Gardencourt finds that "she had never been less interested in literature than to-day when she occasionally took down from the shelf one of the rare and valuable volumes."[56] It is the final and most appropriate use of the book as symbol to affirm the process of Isabel's coming to maturity.

iv

Anyone who has taught The Portrait of a Lady knows the disappointment with which students, many of them reading James for the first time, protest its ending. To have sent Isabel back to Gilbert Osmond seems an act of monstrous injustice on the part of her creator; how much more satisfying to the modern imagination if she had been

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[55] Ibid., p. 370.

[56] Loc. cit.

permitted to divorce her husband and come back to America with the faithful Caspar Goodwood!

But our analysis of the operation of the symbol of the book as it suggests the censure of Isabel for her naive romantic sympathies demonstrates that no destiny other than that of the return to Rome was possible for James's heroine. To have minimized Isabel's distress and to have treated the results of her sentimental confusion so lightly as to make an easy and immediate adjustment of them possible at the conclusion would have vitiated the significance of the entire experience which has gone before. It is not simply that Isabel must be punished for her folly but that we should not slight the determination with which she pursued it. Isabel's lapse from imaginative realism is so self-willed that it imposes consequences which her author, out of respect for her moral integrity, could not possibly absolve her from. Isabel has been shocked alive; she wanders no longer in the dream world of literary and historical romanticism; but living the good life requires more of someone with Isabel's imagination than a simple renunciation of the past and its error. If one has willed the error with the highest degree of perception of which one was capable at the time of choice, then one is bound to honor without protest the destiny which that choice has provided. To do otherwise would be to disregard the obligations of decency and taste.

But, apart from the novel's symbols, we are prepared earlier in the narrative for Isabel's decision. "One ought to choose something very deliberately," Isabel tells Osmond, "and be faithful to that,"[57]

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[57] James, The Novels and Stories, VI, pp. 335-6.

and her answer to Henrietta's accusation that she is too proud to confess that she has made a mistake in marrying Osmond is even more resolved.

> "I don't know whether I'm too proud. But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that's decent. I'd much rather die."
>
> "You won't think so always," said Henrietta.
>
> "I don't know what great unhappiness might bring me to; but it seems to me I shall always be ashamed. One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. One can't change that way."[58]

Liberty, that is, entails high standards of responsibility for one's actions. The privilege of freedom is not sanction for personal or moral diffusion or for a constant fluctuation of conviction and opinion. Freedom of the will is dignified only through our willingness to know and accept the effects of careful, sensitive and unhampered choice. The great good life is fidelity to a standard of human freedom which assures the maximum opportunity for the operation of the imagination, refined by an informed and exacting taste, and providing the occasions for wholly responsible acts of will from which there will not be an easy appeal. The great good life of the novels of Henry James derives its impetus from the author's steadfast defense of the moral dignity of man.

It has been the purpose of this thesis, then, to demonstrate this defense and to show that James's concern with social and moral considerations can be apprehended through an analysis of the language of the

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[58] Ibid., pp. 249-50.

novels. Such analysis reveals that most of the novels and stories of the period 1881-1900 contain careful symbolic structures which help to convey meaning, theme and tone. The language joins with the other parts of the novel in the unity or gestalt of the work. Consequently, the study of James must always include attention to his language if the full significance of the novels is to be realized: critical observation of his imagery is not only helpful, it is indispensable.

Such observation results in a new appreciation of Henry James as a writer of great moral force, a penetrating critic of the social disorders of his time, a tireless commentator on the vulgarization of manners, a shrewd and prophetic interpreter of social change and moral conflict, a dedicated practitioner of an art to which, as T. S. Eliot's memorable statement has it, "he brought a mind so fine that no idea could violate it", a steadfast defender of the fullest conceivable measures of human liberty and responsibility, a tireless proponent of those graces and gestures which make a civilization of free men possible.

The water imagery, which, in The Princess Casamassima, helps to show the imprecise and, therefore, (in this instance) morally defective manner in which the upper classes view the suffering and distress of the workers; the figures of light and vision which, in The Awkward Age, operate to suggest the desperation with which a decadent society tries to see and understand its corruption; the symbols of dust and drought which, in The Spoils of Poynton, indicate the spiritual aridness of an age which places its trust in objects of material splendor; the metaphor of steel wire and twisted metallic cords which, in

The Bostonians, demonstrates the self-deception and attempted manipulation of another's will which results from a limited comprehension of human psychology -- these symbolic structures, along with the others detailed in this study, show not only the range of James's interest in the contemporary scene but a solid, thoughtful, and sincere approach to a solution of the problems of his age.

