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HENRY JAMES'S EXPERIMENTS IN CHARACTERIZATION,  
1882-1890

By

Judith Ellen Funston

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ABSTRACT

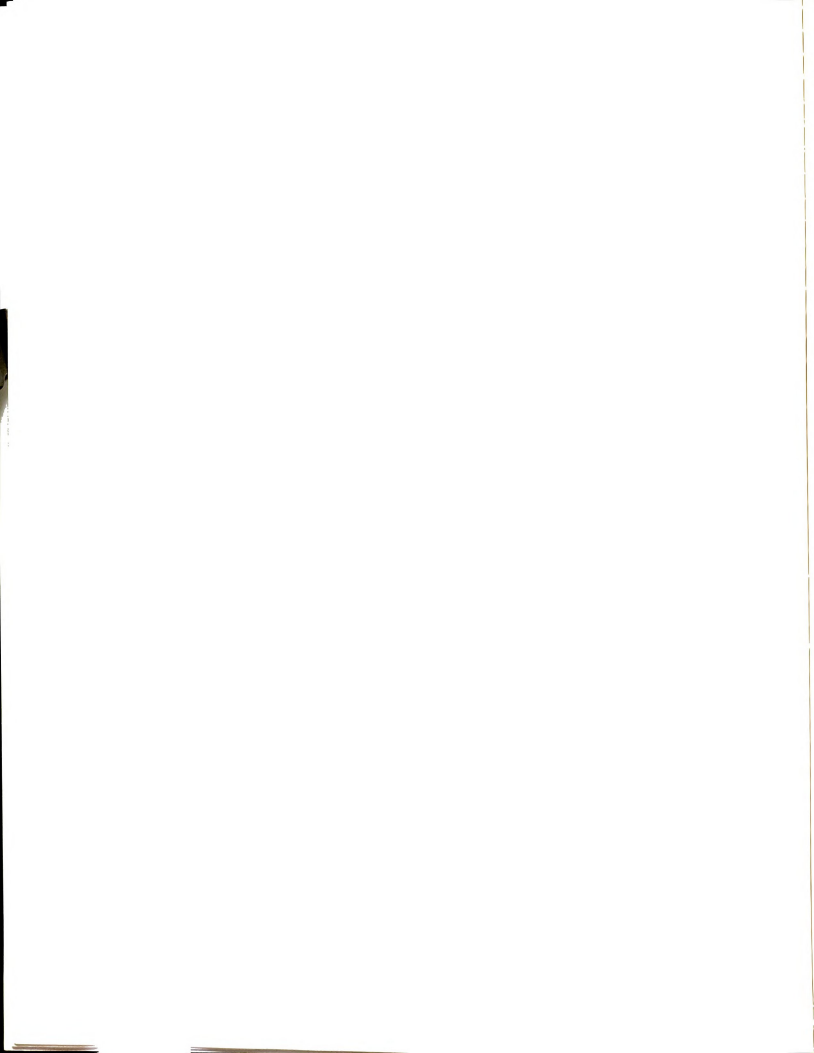
HENRY JAMES'S EXPERIMENTS IN CHARACTERIZATION,  
1882-1890

By

Judith Ellen Funston

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The novels and tales that Henry James produced between 1882 and 1890 occupy an important place in his development as a writer. From The Portrait of a Lady to The Tragic Muse, James moves from the "painterly" novel to dramatically presented fiction. His use of the center of consciousness as a means of characterization and narration marks this shift, for he saw the center as essentially dramatic. This study traces chronologically James's growing dependence on the center of consciousness and his gradual suppression of the omniscient narrator.

In The Portrait of a Lady James perfected the painterly novel. The presence of the omniscient narrator, however, reveals the limitations of the novel construed as painting. The center of consciousness becomes a strategy to circumvent narratorial intrusion and to project character dramatically--characters projected through the center mirror the manner in which actors are seen upon the stage. The tales of the decade, "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," "Pandora," "A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master," are James's purest experiments with the center of consciousness where the narrator is successfully suppressed. In contrast, the novels of the period, The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, and The Tragic Muse, rely to



varying degrees on the traditional narrator, although they too display James's growing confidence with the center of consciousness.

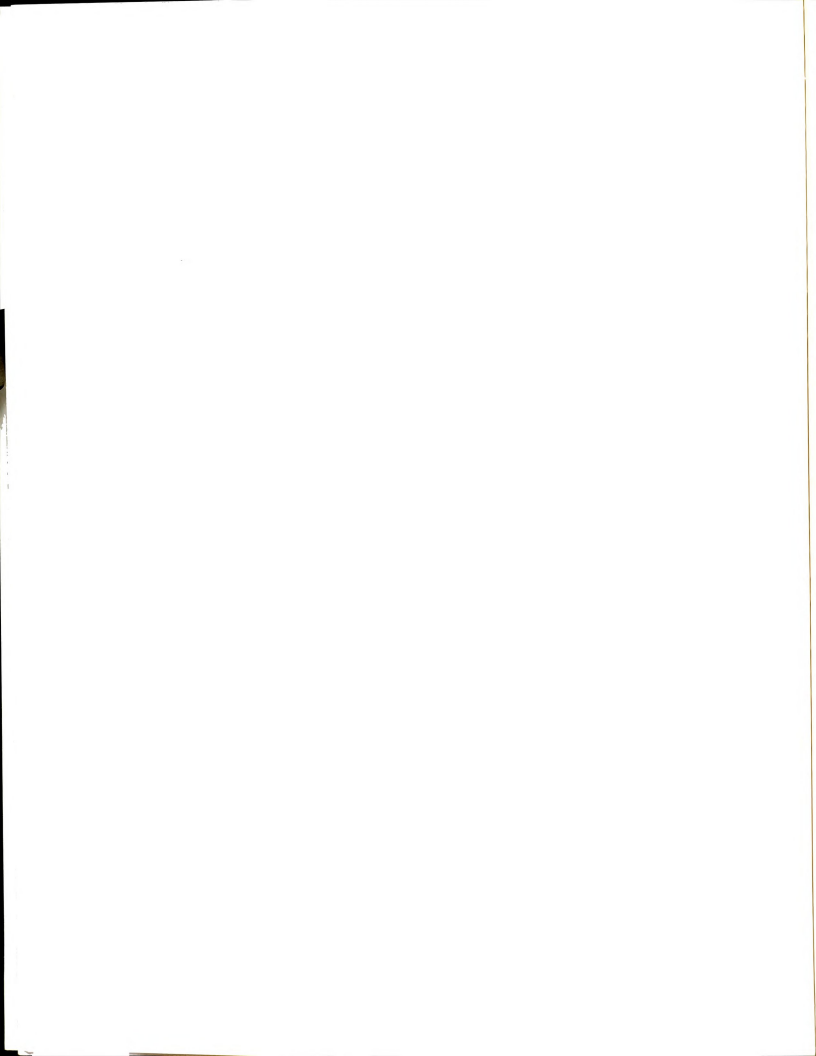
The fiction of the eighties is important: it provides a bridge between the early novels and the later masterpieces which depend on the center of consciousness as narrative method. James's novels and tales of the years 1882 to 1890, however, are valuable as a distinctive body of work: they represent a provocative synthesis of painting and drama, tradition and innovation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

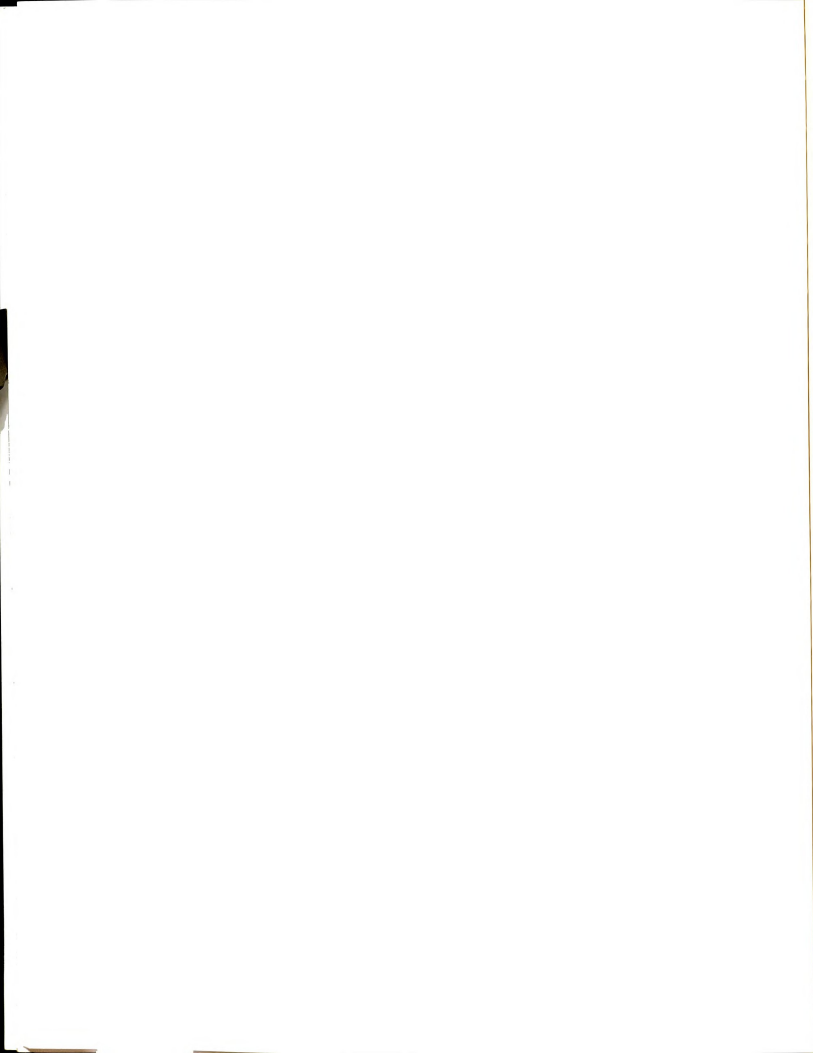
I would like to thank the members of my guidance committee-- Victor Howard, Linda Wagner, Cathy Davidson, Richard Benvenuto, and William Johnsen--for their generous assistance. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Howard, my thesis director, for his sound advice; to Dr. Wagner, for her excellent editorial suggestions; and to Dr. Davidson, for her unstinting encouragement. To the Graduate Council of the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State, I owe special thanks for the 1980-81 Fellowship which enabled me to devote myself entirely to this study. And finally, with gratitude I acknowledge the constant support and understanding of my husband, Brian.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