Necessarily selective, this thesis has had to reject several stories which contain moral comment quite as pronounced as that of the stories treated. James's delightful little mystery "Owen Wingrave" is as pointed and severe an indictment of war as literature since James, in its persistent concern with this subject, can show. "The Reverberator" carries James's own denunciation of vicious practices in the journalism of his day. The poignancy of "The Pupil" is unforgettable in its handling of the distress caused a child by the shabby pride and showy display of a family living beyond its means. "Sir Dominic Ferrand" is a dexterous assertion of an individual's democratic right to safety from slander and villification. A full treatment of all of the stories of the period 1881-1900 would require many more pages, but the findings would serve principally to re-inforce the statements already made. Further symbols of morality would repeat the evidence that James in the middle period is anything but "thin" in substance, just as they would support the new opinion of James: that, as Edmund Wilson has said, "he can be judged only in the company of the greatest."

Appendix: The Turn of the Screw Again

Note: Any discussion of the middle period of James's career failing to comment on the story of the period which has received the greatest amount of critical attention, namely "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), would certainly seem incomplete. I do not see, however, that James's ghost story contributes to the central discussion of the thesis and consequently append this chapter as a separate piece of analysis. It is the development of a paper prepared for a course in Techniques of Modern Fiction, given by Mark Schorer at the Kenyon School of English, 1949.

i

In refuting the Edna Kenton-Edmund Wilson[1] interpretation of The Turn of the Screw, recent studies of the story have gone too far in the opposite direction. The analyses by Oliver Evans[2] and Robert Bechtold Heilman[3] prove conclusively, from close attention to James's preface, his letters and the story itself, that the theory which holds that the ghosts of the story are "merely the hallucinations of the governess"[4] is untenable; but, although they establish the "authority"

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[1]The best expression of this theory is to be found in Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," a much-anthologized piece which can be found in Wilson's book The Triple Thinkers (New York, 1938), I have the essay at hand in American Harvest, eds. Allen Tate and John Peale Bishop (New York, 1942), pp. 257-90, and my quotations from the essay are from this edition.

[2]Oliver Evans, "James's Air of Evil: The Turn of the Screw," Partisan Review, XVI (February, 1949), pp. 175-87.

[3]Robert Bechtold Heilman, "The Turn of the Screw as Poem," Forms of Modern Fiction, William Van O'Connor, ed., (Minneapolis, 1948), pp. 211-26.

[4]Wilson, op. cit., p. 257.

of the governess to report what she sees, they fail to acknowledge that she too has a responsibility for the accumulation of evil which finally engulfs the children. The governess is perhaps not "a neurotic case of sex repression";[5] neither, however, is she a competent governess. Above all, she is not a meaningless abstraction. She has an operating identity of her own in the dramatic problem, and it must not be eliminated.

Mr. Philip Rahv says in his introduction to this story that "so far as intention goes, we should keep in mind that in James we are always justified in assuming the maximum; and the trouble with the governess theory is that it reduces the intention to a minimum."[6] Mr. Rahv is entirely right, and the point that this chapter wishes to make is that Evans and Heilman are themselves guilty of oversimplification. Their explanations of the story see the governess finally as an ideal good in conflict with the absolute evil of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. I propose to prove that the governess is nothing of the sort; that James intended no conflict so specific and so easy; that, though she has the authority to report, the governess has not the authority to interpret; and that maximum of intention involves something like presenting the vision of real and wholly evil ghosts to a young girl who, because of the limitations of her personality, biography and artificial situation, is incapable of dealing decisively with the spirits.

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[5] Loc. cit.

[6] Philip Rahv, ed., The Great Short Novels of Henry James, (New York, 1944), pp. 624-5.

Disregarding Wilson's notion that the ghosts are unreal, we can, nevertheless, retain functional points from his essay, the principal one being that the governess, holding the dead boy in her arms at the story's conclusion, must share the responsibility for his death. The denial of what she is told by her imagination, which is active from the opening of the story with a precise clarity and penetration, has accelerated the concentration of evil which results in the tragedy.