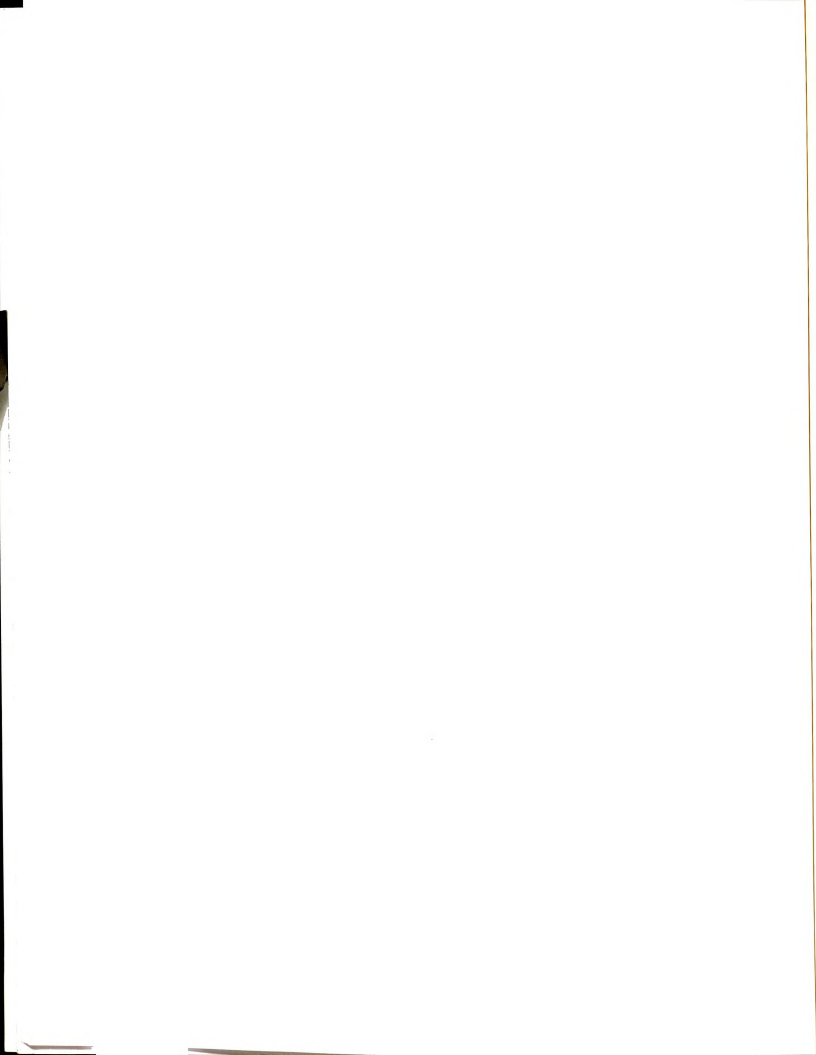
	Page
Introduction . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I.    The Impulse to Experiment . . . . .	6
II.   Painters and Portraits . . . . .	37
III.  The Dramatic Side of Human Situations . . . . .	70
IV.   A Most Salient and Peculiar Tale . . . . .	106
V.    The Penetrating Imagination . . . . .	137
VI.   Direct Impressions of Life . . . . .	169
VII.  One Must Go One's Way . . . . .	202
Conclusion . . . . .	240
Bibliography . . . . .	251



## INTRODUCTION

The decade of the eighties marks a period of change in Henry James's life. Many of the people closest to him--his mother, his father, George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, and Ivan Turgenev--die during these years. Moreover, James is very much aware of having reached the midpoint of his own life. In a November 25, 1881 notebook entry, the first in an "unspotted blank-book," he takes stock of himself: "I am 37 years old, I have made my choice, and God knows that I have now no time to waste."<sup>1</sup> The choice to which James refers is his discovery that the old world is his "need" and his "life." Few ties, physical and emotional, bind him to his native land; he impatiently notes that "I feel as if my time were terribly wasted [in America]."<sup>2</sup>

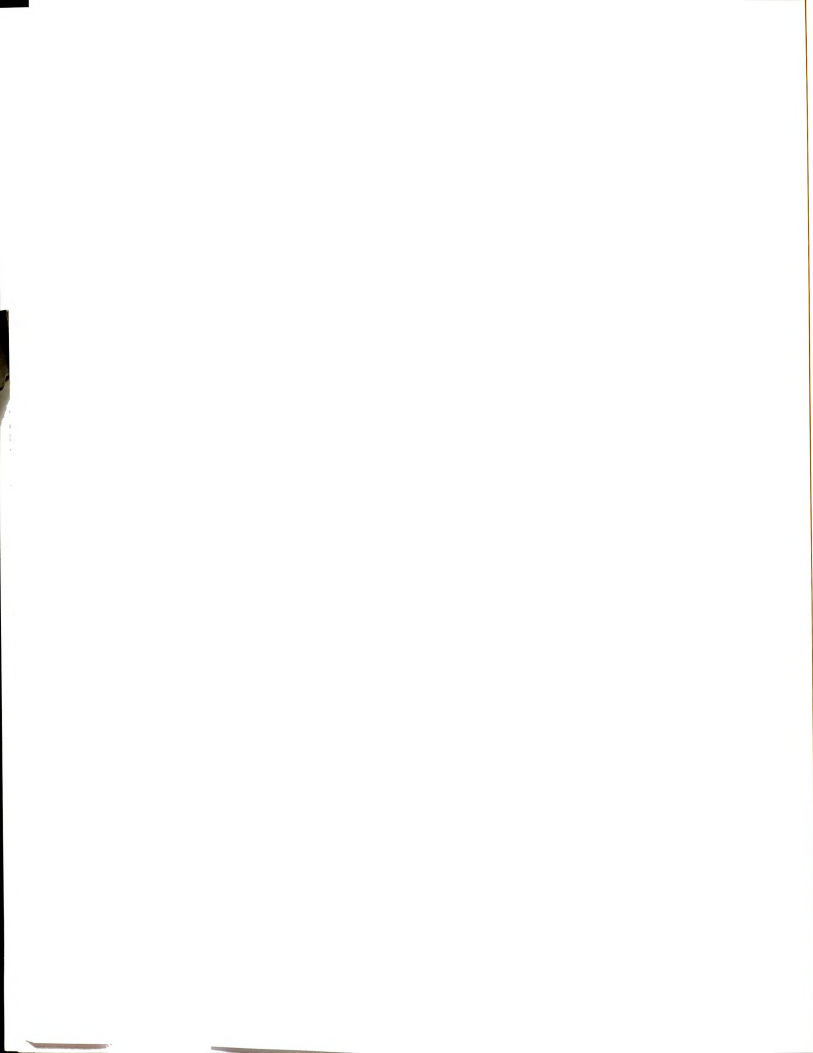
James's sense of change, his search for new sources, and his need for new roots pervade the fiction James produces during this decade. With The Portrait of a Lady, published in 1882, James enjoyed a considerable amount of fame and success. Nevertheless, James abandons the highly popular International Theme and the American Girl to test new material. James turns to social criticism, first in The Bostonians--where he pokes fun at the American penchant for reform--and then in The Princess Casamassima--where he focuses on social unrest and the despair of the lower classes. Both novels, in which James attempted to appeal to public taste, were received with apathetic silence. The failure of the novels, and the subsequent decline in his popularity--James complains to Howells that the two novels reduced the



demand for his work to zero<sup>3</sup>--prompts James to re-evaluate his relationship to his audience. Feeling forced to choose between popularity and artistic integrity, James deliberately pursues his own talent. "One must go one's way," James declares to his brother William on July 23, 1890, "and know what one's about and have a general plan and a private religion."<sup>4</sup> James wrote these words upon completing The Tragic Muse, a novel which traces the careers of two artists, Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth, who must choose between their art and the demands of the world.

The completion of The Tragic Muse marks a turning point for James: he decides to devote his talent to writing primarily for the stage, a long-nurtured ambition fostered by his love of the pièce bien faite of Scribe and Sardou. As James repeatedly describes The Tragic Muse as his "last long novel,"<sup>5</sup> he suggests that this novel closes a stage in his own career. Indeed, The Tragic Muse is James's last Victorian novel; with it, James leaves behind the social themes, the expansive canvases, and the varied casts of characters that distinguish his novels up to 1890.

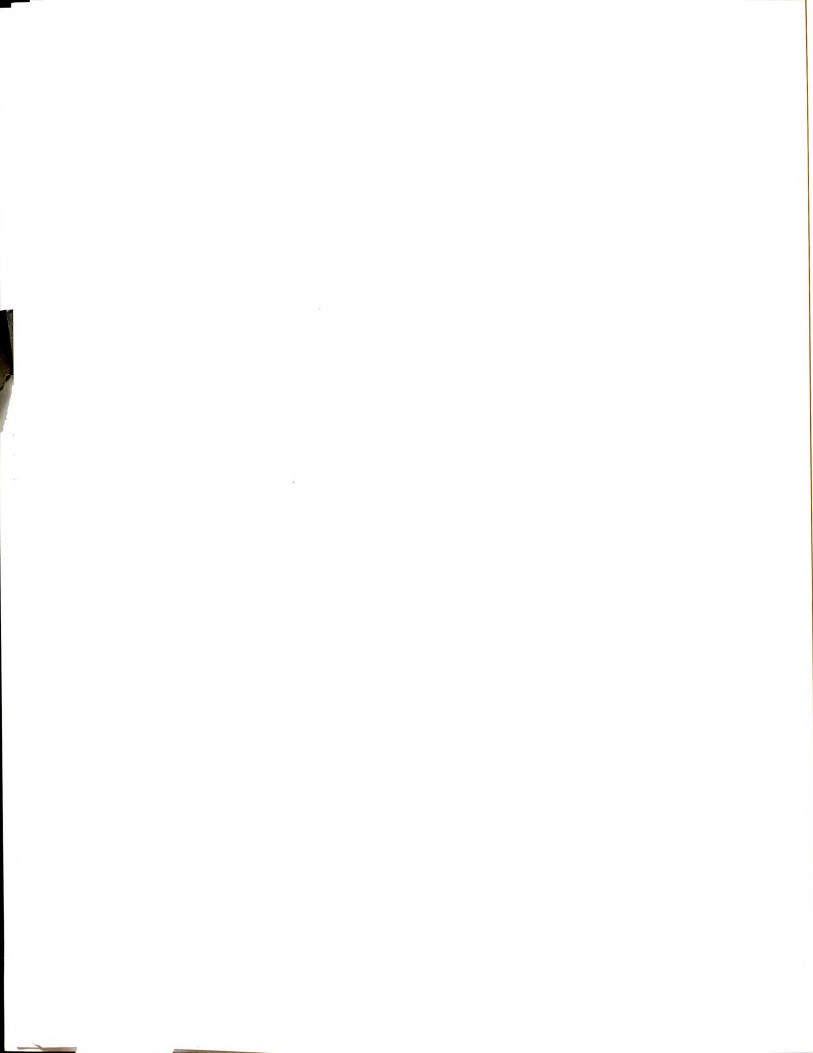
James's description of The Muse as his last long novel, with its valedictory tone, hints at his concern with form and technique. In fact, The Tragic Muse culminates a distinctive phase in James's development. From The Portrait of a Lady in 1882 to The Tragic Muse in 1890, James travels a long distance, the nature of which is indicated by the novels' titles. The early phase of his work, which The Portrait of a Lady caps, is influenced by the world of the studio. Always fascinated by visual art, James is convinced of the kinship between the novelist and the artist, a conviction which leads him to conceptualize





the novel as painting and to incorporate painterly rendering as a means of characterization. Yet the "analogy" between visual art and fiction is clearly limiting. James becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the presence of the artist--the omniscient narrator--who paints the characters' portraits. This dissatisfaction leads James to seek a new analogy and by implication a new technique for narration and characterization. James, an inveterate play-goer and drama critic, naturally turns to the world of the stage for inspiration. The dramatic analogy suggests a new direction for James's technical development, which becomes a gradual refinement of and growing dependence on the center of consciousness. James finds the center of consciousness essentially dramatic. Characters and events are projected through the center, mirroring the manner in which actors and situations are seen upon the stage; the center of consciousness presents dramatically the objective center of the work. Moreover, the center is a strategy to circumvent the intrusive narrator, thus enhancing "the air of reality" of fiction.