The evidence for the point I wish to make comes from James's repeated use of a device which, so far as I have been able to discover, has not been commented on in other critical studies. Though the text of this story in the Macmillan edition of James's works runs to a mere 161 pages, we notice with considerable surprise that there are explicit references to letters and/or letter writing on more than forty of them. Such repetition is never accidental in so conscious an artist as James; indeed, we had better assume maximum of intention here also. Letters have plot and structural importances in The Turn of the Screw which are immediately obvious. But they also have, I am convinced, an additional and more subtle importance in establishing the character of the governess. We know from the preface that James was sensitive to the charge that the character of the governess had not been sufficiently developed; and part of his response to the persons who made that criticism hints that their reading of the story may have been defective. James writes that, on hearing the criticism, "One's artistic, one's ironic heart shook for the instant almost to breaking....It was 'de ja tres-joli'...please believe, the general proposition our young

woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities -- by which I don't mean, of course, her explanation of them, a different matter."[7] Mr. Wilson quotes this part of the preface for justification of his "hallucination" theory, which is certainly extravagant. But I don't see how it is possible to deny James's implication here that there is more to the character of the governess than what meets the eye. I want to show that James was, as usual, extraordinarily devious in inserting the dimensions of her character; that her preoccupation from the story's beginning with letters and the writing of letters firmly outlines the inadequacies which implement her failure.

ii

It is by means of a letter, interestingly enough, that we get to hear the governess's story in the first place. In order that Douglas, having just heard about a ghost that appeared to a child, can tell us about ghostly apparitions to two children, the manuscript in the governess's handwriting must be sent for. Douglas writes to his man; the packet is delivered three days later. This first use of the device in the frame of the story seems of no particular significance to me, but the next reference to letter writing is another matter. Relating the circumstances under which the young lady was employed as governess of the two children, Douglas tells us that she was forbidden

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[7]James, The Novels and Stories, XVII, p. xxi.

by their uncle-guardian to write to him--"...she should never trouble him--but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything."[8] The prohibition here is, of course, a matter of plot if of nothing else, for the isolation which results from the uncle's provision makes possible the greatest amplitude for a ghost story. But there is something else to be noticed. The young girl has been strongly affected by the charm of her employer. "He was handsome and bold and pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind."[9] She succumbed, Douglas tells us, to the "seduction exercised by this splendid young man."[10] The two basic themes of The Turn of the Screw are joined here: attraction and denial. To yield to that which attracts is to accept that which restricts. Throughout the story the governess is repeatedly forced to sacrifice the demands of her perception to the vagaries of emotional desire.

The initial use of the letter device in the story proper is an important case in point, and it has the added -- and extremely forceful -- function of introducing the boy Miles into the story. On the evening of her first day at Bly the governess receives a letter from the headmaster of Miles's school. "I broke the seal with a great effort," James has the governess write.[11] The headmaster's letter contains distressing news; Miles has been dismissed from his school; he may not

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[8] Ibid., p. 137.

[9] Ibid., p. 134.

[10] Ibid., p. 136.

[11] Ibid., p. 144.

return to it after his holidays. The governess confers with Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, about the letter the following morning. Faced with the letter, Mrs. Grose reveals that she is illiterate; and, to the demands of the governess to know whether or not Miles is bad, she can only insist that the governess must see him first. At Bly he has occasionally been mischievous but not to the extent -- the governess supplies the words -- "to contaminate" or "to corrupt."[12] These words are important because they establish that the governess has had from the moment of receiving the letter an unusual intuitive sense of the probable nature of Miles's offense. Speaking of the content of the letter from the school, she says, "They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him. That can have only one meaning....That he's an injury to the others.... To his poor little innocent mates!"[13]

Seeing Miles the following day, however, the governess is completely captivated; and the immoderateness of the language she uses in describing him is surely meant to alarm us.

> ...I was a little late on the scene, and I felt, as he stood wistfully looking out for me before the door of the inn at which the coach had put him down, that I had seen him, on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had from the first moment, seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it: everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child -- his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love. It would have

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[12]Ibid., p. 147.

[13]Ibid., p. 145.

> been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence, and by the time I had got back to Bly with him I remained merely bewildered -- so far, that is, as I was not outraged -- by the sense of the horrible letter locked up in my room, in a drawer. As soon as I could compass a private word with Mrs. Grose I declared to her that it was grotesque.
>
> She promptly understood me. "You mean the cruel charge --?"
>
> "It doesn't live an instant. My dear woman, look at him!"
>
> She smiled at my pretension to have discovered his charm. "I assure you, Miss, I do nothing else! What will you say, then?" she immediately added.
>
> "In answer to the letter?" I had made up my mind. "Nothing."
>
> "And to his uncle?"
>
> I was incisive. "Nothing."
>
> "And to the boy himself?"
>
> I was wonderful. "Nothing."[14]

I have quoted from the text at some length here because it is precisely in these decisions that the governess's dereliction of duty begins. Yielding to the physical beauty of the child, she has renounced the perceptive validity of her imagination. Her refusal to answer the letter is a denial of what a moment's imaginative illumination had told her about the seriousness, if not the precise identification, of Miles's behavior at school. The letter which was so difficult to open, is now locked up in her room in a drawer and will not be answered. The governess's delinquency here is nothing less than acquiescence in evil; it prepares for -- even, I should prefer to say, invites -- the visit of a more active malice. Before the chapter ends Peter Quint has made his first appearance to the young woman.

James's next use of the letter device is highly interesting

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[14] Ibid., pp. 150-51

because, although it has nothing whatever to do with the story of the children, it has a relevance exclusive to the character of the governess. Now completely under the spell of Miles, convinced that "he was only too fine and fair for the horrid, unclean school-world,"[15] the governess acknowledges her lapse. "I gave myself up to it; it was an antidote to any pain, and I had more pains than one." But it is her next sentence which startles. "I was in receipt in these days of disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well." And then: "But with my children, what things in the world mattered? That was the question I used to put to my scrappy retirements. I was dazzled by their loveliness."[16]

The circumference of the governess's neglect has now expanded with her denial of an obligation to the world outside Bly as well as to the world within. She is beguiled from morality and rendered incapable of the act of will which the dual exigencies require. The effect is sudden: Peter Quint reappears, this time with a bold aggressiveness which shocks the governess into a terrifying awareness of what he wants and of what, therefore, is required of her. It was "not for me that he had come there. He had come for someone else," she tells us, this flash of knowledge producing in her "a sudden vibration of duty and courage."[17] She runs out on the terrace to the very spot where he must have been standing, but he is gone now. She then goes directly to the

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[15] Ibid., p. 159.

[16] Ibid., p. 160.

[17] Ibid., p. 162.

window through which he had been visible and sees Mrs. Grose just coming into the inside room. What happens then has often been considered one of the most puzzling occurrences of the book.

> She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received. She turned white, and this made me ask myself if I had blanched as much. She started, in short, and retreated on just my lines, and I knew she had passed out and come round to me and that I should presently meet her. I remained where I was, and while I waited I thought of more things than one. But there's only one I take space to mention. I wondered why she should be scared.[18]

Mrs. Grose has been too much ignored by other critics of James's story; she seems not to have fitted very well into any of the interpretations I have mentioned and was consequently dropped. But she will fit very well into a theory which sees the governess as being at fault in the management and control of the children, and that fitness is established by means of the letter-writing device. For, as we have learned already, Mrs. Grose is illiterate; she is unable to write; she does not, in other words, have the ability to make the act of will which is necessary to dispel the evil. But we can go a step further and change the tense of our verb. Neither, therefore, has she had such ability in the past. Mrs. Grose tells the governess later that when she was convinced at an earlier time of the evil influence of Quint on Miles, she remained silent; she did not act; as the governess is now doing, she permitted the evil. If Mrs. Grose has been "scared" at seeing the governess through the window at which Peter Quint had just

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[18] Ibid., p. 163.

appeared, I see no reason for our not being able to hold, at least tentatively, that Mrs. Grose has also seen ghosts. We remember that she had seemed to the governess positively on her guard against showing how relieved she was to have another person at Bly. She betrays through a slip of her tongue very early in the story -- before the governess even knows of the previous existence of Peter Quint -- that he is an ever-present reality to her, and the manner in which she questions the governess about the description of the ghost indicates an imperfectly disguised eagerness to establish his identity. But it is wrong to read Mrs. Grose's part in the conflict as synonymous with that of the governess. They are not alike, and their relation to the spirits is not the same. The difference between them is something that James's use of the letter-writing device will verify.

It has something to do with a conviction which the governess announces to Mrs. Grose after Quint's second appearance. The reader has been told nothing as yet about the intimacy between Quint and Miles, but the same uncanny intuition which the governess has previously displayed operates again.