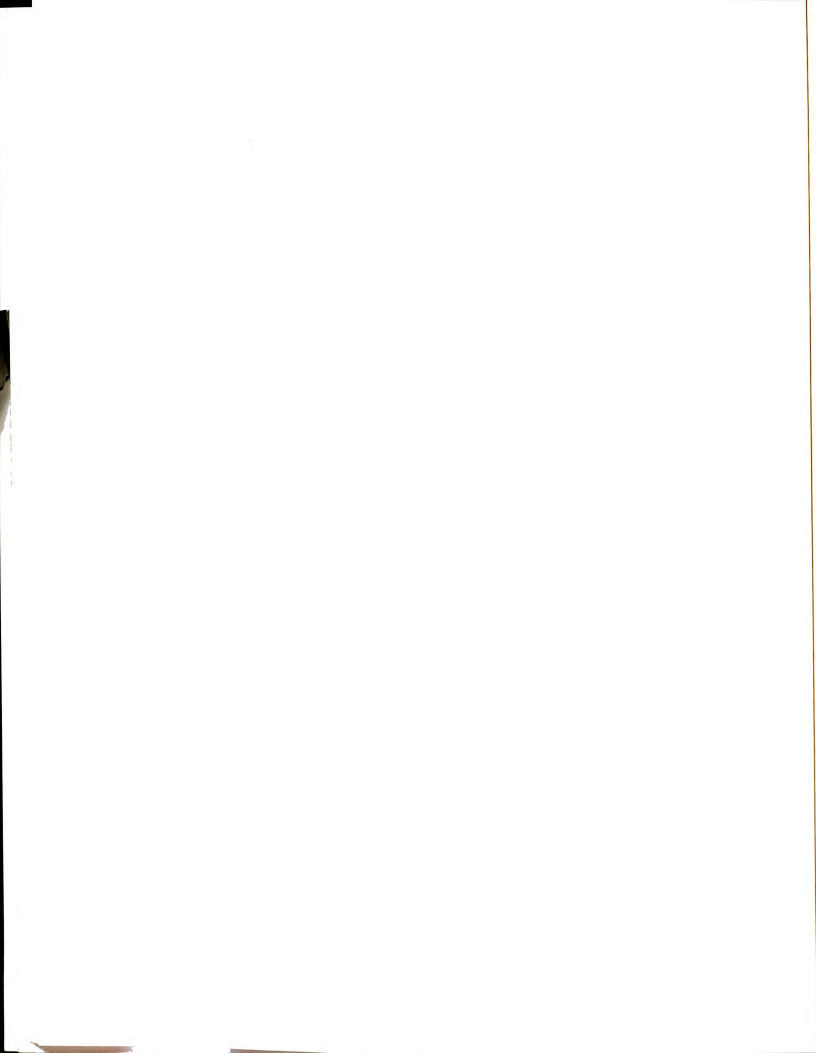
Consequently, the fiction of the eighties is distinguished by James's movement away from the concept of novel as painting and portrait and toward the gradual incorporation of dramatic principles in the novels and tales. Although the novels of this decade--The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, and The Tragic Muse--are firmly rooted in the traditions of the Victorian novel, they show increasing dependence on the center of consciousness. And many of the tales of the eighties--"The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," "Pandora," "A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master"--complement James's technique in the novels. The tales are boldly experimental, where the omniscient narrator is suppressed while the center is



responsible for narration and characterization. Together, the novels and tales of the eighties form a distinctive body of work in which James refines his use of the center as he shifts from the art of fiction to the drama of the consciousness.

It is my purpose to trace James's technical development chronologically from 1882 to 1890. Beginning with The Portrait of a Lady, moving through the novels and tales of the eighties, and concluding with The Tragic Muse, this study will focus on James's use of the center of consciousness for characterization and narration, and gradual elimination of the omniscient narrator. Concurrently, this study will show the manner in which James replaces the painterly novel with dramatically presented fiction. To these ends, I will examine James's novels and tales of this decade, as well as draw upon essays from French Poets and Novelists and Partial Portraits, letters, and the New York Edition Prefaces.

The fiction of the eighties reveals a James considerably different from the Master of the major phase. Nevertheless, the novels and tales written during the years 1882 to 1890 are important: these works are transitional, still influenced by Victorian tradition, yet clearly anticipating the use of the center in the later novels. Indeed, the fiction of the 1880's, providing a link between the early phase and the major phase, is valuable--and essential--in understanding the James canon.



## Notes

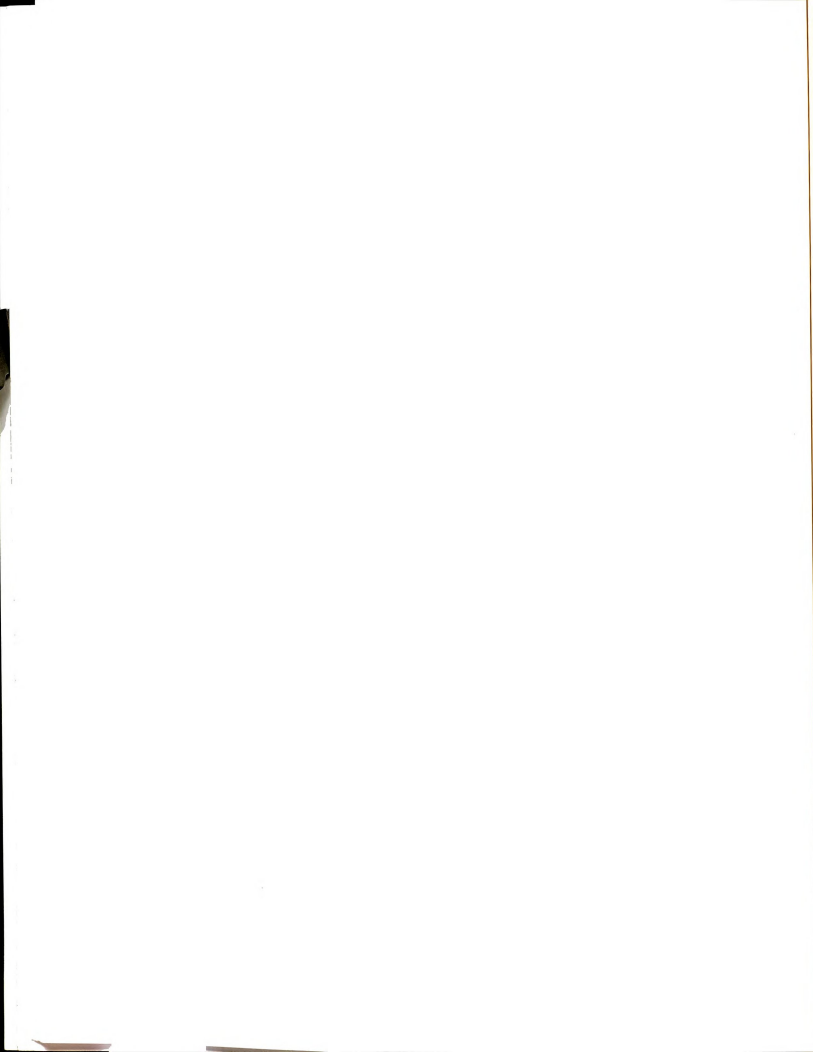
<sup>1</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds. The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> James, p. 300.

<sup>5</sup> Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), vol. I, p. 168.



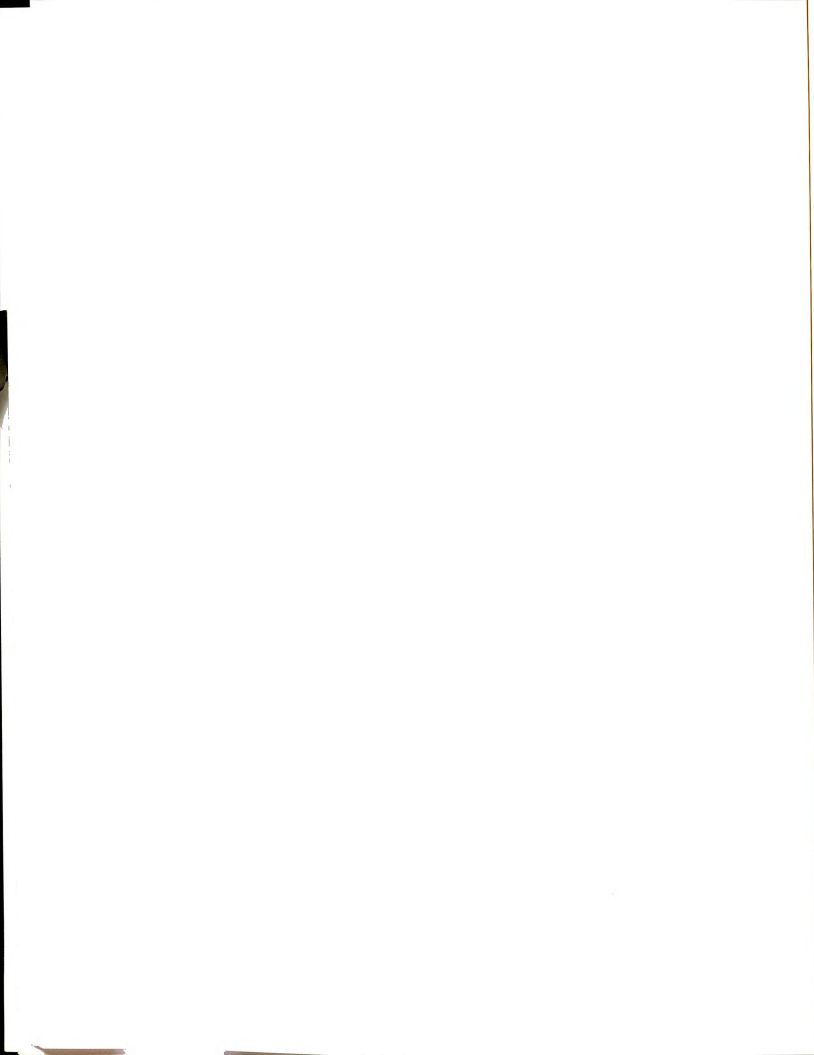
## CHAPTER I

### The Impulse to Experiment

Although Henry James devoted his life to writing, he is generally thought of as a novelist. Nevertheless, James himself is proof of his conviction that "all art is one," and although the phrase is taken from his 1890 novel The Tragic Muse,<sup>1</sup> that conviction governs his interests during the years before and after that novel. James's fascination with the visual arts--painting and the theatre--appears early in his life. In A Small Boy and Others, James recalls that the "terms" of his experience of life were "in the vivid image and the very scene," a description neatly combining painting and the stage.<sup>2</sup> James notes, too, that his earliest literary productions were "dramatic, accompanied by pictorial compositions," anticipating, perhaps, his mature technique of alternating picture and scene.<sup>3</sup>

Many of James's first publications were in the service of painting and the theatre. Beginning in 1868, James contributed numerous art reviews to British and American newspapers and journals. An inveterate play-goer, as Allan Wade describes him, James frequently reviewed plays and actors.<sup>4</sup> Yet James was not content to be just a drama critic. In an 1878 letter to his brother William, James wishes "to get at work writing for the stage"--an idea, he stresses, that he has long had.<sup>5</sup> And although the art reviews gradually tapered off during the late eighties and throughout the nineties, James continued to write for the theatre, as a critic and later as a playwright,