> "He was looking for little Miles." A portentous clearness now possessed me. "That's whom he was looking for."
> "But how do you know?"
> "I know, I know, I know!" My exaltation grew. "And you know, my dear!"
> She didn't deny this, but I required, I felt, not even so much telling as that.[19]

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[19] Ibid., p. 170.

The superiority of the governess in the situation at Bly is precisely the superiority of her perceptiveness. Mrs. Grose is an inadequate protagonist in the drama, although she knows what is at stake and recognizes the antagonists. The governess is an adequate protagonist whose single weakness--that of indulging her delight in the beauty of the children to the neglect of writing to their uncle about the genuine crisis of Miles's expulsion (and, we must not forget, pleasing the very charming uncle by not writing) has given the forces of evil their initial advantage. Mrs. Grose's full revelations about the nature of the relationship between Quint and Miles, about her failure to oppose it, and about the violence of Quint's death, sharply accentuate the horror we are asked to behold, and make the first appearance of Miss Jessel at this point in the story seem the inevitable outcome of the unwillingness to deal resolutely with so much destructive evil.

There is an interesting use of metaphor in a later reference to the letter of Miles's dismissal. The governess is questioning Mrs. Grose about the latter's statement that Miles had been occasionally bad at Bly; the governess wants to know if this badness related to his awareness of the relationship between Quint and Miss Jessel. "But I shall get it out of you yet," she says to Mrs. Grose. "There was something in the boy that suggested to you...that he covered and concealed their relation." And almost immediately afterward: "I don't wonder you looked queer...when I mentioned to you the letter from his school."[20] The exact function of James's device is implicit here.

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[20] Ibid., pp. 188-9.

Letters in the story are regularly covered and concealed; they are difficult to open; they are put aside; the writing of letters is resisted. To acknowledge the full import of the letters and to respond to them would be salutary; the refusal to deal properly with them or to write new ones is an immoral indolence which gives impetus to the hostile forces represented by Quint and Miss Jessel.

The matter of whether or not actual contact exists between the children and the ghosts seems to have been settled with sufficient conclusiveness by the essays of Heilman and Evans. I think that we must be prepared to accept the governess's vigorous assertion that contact does exist. And so persuaded is she of the danger of this communication that, after the incident of discovering Miles on the lawn in the middle of the night looking up toward the tower in which Quint had first appeared, she accuses the children to Mrs. Grose of policy and fraud. "They are not mine -- they're not yours," she tells the housekeeper. "They're his and they're hers." If this contact is not broken, the children may be destroyed.

> "...They [the spirits] don't know, as yet, quite how -- but they're trying hard. They're seen only across, as it were, and beyond....but there's a deep design, on either side, to shorten the distance and overcome the obstacle; and the success of the tempters is only a question of time...."[21]

Mrs. Grose's suggestion of the way to prevent this catastrophe

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[21] Ibid., p. 212.

is the one we have been waiting for. Their uncle must be written to and he must take the children away. The governess reacts in quick opposition. Is she to write to him that "his house is poisoned and his little nephew and niece mad?....That's charming news to be sent him by a governess whose prime undertaking was to give him no worry."[22] Mrs. Grose is adamant. He ought to be here -- he ought to help.[23] The paragraph which follows is more pertinent to the contentions of this chapter than any other which we have looked at so far.

> I quickly rose, and I think I must have shown her a queerer face than ever yet. "You see me asking him for a visit?" No, with her eyes on my face she evidently couldn't. Instead of it even -- as a woman reads another -- she could see what I myself saw: his derision, his amusement, his contempt for the break-down of my resignation at being left alone and for the fine machinery I had set in motion to attract his attention to my slighted charms. She didn't know -- no one knew -- how proud I was to serve him and to stick to our terms; yet she none the less took the measure, I think, of the warning I now gave her. "If you should so lose your head as to appeal to him for me —"
>
> She was really frightened. "Yes, Miss?"
>
> "I would leave, on the spot, both him and you."[24]

There follows a month of strange bewilderment and indecision during which the spirits fail to appear to the governess, though she is apprehensive that they are regularly visible to the children. She is convinced, furthermore, that the children are fully aware of her predicament: that speaking to them of the ghostly visitations was "an effort beyond [her] strength."[25] She recognizes a "small, ironic consciousness"[26] on the part of her pupils; certain subjects of

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[22] Ibid., p. 212.

[23] Loc. cit.

[24] Loc. cit.

[25] Ibid., p. 213.