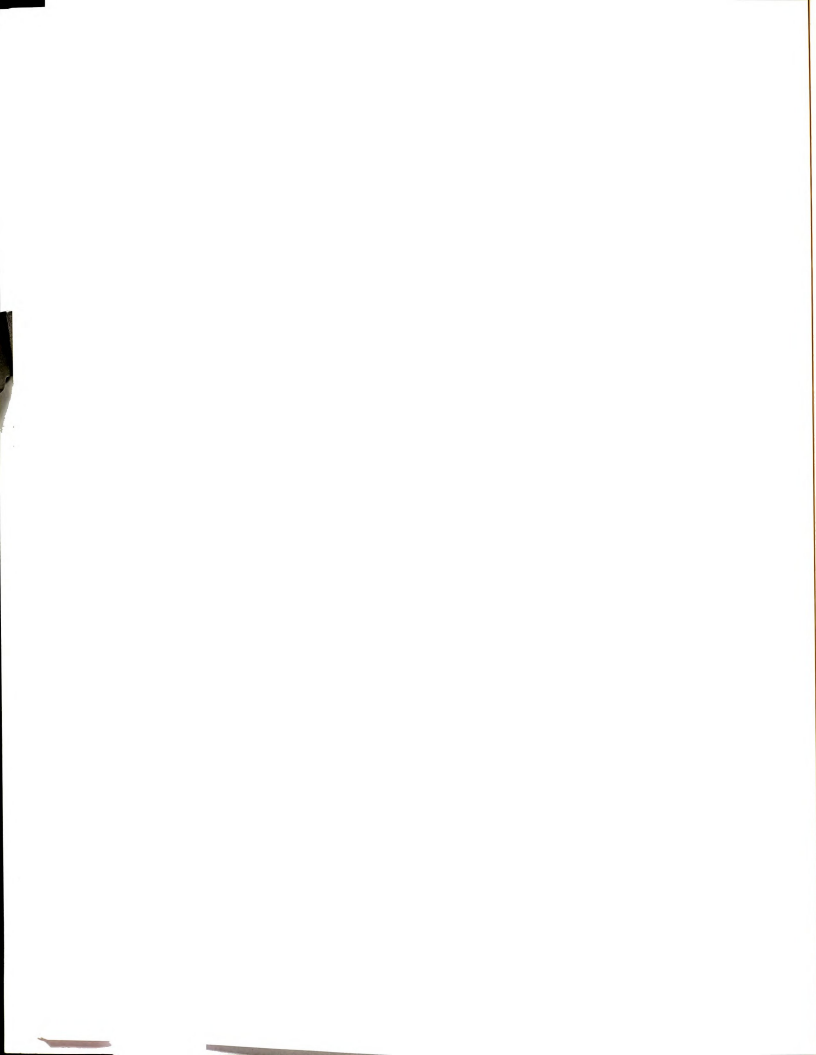


eventually realizing his ambition. And although James's real contribution to literature is his fiction, his love for painting and drama remain real influences in his work. He proves that "all art is one" in the masterful synthesis of the language of painting and drama with the technical concerns of fiction in the Prefaces.

James chose the writing of fiction as his vocation--a vocation which he describes as a "sacred calling."<sup>6</sup> Yet painting and the theatre remain real sources of inspiration because he eventually regards both arts as fruitful analogies for fiction. So fruitful were they, in fact, that James transferred their techniques and specialized vocabulary to the art of fiction. Underlining his conviction that "the arts were after all essentially one,"<sup>7</sup> James habitually describes one art in terms of another. Balzac, for example created "Dutch pictures"; "an acted play is a novel intensified."<sup>8</sup> James could "rhapsodize" in his early years about drama; reviewing Tennyson's Queen Mary in Galaxy, September, 1875, James proclaims that "the dramatic form seems to me of all literary forms the noblest," and proceeds to define the nature of that nobility:

The fine thing in a real drama, generally speaking, is that, more than any other work of literary art, it needs a masterly structure. It needs to be shaped and fashioned and laid together, and this process makes a demand on the artist's rarest gifts. He must combine and arrange, interpolate and eliminate, play the joiner with the most attentive skill; and yet at the end effectually bury his tools and his sawdust, and invest his elaborate skeleton with the smoothest and most polished integument.<sup>9</sup>

What attracted James to drama was its requirement for a fairly rigorous structure and for the virtual effacement of the "architect's" presence. Lack of structure and the intrusive narrator were the main

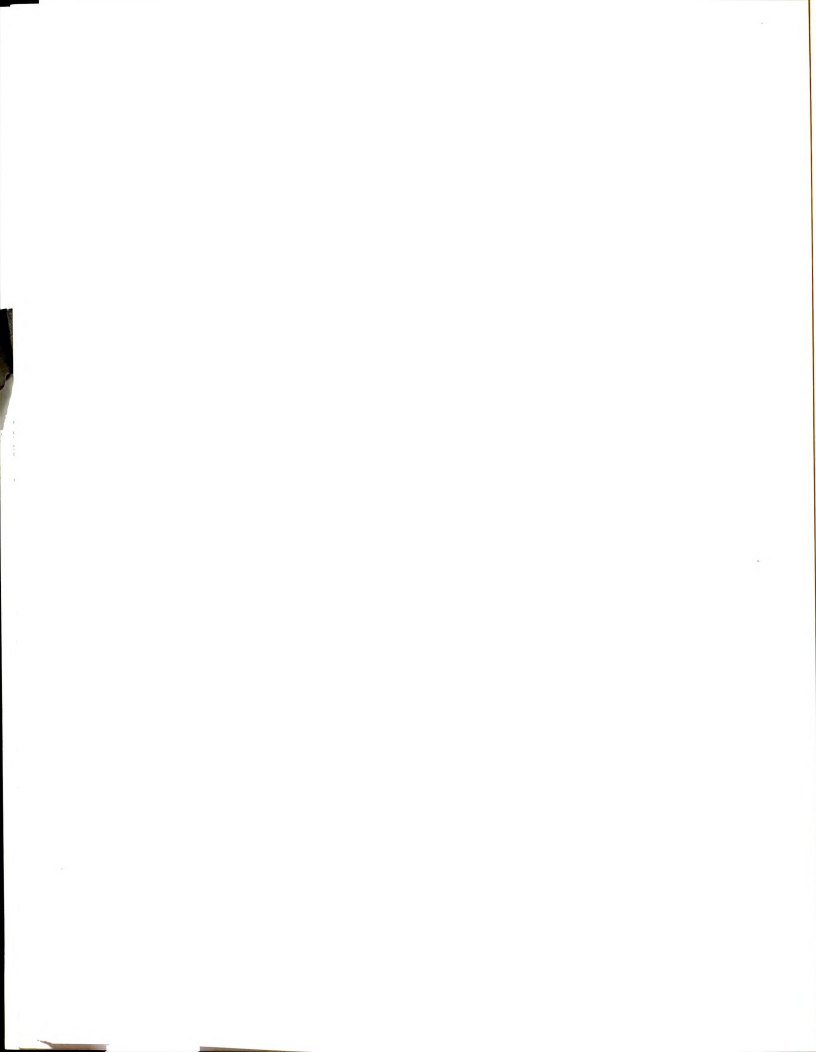


criticisms James leveled against the current state of the novel. The drama was noble precisely because of the demands it made on the dramatist's skill--artifice with the "tools" and the "sawdust" buried.

Yet when James wrote his first novels, he turned to painting, not drama, for subject and technique. His early novel, Roderick Hudson, examined the artistic temperament. The painter's craft, particularly in terms of artistic self-consciousness, detailed background, and the concept of "rendering," provided James with a technical vocabulary as well as a methodology for his fiction. In the fiction of James's early phase, from 1864 to 1882, the year The Portrait of a Lady was published, painterly technique is paramount. The novels and tales of these years, dominated by the International Theme and the American Girl, form a cohesive body of work. Influenced by Hawthorne, Sand, Balzac, and Eliot, the novels of this period employ traditional techniques.<sup>10</sup> Settings are localized, elaborate, and detailed, but are not always completely related to the narrative. And in keeping with the Victorian novelist's habit of maintaining a palpable authorial presence, James depends on an omniscient point of view and frequently intrudes upon the narrative to comment upon the action, to shift scenes, or to instruct the reader.

But the most distinguishing feature of the early work, and the one most clearly influenced by painting, is James's construction of character. The controlling idea is that of portraiture, which affects the characterization and ultimately the total pattern of the novel. James's interest in painting, and especially portraiture, can be traced back to those years when he fancied himself an artist, but as F. O. Matthiessen demonstrates, James's appreciation of portraiture

has literary origins, too. Noting the manner in which, in The House of the Seven Gables, Holgrave's daguerreotype probes the depths of Judge Pyncheon, Matthiessen sees similarities in Hawthorne's and James's use of the portrait to enhance character. Whereas Hawthorne's use of the portrait is as a "device" or "naked allegory," James elaborates the portrait into a method.<sup>11</sup> James's use of the portrait as method is most apparent in Roderick Hudson and The Portrait of a Lady. By sketching the basic attributes in the protagonist in the opening chapters, and devoting the whole of the novel to defining and highlighting the preliminary sketch, James successfully makes the novel serve a full-length portrait. Portraiture in the novel, however, radically determines the manner in which character is developed. In the painted portrait, the individual is fixed upon the canvas; the painter's task is to force that image to reveal personality. Likewise, the character in the novel of portraiture is fixed within the framework of the novel; the novelist's task is to uncover the various facets and depths of the established character. Rowland Mallet and Isabel Archer do not grow. They do become clearer in their lineaments as the reader watches them acting in consonance with the outlines presented in the opening sketch. The other characters in the novel form the background against which the "portrait" is rendered. In such a novel, the emphasis is on picture, and on character delineation. Rowland and Isabel discover truths about themselves in the course of each novel, but they do not essentially change. Oscar Cargill sees portraiture as James's predominant concern during his early phase:

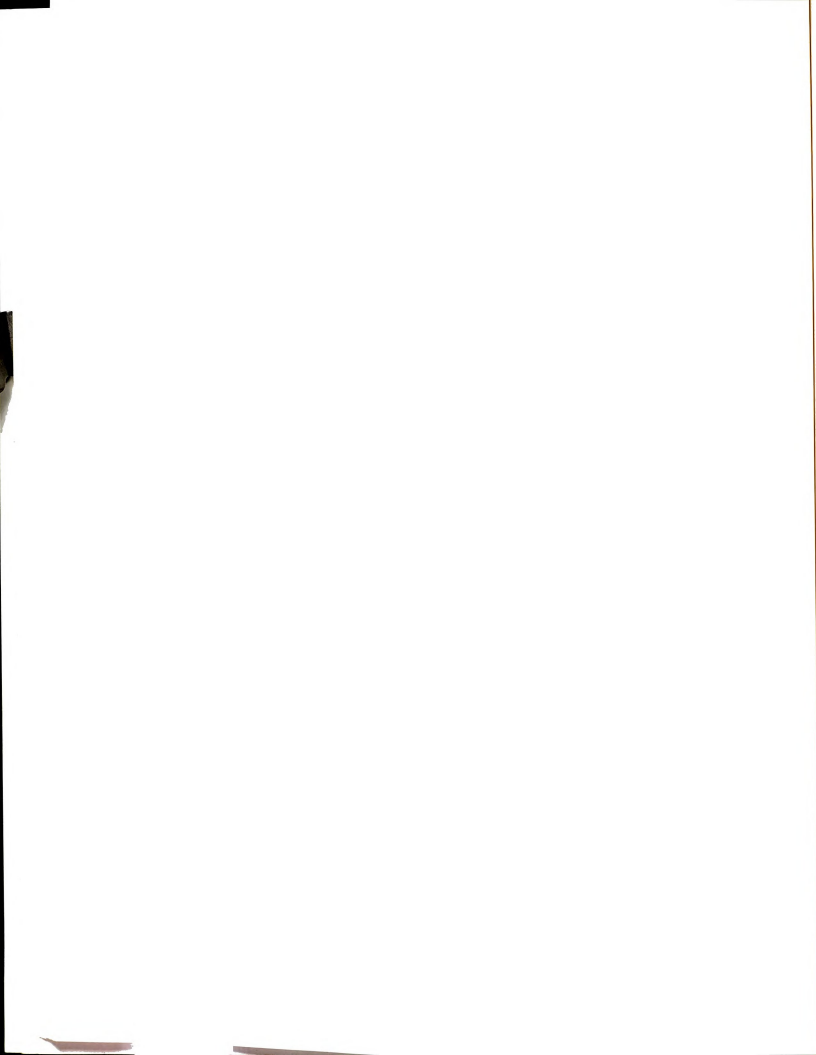


From Watch and Ward in 1871 through The Portrait of a Lady in 1881 James's work in the novel follows a single line of development: his object was portraiture, his method was analytical, and his principal achievements were the sharpening of characterization through international contrasts and the enrichment of it by concentration--by making the other characters ancillary to the central figure.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, James brings the method of portraiture to its most refined development in The Portrait of a Lady, in which the character of Isabel Archer--and James's thoroughgoing analysis of it--forms the real subject of the novel. As James notes in the Preface to The Portrait, Isabel's primary interest for both her creator and her reader lies in what she will "do"; action is interesting as a means of gradually revealing character. When the concept of portraiture, both as subject and method, dominates the novel, the novel itself is transformed by the change of focus from plot to character. And James, with roots in the world of the studio, deliberately uses the novel as portrait, thereby achieving a provocative synthesis of the aims of fiction with the methods of painting.

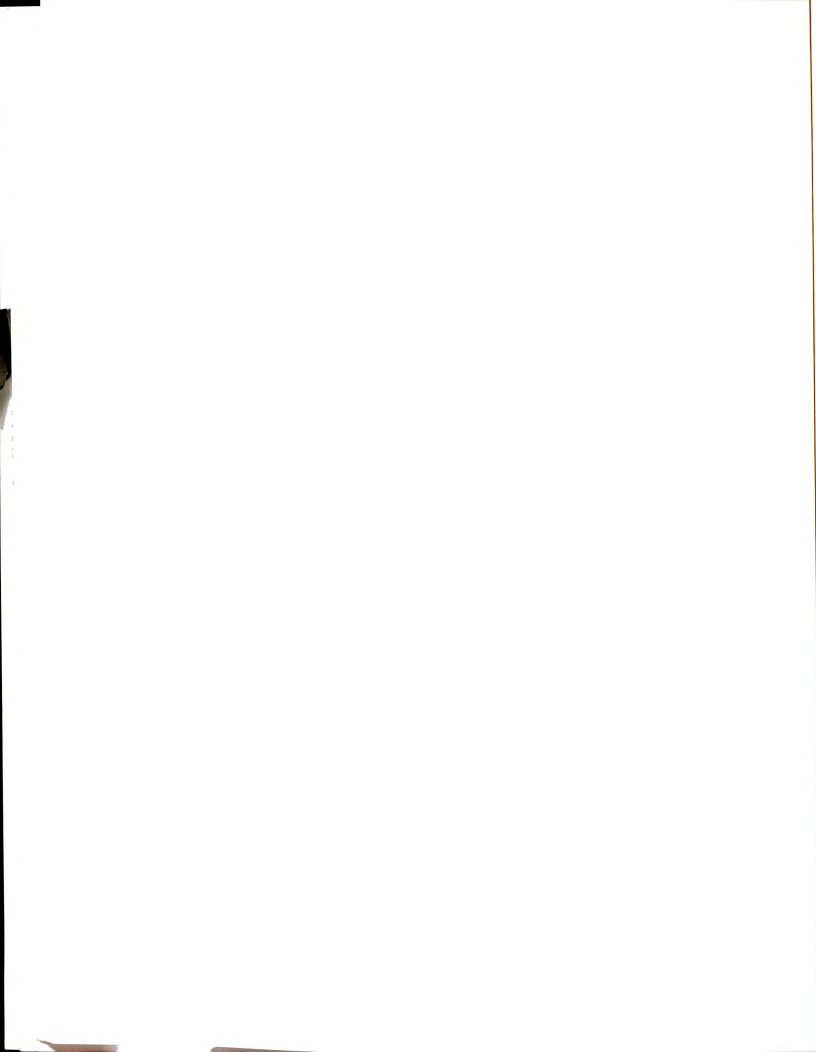
The Portrait of a Lady, with its sharpening of painterly technique, and its typically Jamesian concerns with the International Theme and the American Girl, is the brilliant culmination of James's first phase. With the publication of The Portrait, James turns to new themes and experimental techniques, for he is devoted to exploring the possibilities of fiction and his practice of it. As early as 1878 he announced his commitment to this exploration in a letter to his brother William: while conceding to William's stress on "the importance of subject" (James's letter was written in response to William's comments on The Europeans--he had pronounced the novel "thin" in subject), James





explains his failure to exploit "big situations" because, as he notes, "being 'very artistic,' I have a constant impulse to try experiments of form."<sup>13</sup> James was never content to repeat old "forms," even though the novels written during his early phase had considerable public and critical acclaim. Deliberately turning his back on the successes of the seventies, James risks his popularity in his compulsion to experiment with form and theme.

James's commitment to experiment is clearly manifest during the decade of the eighties--the years between the publication of The Portrait and his decision in 1890 to abandon the novel for the theatre. These years are a transition in James's development, and they are particularly productive ones: he wrote numerous tales ("Lady Barberina," "The Author of 'Beltraffio,'" "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master" are a few of the more notable); novellas (The Reverberator and A London Life); and three important novels (The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, and The Tragic Muse). The novels present significant departures from his early work. Although the International Theme continues to dominate the tales of the eighties, it does not inform the three novels. Instead, James turns to themes arising out of the conflict between the individual and society's demands; specifically, The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima rely upon contemporary social issues to provide the background for this conflict. Localized and concretely depicted settings and an extensive variety of characters also set these three novels apart from James's previous work. These distinguishing features make the novels of this period the most typically Victorian of all of James's work.<sup>14</sup>



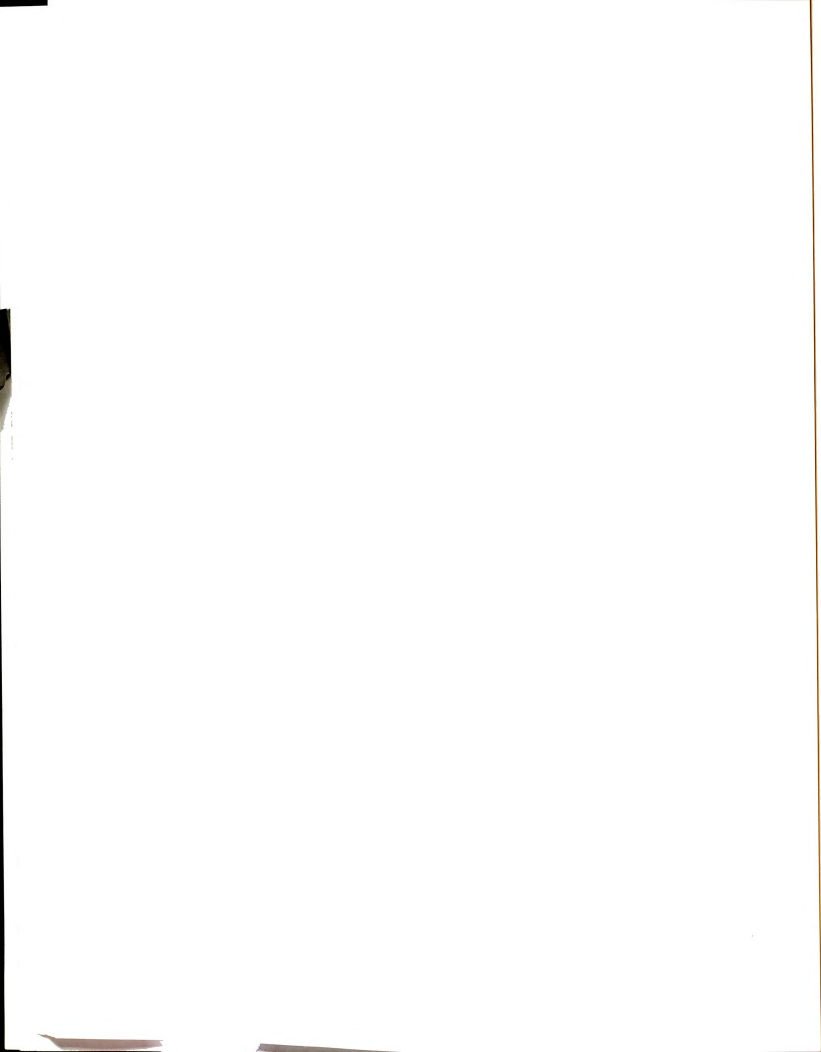
Paradoxically, however, while James was writing his most traditional novels, he follows his "impulse to try experiments." Although he relies on familiar devices (such as the omniscient narrator who on occasion addresses the reader), he also works toward a new conception of the novel. His essay, "The Art of Fiction," published in 1884 (a year before the first installment of The Bostonians), is a crucial document for understanding James's unique sense of the novel.<sup>15</sup> As the essay's title suggests, "The Art of Fiction" not only offers a defense of the novel as "one of the fine arts"; it defines the manner in which James conceptualizes the novel in terms of painting. The novelist "competes" with the artist; the analogy between the two are "complete" and provides the comparison upon which "The Art of Fiction" is based. Although this particular aspect of the essay presents a summation of James's technical concerns to date, "The Art of Fiction" outlines the direction for the future Jamesian novel, or as Perosa suggests, the essay directly informs the novels of the eighties.<sup>16</sup> It is where James defines the novel that "The Art of Fiction" anticipates the major works of the decade:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. (p. 384)

The novel is a subjective view of reality, of life; it neither records nor imitates the sensual qualities of life. By defining the novel as "a direct impression of life," James stresses the reciprocal relationship between the perceiving sensibility and perceivable reality, and implicitly dignifies the novelist's role as the prime perceiving and shaping sensibility. James underlines the primacy of the mind's