[26] Loc. cit.

discussion and study -- like the return of the dead in general -- become forbidden ground by a sort of tacit arrangement. There is an unexpressed sensibility in the children to the entire problem, but, worse, for the governess, there are moments when she is ready to cry out to her charges, "They're here, they're here, you little wretches, and you can't deny it now."[27] Masterfully, at the end of the chapter which details the experience of this month, Henry James re-employs the device of the letters. We learn that the children, as part of their studies, have been writing letters to their uncle. But these are letters without purpose or accomplishment; these are, again, hidden and suppressed letters. "...I let my charges understand," writes the governess, "that their own letters were but charming literary exercises. They were too beautiful to be posted; I kept them myself; I have them all to this hour."[28] It is unnecessary to comment on the symbolic meaningfulness here. Once again, letters might have broken the evil; it is surely conceivable that the messages might have awakened in the uncle a greater interest in the children, a desire, perhaps, to visit them. But the letters to the governess were too beautiful to be posted. They are covered and concealed; the evil goes on.

But there must be a reckoning, and it cannot longer be postponed. Miles demands to know when he is going back to school; he wants "to see more life" than is possible at Bly; he wonders if his uncle knows that

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[27] Ibid., p. 216.

[28] Ibid., p. 218.

he is being kept from school. "I don't think your uncle much cares," the governess offers.[29] Miles, however, suggests that his guardian can be made to care by coming down to Bly. The development from this point is swift and sure. Miles's suggestion strikes an instant fear in the governess, and she makes the first judgment of her failure to deal with her difficulties.

> My fear was of having to deal with the intolerable question of the grounds of his dismissal from school, for that was really the question of the horrors behind. That his uncle should arrive to treat with me of these things was a solution that, strictly speaking, I ought now to have desired to bring on; but I could so little face the ugliness and the pain of it that I simply procrastinated and lived from hand to mouth.[30]

She determines then to leave Bly -- to depart without announcement when Mrs. Grose and the children are at church. She enters the house, going straight to the schoolroom where she will pick up several of her belongings. There, to her astonishment, she sees Miss Jessel again. The former governess is seated at a table, and she is writing a letter. She is doing, in other words, what the present governess has been unwilling to do. This is the ultimate example of the letter hidden or concealed -- a letter written by a spirit -- and, once again, the effect is to intensify the evil. For the governess decides now to remain at Bly; the vision of the "terrible, miserable woman" has given her a sense that she must stay. Had she left, the uncle most certainly would have been sent for, and the safety of Miles and Flora assured.

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[29] Ibid., p. 224.

[30] Ibid., p. 225.

In remaining, the governess merely pushes on to an inexorable catastrophe a conflict which she has largely precipitated.

Next day, however, she makes a feeble resolution to write. She will send "for their uncle." She will show him the letter from Miles's school. She "ought to have done so on the instant."[31] She will tell him that Miles was made wicked by Quint and Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose protests: the children shall not suffer; the uncle didn't really know Quint and Miss Jessel; she (Mrs. Grose) is to blame.

> I was silent awhile; we looked at each other. "Then what am I to tell him?"
>
> "You needn't tell him anything. I'll tell him."
>
> I measured this. "Do you mean you'll write --?" Remembering she couldn't, I caught myself up. "How do you communicate?"
>
> "I tell the bailiff. He writes."
>
> "And should you like him to write our story?"
>
> My question had a sarcastic force that I had not fully intended, and it made her, after a moment, inconsequently break down. The tears were again in her eyes. "Ah, Miss, you write!"
>
> "Well--tonight," I at last answered; and on this we separated.[32]

The reluctance of the governess is, of course, apparent, though she does go so far in the evening "as to make a beginning." After staring for a long time at a blank sheet of paper, she takes a candle and pays a visit to Miles's room. He urges his return to school more emphatically now, and the governess reveals that she has begun a letter to his uncle. "Well, then, finish it!" Miles tells

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[31] Ibid., p. 231.