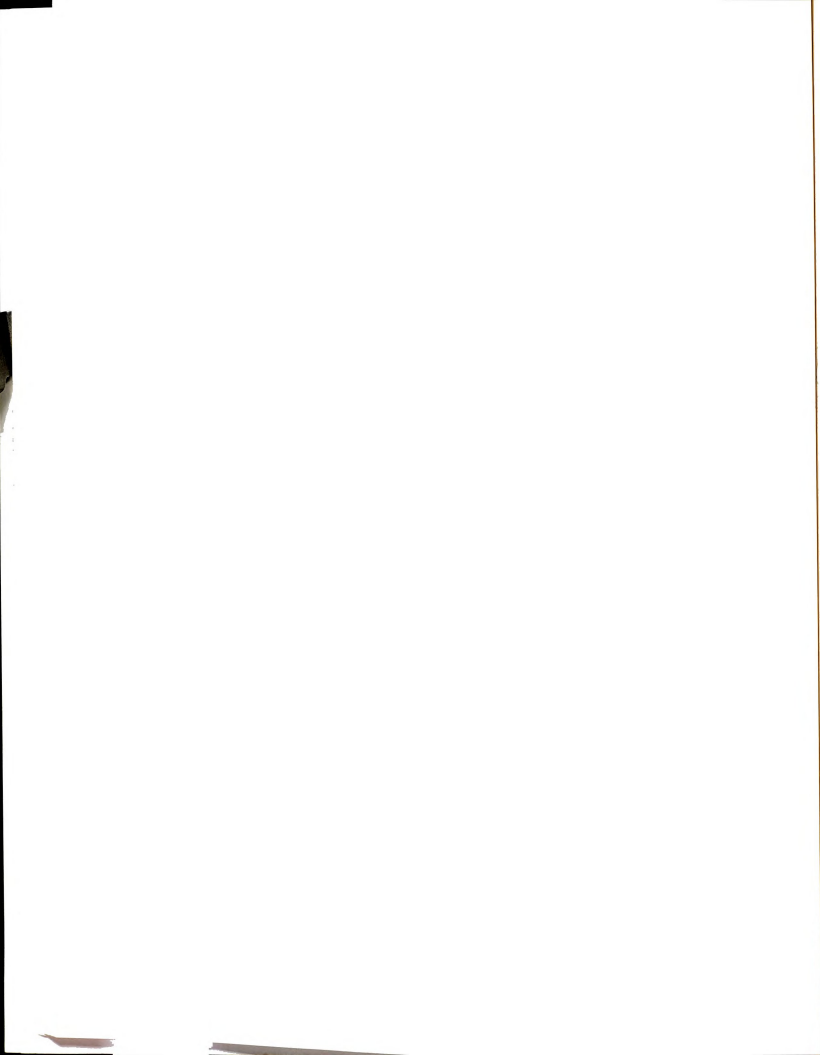
role in experience when he describes experience as "an immense sensibility," likening it to "a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness . . . catching every airborne particle in its tissue" (p. 388). His conception of experience is based on an important distinction, because his focus is not on the stuff of experience--the flood of sensory data--but on the consciousness, or more specifically, on the impact of experience upon the perceiving sensibility. James's stress is on that sensibility--on the way it is shaped by experience, on the way it responds to and interprets reality; "the faintest hints of life" are "revelations" for the sensitive and imaginative mind (p. 388). James sees the consciousness as a web which binds together perception and its object, or as Robert J. Reilly describes it, "as a homogeneous tissue in which inner and outer reality shaded into each other in blendings so subtle that one could hardly specify boundaries."<sup>17</sup> James's vision of the novel results from his establishing as the material of fiction the role of the consciousness and experience's impact upon it. His interest in the physical world arises from its influence upon "the very atmosphere of the mind." Throughout the essay, James returns to his appreciation of the consciousness as his true subject: "There are few things more exciting to me . . . than a psychological reason . . ." (p. 402). Consequently, the cultivation of the consciousness--the response to "the faintest hints of life"--takes increasing precedence over action--the concern with plot--in James's fiction of the eighties.

However, James's emphasis on the consciousness seems to contradict his other aims. The controlling analogy of "The Art of Fiction"



is that of painting; both painting and the novel "attempt to represent life," and the analogy between the painter and the novelist is "complete": "Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle), is the same, their success is the same" (p. 378). James's aims are those of the painter, but unlike the painter, James sees as the novelist's subject not the painter's tangible reality, but an inner reality. The novelist must capture "the very atmosphere of the mind" upon his canvas. Although the consciousness does not seem translatable to the concrete demands of art, as does the subject of the painter, James sees no substantial contradiction. In "The Art of Fiction" he confidently asserts that "a psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial; to catch the tint of its complexion--I feel as if that idea might inspire one to Titianesque efforts" (p. 402).

By painting the consciousness of a character, James discovers a means to capture "the very atmosphere of the mind" as well as a technique which eliminates the intrusive, omniscient author, which for James was a flaw in the contemporary novel. In spite of James's reverence for Trollope, he deplored Trollope's intrusion in his novels, the sign of Trollope's lack of seriousness.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, then, The Portrait of a Lady is a considerable achievement in novelistic technique, for although James lapses into omniscient narration, he does realize Isabel's consciousness pictorially (Chapter 42, the vigil, is the centerpiece of the method), thereby maintaining Isabel's integrity as a character and James's "seriousness" as a novelist. Moreover, by reflecting physical reality through a character's consciousness, thus endowing that reality with a distinct moral sense, James corrects

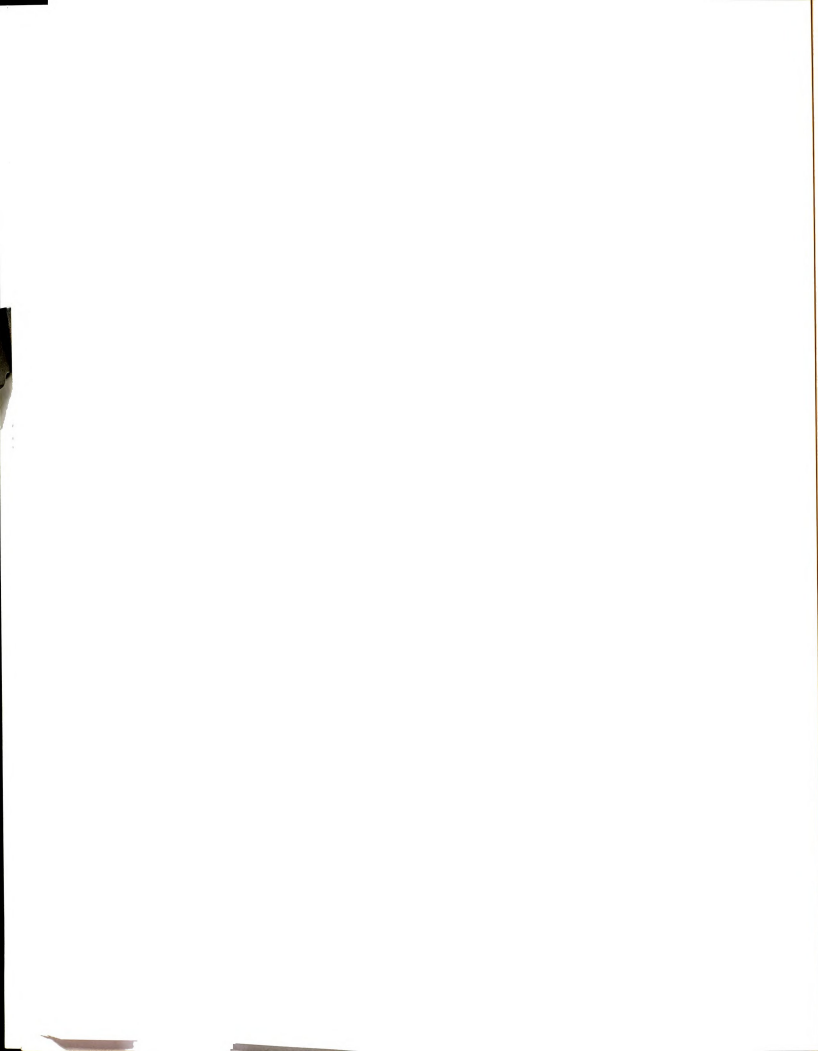




the shortcomings of the French realists. In James's view, the realists failed to probe the depths of the consciousness. For example, writing to Daudet about Sapho, James points out that "en un mot, le drame ne se passe peut-être pas assez dans l'âme and dans la conscience de Jean Gauvin"--and note that James describes the consciousness in dramatic terms.<sup>19</sup> And although James revered the French writers for their attempts to capture the surface of life honestly and unflinchingly, he deplored their rejection of morality and ethics.<sup>20</sup>

As James sees it, the consciousness provides both depth and moral vision, and is therefore a challenging subject for the novelist. In "The Art of Fiction" he exults that "there are few things more exciting to me . . . than a psychological reason. . . ." Later, in the retrospective view of the Prefaces, he declares that his characters "are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it."<sup>21</sup> James judges the success of his characters in terms of the intensity of their consciousness: in Isabel Archer he achieves a "maximum of intensity" while he fails with Laura Wing, the heroine of "A London Life," because her "intensity ruefully drops."<sup>22</sup>

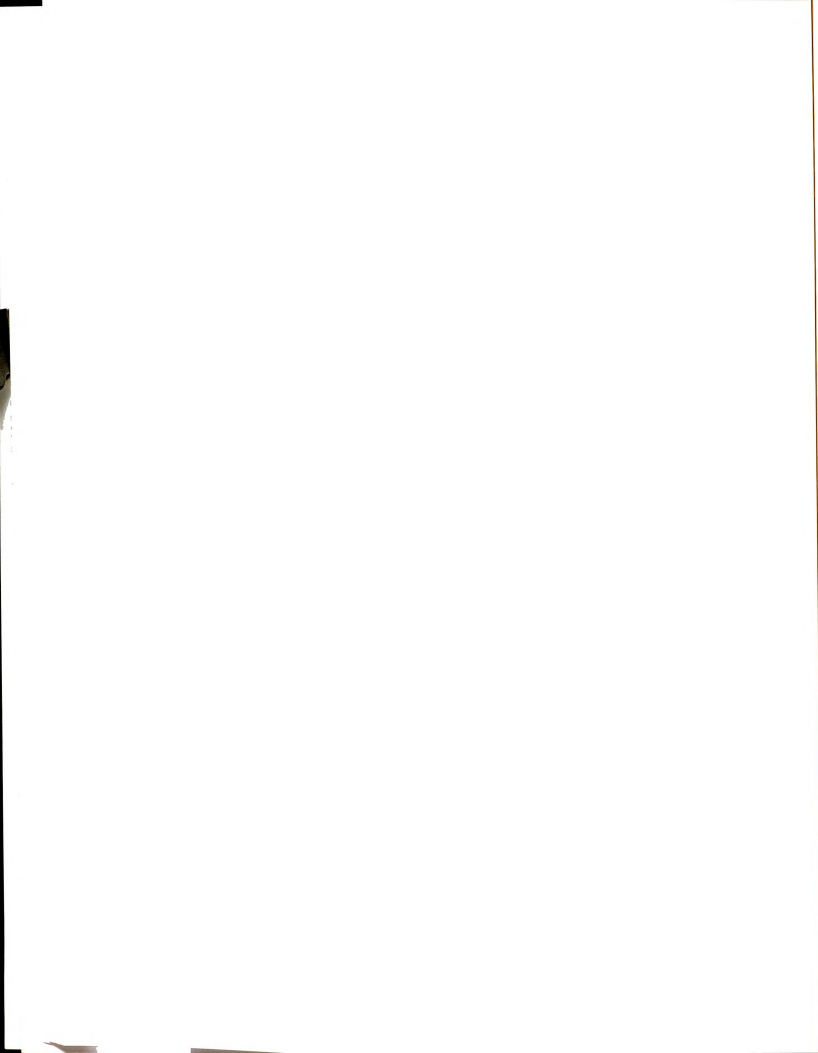
For all his use of consciousness as a criterion in judging character, James never explicitly defines the term, although it is a perennial subject in his writing, and one he lovingly masks in metaphor. Ross Labrie surveys those metaphors, and explores their implications for James's "idea of consciousness." Labrie's real contribution, however, is the definition he offers of Jamesian consciousness: "James



viewed consciousness as the mind's dynamic and selective assimilation, interpretation, and evaluation of its environment and of itself at any one moment."<sup>23</sup> Consciousness encompasses both perceiver and perceived reality; it is neither a solipsistic exercise nor aesthetic self-indulgence. J. A. Ward glosses James's notebook objective of "completeness as seeing things in all their relations"<sup>24</sup> in terms of consciousness and its implications for character and reader:

Perception and intensity of awareness are of supreme importance in James, but his enlightened vessels of consciousness seldom exult in isolated ecstatic moments. For them as for the reader, the illumination is an understanding of the complete pattern of relationships surrounding the central situation. . . .<sup>25</sup>

James's greatness is frequently measured by his creation of the center of consciousness as both subject and technique, but it is important to realize that James's interest in the "psychological reason" is not atypical of the period. During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the concept of the mind underwent radical transformations, resulting from the growing science of psychology, but exerting enormous influence upon many novelists. In place of the view of the mind as "discrete mental states" there arose the idea of "organically-linked mental states"; concurrently, the representation of discrete mental states gave way to the representation of the sequential process of thought.<sup>26</sup> James's contribution to the novel, at least in terms of consciousness, is not the idea of consciousness, but his attempt to objectify that process. For James, the consciousness, with its blending of perceiver and perceptible reality, can be reflected in the novel, where subject imperceptibly merges into form. J. A. Ward, for example, recognizes that "in many of James's novels and tales the



structure derives not from the external action, but from the developing awareness of the central consciousness."<sup>27</sup> The problem for James, then, is one of form and technique, not subject. Even from the retrospective of the Prefaces James could recapture his excitement at confronting this challenge: "'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you wish.'"<sup>28</sup> The solution to the "difficulty" was to have the consciousness of a character perform the narrator's function, eliminating in a single stroke the omniscient author James deprecated. Thus, physical reality is seen only through the center of consciousness, which appropriately records and organizes perception. And by shifting the emphasis of the novel from plot, the sequence of events or actions, to the perceiving medium, the consciousness, James transforms the novel.

In conceptualizing his novel, James turns to the other arts for terminology and metaphor. During the early phase of his career, which includes The Portrait of a Lady, the world of the studio was the most familiar and accessible source. As will be shown in Chapter 2, painting provides a fruitful metaphor and suggests techniques in adapting the novel to the demands of portraying a character's consciousness. James's conception of the consciousness lends itself to the methods of painting; as Ward sees it, "The synthesizing reflector pictorializes rather than narrates: he is given not to the fluid reporting of incidents but to the assimilating of all the aspects of the entire situation."<sup>29</sup> Appropriately, James was fond of describing his novels, especially his early ones, in terms of painting or architecture--fixed compositions.

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But the problem with applying the methods of painting to the demands of fiction was that painting was too self-conscious an art for James. In The Portrait of a Lady, for example, James does achieve moments of artistic integrity in Isabel's functioning as a genuine center of consciousness, but to arrive at these moments requires the shaping presence of the narrator who shifts scenes, telescopes time, and educates the reader--in short, functions as an intrusive narrator. Throughout The Portrait of a Lady, for example, the narrator never permits the reader to forget that the novel is a deliberately shaped work of art; similarly, the viewer of a painting is always aware that the picture viewed is a painting, composed by the artist. Clearly, the novel as a work of art does not realize James's goal for the novel as "a direct impression of life." To imitate the picture of the consciousness was possible, but that picture did not capture the mind's movement in discovering the "pulses" during which the consciousness transforms sensory data to experience. The consciousness portrayed in The Portrait of a Lady is a peculiarly static entity: it is captured within the framework of a portrait, and comes to the fore only when its subject--Isabel Archer--is at rest and isolated, as in her midnight vigil. To reproduce the movement of the consciousness, James had to turn to a new form, a new analogy. He chooses drama. The world of the theatre, particularly its sense of activity and the effacing of its creator, is eminently suitable as a vehicle for the consciousness--so entirely appropriate, in fact, that it is a commonplace of Jamesian criticism to speak of the "drama of the consciousness."

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James had a lifelong interest in the theatre; as noted above, James was a dedicated play-goer and drama critic. His letters also reveal a project eagerly anticipated by James--the desire to write for the stage. James was attracted to playwriting because he saw the theatre as a secure and comfortable source of income. Writing to his brother, William, on July 23, 1878, James confides: "I am very impatient to get at work writing for the stage--a project I have long had. I am morally certain I should succeed, and it would be an open gate to money-making."<sup>30</sup> Yet it would be wrong to regard James's motive for playwriting as purely financial. James indeed cherished the project for a long time, but more as an ideal exercise of his artistic talents. A few months earlier, James confidently proclaims to William:

For myself (in answer to your adjuration) it has long been my most earnest and definite intention to commence at playwrighting as soon as I can. This will be soon, and then I shall astound the world! My inspection of the French theatre will fructify. I have thoroughly mastered Dumas, Augier, and Sardou . . . and I know all they know and a great deal more besides. Seriously speaking, I have a great many ideas on this subject, and I sometimes feel tempted to retire to some frugal village, for twelve months, where, my current expenses being inconsiderable, I might have leisure to work them off. Even if I could only find some manager or publisher sufficiently devoted to believe in this and make me an allowance for such a period, I would afterwards make a compact and sign it with my blood, to reimburse him in thousands.<sup>31</sup>

This letter reveals the central reason James is drawn to writing for the stage: he admires the "well-made play" of Dumas, Augier, Scribe and Sardou. The drama, particularly that of the Théâtre Francais, was noble precisely because it demanded rigorous form. And in his notebook, either at the end of 1881 or at the beginning of

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1882--the entry is undated--James describes drama as "the ripest of all the arts, the one to which one must bring most of the acquired as well as most of the natural."<sup>32</sup> Again, such a description indicates the basis of James's fascination with drama; the blend of form and "life" presents a unique challenge to James. According to this entry, play-writing was his "earliest" project; it is his "most cherished," giving him bright hopes and sweet emotions.<sup>33</sup> His intensive and "contemplative" study of the French stage, together with his long-standing fascination with drama, make it "clear" to James that "this is the light by which one must work today."<sup>34</sup> Crucial in understanding how strongly James felt about drama, the entry is James's taking stock of his artistic progress, having finished his masterpiece, The Portrait of a Lady. In the notebook he examines his motivations to write for the stage, and rededicates himself to the lessons of Dumas, Sardou, and Augier. He describes the degree to which he has incorporated their lessons: "Ces emotions-là ne se perdent pas; elles rentrent dans le fonds même de notre nature; elles font partie de notre volonté."<sup>35</sup> Drama--and the lessons of his French masters--are truly part of his nature and will.

Drama is the light James will work by during the eighties. Although James does not begin writing plays until the end of the decade, drama exerts a considerable influence on the fiction of the period. Prior to these years, James habitually connects fiction with drama. In a February 2, 1877 letter to William Dean Howells, discussing the "story" that will later become The Europeans, James notes that he will "endeavor to make it something of an 'objective,' dramatic and picturesque sort."<sup>36</sup> Earlier, in an 1872 essay on the Parisian stage,



James glosses drama in terms of the novel: "An acted play is a novel intensified; it realizes what the novel suggests, and, by paying a liberal tribute to the senses, anticipates your possible complaint that your entertainment is of the meagre sort not styled 'intellectual.'" <sup>37</sup> Although James defines the play as a "novel intensified," the passage is important because it proves that James recognizes a basic kinship between the novel and the theatre.

During the eighties, then, the idea of the drama--as a lucrative venture, but more significantly as the "ripest form"--is never far from James's mind. Although "The Art of Fiction," with its emphasis on the relationship between the novelist and the painter, continues as an influence on James's conceptualization of the novel during this period, drama has a considerable impact on the fiction of the eighties. Along with painting, the theatre suggests method to James. Indeed, throughout the decade there is a gradual and subtle movement away from painterly techniques toward the techniques of the theatre: the painter competes with the playwright. By the end of the period, the dramatic analogy dominates the fiction, such that in The Tragic Muse, drama provides both technique and subject. Kenneth Graham, in discussing The Tragic Muse, notes that the interplay of form and life dramatizes the subject of the novel and recommends that "it should be approached as a performance and a fiction, not just as an exposition of ideas. . . ." <sup>38</sup> James's search for form during the eighties is similar to Miriam Rooth's struggle to discover the "right spring" that opens the locked box of her talents. <sup>39</sup> In the three novels and in many of the tales, James experiments with technique, trying to invest the

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pictures of his characters--and their consciousness--with a dramatic sense of life and movement.

James is committed to experiment, and the fiction of the eighties clearly shows James's testing of new themes and new techniques. "The Art of Fiction," which informs the novels of the period, outlines the novelist's duties: "The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant--no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes"--a description particularly relevant to James's development as a craftsman during the decade.

Despite James's words, many critics minimize James's "experiments of form" during the eighties, preferring to place greater emphasis on the more obvious experiments of the nineties. Sergio Perosa's treatment of James's middle period (1882-1901) is typical: using James's "dramatic years" (1890-1895) as the dividing line, Perosa distinguishes between the experimental themes of the eighties and the experimental techniques of the nineties--although Perosa does mention in passing that new themes entail new techniques.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, some critics acknowledge at least implicitly that drama influences James's writing before he actually ventured into playwriting. Francis Fergusson, in summing up James's life "at the moment of writing his plays," notes that "James followed the theatre all his life, and was aware that his fiction approached the form and texture of drama."<sup>41</sup> Charles Hoffman, in fact, is explicit about the dramatic influence throughout James's career prior to his writing for the stage: "The dramatic method and scenic development, the indirect approach, the central observing

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intelligence, pictorial representation, objectivity and consistency of point of view--all these elements of James' [sic] art of the novel are utilized in the early short novels."<sup>42</sup> And Oscar Cargill, while stressing James's use of the drama after 1895, admits that the novels of the eighties, written under the influence of Turgenev, have "objective and dramatic" method.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, as Dale Peterson demonstrates in The Clement Vision, Ivan Turgenev's "dramatic novel" was influential throughout the period, being highly publicized by the contemporary critics T. S. Perry and George Parsons Lathrop. Peterson notes that "Perry's criticism, with its militant insistence on the necessary finitude of the authorial vision, advanced Turgenev as the exemplar of the well-made, realistic novel of manners."<sup>44</sup> Lathrop, in two articles on "The Growth of the Novel" in Atlantic Monthly, June and September 1874, also cited Turgenev as the practitioner of the "dramatic method" in the novel. Calling the novel "a portable drama," Lathrop explains that "the secret of the dramatic effect is simply this, that in real life ultimate truth seldom finds a pure utterance . . . [t]he involved truths of the whole proceeding being illustrated by the partial expressions of each individual." Lathrop demanded authorial objectivity, a controlled point of view replacing omniscience, and the dramatization of "psychological phenomena."<sup>45</sup> It is easy to agree with Peterson that Lathrop's manifesto was "an extraordinary anticipation of the mature Jamesian point-of view theory."<sup>46</sup> Or, alternatively, James had the requisite skills and the interest in experimental forms to expand and refine contemporary theories in his fiction.