[32] Ibid., p. 232.

her, but now she has the courage to ask for confirmation of her fears about the nature of the offense which caused his dismissal from school. She appeals to him in hysteria to allow her to help him. The answer is "an extraordinary blast and chill," a great shake of the room, and a loud high shriek from the boy, "a note either of jubilation or of terror." She sees then that the candle is out. "It was I who blew it, dear!" said Miles.[33]

To Mrs. Grose's inquiry the next afternoon, the governess answers that she has written her letter to the uncle. "But I didn't add" — the governess tells the reader -- "that my letter sealed and directed, was still in my pocket."[34] There it remains concealed until Flora is suddenly missed. Lulled into forgetfulness by Miles's beautiful piano playing the governess has neglectfully assumed the girl to be with Mrs. Grose. When it is discovered that she is not, a searching party is drawn up. Flora's absence motivates another decision. "I quickly...felt for my letter, drew it forth, held it up, and then, freeing myself, went and laid it on the great hall table. 'Luke will take it,' I said as I came back."[35] I call attention to the nearly-ritualistic detail here, to the fact that James makes so much of the governess' actions. She "felt for [the] letter," she "drew it forth," she "held it up;"[36] these are the gestures of purposeful separation; these are the farewell to vacillation and ambiguity.

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[33] Ibid., p. 238.

[34] Ibid., p. 239.

[35] Ibid., p. 242

[36] Loc. cit.

Freeing herself -- from the dread fascination of a beauty which has placed her in an intolerable situation — she places the missive on the table.

But it does not reach its destination; her action is too late. After the violent, impassioned scene with Flora, in which the governess accuses her of being fully aware of the presence of Miss Jessel and in which Mrs. Grose defends the little girl and carries her off to the house, we learn that Miles has stolen the letter. Concealment has been final in this case; the letter has been burnt. The governess's act of will has been to no advantage. Flora -- we have Mrs. Grose's word for it now -- is totally depraved, although the old lady consents to take her off at once to London. It remains only for Quint to claim his victim, which, of course, he does at the precisely appropriate moment -- the moment when Miles begins the full confession of his deeds at school, of the things he said to the other pupils he liked, the things that were too bad "to write home."[37] "The coward horror" appears for the last time at the window; Miles gives full proof that he has always been aware of the nearness of the ghost by naming him (the governess and Miles had never discussed either of the spirits, yet he speaks both their names in these final moments). There is a brief minute in which the governess somewhat hysterically anticipates victory over Quint, but the greatest bitterness of all overtakes her.

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[37] Ibid., p. 275.

> ..With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him -- it may be imagined with what a passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.[38]

iii

By way of conclusion, I want to come back to the point which Mr. Rahv makes in his introduction to The Turn of the Screw: that we must always assume maximum of intention in a James story. I risk the tediousness of reiteration to insist on the fact that James has deliberately created a governess who is emotionally inadequate in the situation. She must not be erased from the story, as it seems to me she has been in the interpretations of Heilman and Evans. If she is seen as positive good in conflict with absolute evil, this is a story of limited ingenuity; it can hardly be said to have what James himself claimed for it, namely, "the immense merit of allowing the imagination absolute freedom of hand."[39] No great skill is required to write a story about the appearance of bad ghosts to a good person. It is an old tradition which could have had little appeal for an artist of such conscious inventiveness as James. The fullest dramatic potentialities of his basic materials could best be realized by an arrangement which, while it projected the ghosts as real and wholly visible evil, would pit them against an opponent not fully able to deal effectively with

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[38] Ibid., p. 277.

[39] Ibid., p. xviii.

them. The technique of James in The Turn of the Screw is nothing less than the technique of Shakespeare in Hamlet and Macbeth. If supernatural creatures -- who admit, of course, of only one dimension -- are to be brought into the real world, they must reveal themselves to people of intense interior conflict; otherwise one is able to write only a rigid moral parable. Maximum of intention in The Turn of the Screw results from James's manipulation of the destructive evil of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel into the limited realm of experience of the governess. She is not inured to evil; she cannot categorize it; more importantly, she cannot sense that she is also capable of it. Consequently, in a slavish attachment to excitements and attractions which were totally foreign to her experience before her interview with the charming uncle, she denies her imagination, neglects her duty, and facilitates the conquest of the children.

To confirm her failings without a clumsy or blatant announcement of them, James, as I have tried to show, has used the device of the letters. These operate, as I have demonstrated, in both the plot and the structure of the novel. But they have a symbolic control as well; they demonstrate those facets of the governess's character which are the source of her failure. The letters of The Turn of the Screw are never successful in accomplishing a desired action; they are instruments of a denial which evolves from an uncritical and almost pathological attachment to physical beauty. As such, they actualize the weaknesses of the governess, they give her psychical dimension, they give James's story still another "turn of the screw."

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