James himself was quick to acknowledge Turgenev's genius and his contribution to the art of fiction. In a real sense, Turgenev was James's "Master"; James indicates that Turgenev provides the model for James's blending of painterly and dramatic methods. He thought highly of Turgenev, as is evident in the appreciative 1884 essay in Partial Portraits (1888). In French Poets and Novelists (1884) James examines Turgenev's work, particularly his major achievement, dramatic fiction. Turgenev's tales are "ruthless epigram[s], in the dramatic form, upon human happiness."<sup>47</sup> Turgenev's novels, however, vividly capture the essence of drama: in Hélène, "the scene, the figures are as present to us as if we saw them ordered and moving on a lamp-lit stage; and yet, as we recall it, the drama seems all pervaded and coloured by the light of the moral world."<sup>48</sup> James's conception of the dramatic novel, as formulated by Turgenev, is comprised of several elements. First and foremost is point of view. Turgenev, in his willingness to let his characters speak for themselves, provides an antidote to the authorial winking and going behind the scenes of the Victorians Thackeray and Trollope. Turgenev preserves the integrity of character and incident. James describes this integrity when he discusses A Nest of Gentlefolk:

Here is a picture drawn with all the tenderness of a lover, and yet with an indefinable--an almost unprecedented--respect. In this tale, as always with our author, the drama is quite uncommented; the poet never plays chorus; situations speak for themselves.<sup>49</sup>

Turgenev thus "effectually bur[ies] his tools and his sawdust," to reiterate James's early review of Tennyson's Queen Mary. James values Turgenev's effacing the authorial presence, and his refusal to



play the commenting chorus. By permitting the situations to "speak for themselves," Turgenev reveals his sincerity and his seriousness about the novel, qualities James regards as eminently praiseworthy.

But point of view is not the only element of Turgenev's dramatic novel. James praises the Russian for his sensitivity and his absolute fidelity to detail--in his "susceptibility to the sensuous impression of life--to colours and odours, and the myriad ineffable refinements and enticements of beauty--[Turgenev] equals, and even surpasses, the most accomplished representatives of the French school of storytelling."<sup>50</sup> Turgenev is faithful to the sensuous impression of life, and by being so he again lets the situation "speak" for itself--with the meticulous rendering of detail, with imagination guiding and modulating the artist's touch, the author need not play the chorus.<sup>51</sup>

Effacement of author and fidelity to life--these are the basic elements of Turgenev's dramatic novel. Yet in spite of James's stress on Turgenev's dramatic aims, James frequently relies upon painterly terms when discussing Turgenev's technique. Turgenev's "figures are all portraits," James declares, and glosses those portraits: "They have each something special, something peculiar, something that . . . rescues them from the limbo of the gracefully general."<sup>52</sup> In short, Turgenev's characters are portraits of "real" human beings; they are not types; they are individually seen, understood, and rendered.

James is justified in discussing Turgenev's portraiture, because portraits and paintings figured importantly in the Russian's life. Turgenev, like James, appreciated the world of the studio. In his eulogic essay on Turgenev in Partial Portraits, James notes that the



Russian "had a great love of painting, and was an excellent critic of a picture."<sup>53</sup> James is quick to see that Turgenev also turned to the studio for inspiration; Turgenev's method is painterly in that "the germ of a story" was not plot but "the representation of certain persons" of whom he set down a "dossier"; with this in hand, he then asked himself, "What shall I make them do?"<sup>54</sup> A measure of Turgenev's influence on James can be seen when a quarter of a century later, when James recollects the "germ" of The Portrait of a Lady, he models it on Turgenev's method.<sup>55</sup> In fact, The Portrait is, with its young woman as protagonist and its emphasis on portraiture, James's most Turgenevian novel.<sup>56</sup> James's own rendering of Turgenev in the two essays is illuminating. Both essays indicate the reverence with which James regards the Russian master. But in describing Turgenev's methods as founded upon principles drawn from the stage and the studio, James justifies his own experiments of form during the eighties. Turgenev is proof that "the arts were after all essentially one," but he also suggests new directions, new possibilities for the practice of fiction.

James's essay on Turgenev in French Poets and Novelists is as important in understanding his fiction of the eighties as "The Art of Fiction." The defense of the novel in "The Art of Fiction" summarizes James's conception of the novel as he had practiced it, including The Portrait of a Lady. The essay also anticipates and informs the novels of the eighties by designating the "psychological reason" as the true subject of fiction. In the Turgenev essay, however, James demonstrates his continuing fascination for the drama--especially as applied to fiction--and the basis of James's praise of Turgenev is the Russian's





achieving a sense of drama in his novels and tales.

As James implies in the essay, Turgenev's version of the novelistic drama depends on two central ideas: fidelity to detail is one; but more critical is authorial objectivity, the author's willingness to let situations "speak for themselves," respecting the integrity of the objectified world. In "Ivan Turgeneiff," James defines the dramatic novel as he will practice it during the eighties. James's admiration for Turgenev remains strong throughout the decade--his appreciative essay on Turgenev appears in the 1888 collection, Partial Portraits, together with "portraits" of the French naturalists who also influence this period of James's work. The 1884 essay on Turgenev, however, is important in understanding James's technical aims during the eighties, just as the French naturalists "explain" the subjects, ideas, and themes prevalent in that decade of James's work.

J. A. Ward correctly cautions that "'the dramatic analogy' is imperfect."<sup>57</sup> James does not regard drama as perfectly analogous to the novel, but believes--especially given Turgenev's treatment of the novel--that dramatic principles can be employed in fiction. Drama provides an alternative method of narration to the Victorian omniscient author. In the play, emotions, attitudes, and ideas are communicated by the actors directly to the audience; the burden of communication is upon the character, not the playwright. Consequently, greater emphasis is also placed upon the novelist's ability to create "the air of reality" by evoking a precise, detailed sense of atmosphere and background--a reliance upon the individual, not the type. Again, this sense of drama is similar to the Turgenevian ideal. And because the



novelist must "bury his tools," action in the Jamesian sense, meaning the pattern of gradually revealing character,<sup>58</sup> and theme originate from character, thereby creating intensity, economy, and unity.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, while the drama offers these aesthetic effects, it also suggests method. Through dramatic presentation, alternating picture (blocks of narrative setting the stage for the scene by the "massing of elements")<sup>60</sup> and scene (primarily dialogue and movement),<sup>61</sup> James can heighten the impact of action and intensify the relationship among the characters and their connection with theme.

Consequently, although James's view of the painterly novel--as described in "The Art of Fiction"--influences the novels of the eighties, drama begins to compete with painting as a fertile analogy for James's fiction. As the following chapters will demonstrate, after 1884 James increasingly regards "the rules of the drama" as more appropriate for the novel.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis should be, however, on "rules" rather than the actual elements of drama which are more apparent in the novels following James's "dramatic years." In approaching the "drama" of the novels of the eighties, it is crucial to remember both the similarities and dissimilarities between painting--which remains influential during this decade--and drama. In short, a play is a visual medium, like painting; unlike painting, however, a play is not a fixed composition, but visually displays movement and tension, thereby capturing the actual pulse of life. Prior to his playwriting experience, James values dramatic principles as they are applied to fiction. For James, dramatic presentation, in which situations are permitted to speak for themselves, eliminates the author's intrusion into the narrative as commentator; it enhances the objectivity that he considers



essential to fiction. Moreover, he sees dramatic presentation as a means of capturing a sense of life, of movement, of growth that does not seem possible within the fixed composition of the portrait-novel.

Yet in "The Art of Fiction," James also proclaims his commitment to the "psychological reason"--the consciousness--as his pre-eminent interest. The consciousness, however, concerning as it does a character's perception of the physical world and being a mental process, seems to violate the essential aspects of the dramatic method. On the one hand, the dramatic method emphasizes, as does painting, the visual, and captures the objectivity of life. Ideally, the method obviates the apparent mediation of the writer, because characters and situations speak for themselves. On the other hand, the development of a character's consciousness, by its very nature, seems to necessitate the presence of an intrusive and omniscient narrator to describe "the very atmosphere of the mind" not observable. James's main interests--characterization concentrated on the consciousness and the application of dramatic principles to fiction--seem diametrically opposed.

But as Ward perceptively comments, "James's creative energy thrived on the reconciliation of opposites."<sup>63</sup> The fiction of the 1882 to 1890 period occupies an important place in James's development, because in the tales, novellas, and novels James works toward reconciling the demands of characterization based on consciousness with the practice of dramatic presentation. The work of this period is transitional because while James is writing novels in the nineteenth-century tradition, he is increasingly interested in the potential of the inner life as material for fiction. The Portrait of a Lady, although

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traditional in its use of vividly detailed and varied landscapes, a large cast of characters, and omniscient narrator, exemplifies James's skill in employing the consciousness as a method of characterization; later novels, like The Ambassadors, deliberately focus on the consciousness. James's transition is gradual, and undoubtedly James's play-writing experience helps him considerably in forging a means to depict consciousness. But James's movement toward the dramatic novel occurs earlier: prior to his apprenticeship in the theatre, James experiments with methods of presenting his characters dramatically, while focusing on their "immense sensibility."

Critics tend to ignore the experimental nature of James's fiction of the eighties. Sergio Perosa, who divides James's middle period into two parts--the fiction written before the "dramatic years" and that written after--acknowledges the "experimental themes" of the eighties, but stresses the "experimental techniques" of the late nineties. Admitting that the fiction of the eighties is "transitional," Perosa nonetheless recognizes that new themes necessitate new techniques, but examines only those methods directly influenced by James's theatrical experience.<sup>64</sup> Walter Isle studies James's "experiments of form" during the years 1896-1901, and in referring to The Princess Casamassima and A London Life, notes that "in both these cases the themes are treated without the experimental techniques used to sharpen the development of theme in the later novels."<sup>65</sup> The novels of the nineties are strongly influenced by the "dramatic analogy," according to Joseph Wiesenfarth, whose useful study details the specific elements James learns from the stage and brings to the novel. Wiesenfarth never





suggests, however, that the drama has any influence prior to the dramatic years.<sup>66</sup> And those critics who examine the various "analogies" James applies to fiction usually simplify James's movement from painting to the stage: Oscar Cargill and Edna Kenton, for example, see this movement as sequential--first painting, then drama--rather than as a more complex intermingling of the two.<sup>67</sup> But what is particularly intriguing about the fiction of the eighties--besides James's use of new subjects and themes--is the subtle and complicated dialectic between the analogies of painting and the drama.

Obviously, experimental techniques do distinguish James's fiction of the nineties, and these techniques can be related, at least in part, to the elements James transfers virtually intact from the stage to the novel. In this respect, the techniques are more clear-cut and consequently are easier to trace and examine. But it is the major assumption of this study that dramatic principles influence James's fiction prior to his actual playwriting experience--an assumption that has foundation in James's letters and essays written before his "dramatic years." The fiction of the eighties, although undeniably affected by James's love of the painter's craft, bears the mark of James's commitment to the theatre.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, The Tragic Muse (1890; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, A Small Boy and Others in Autobiography, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (1913; rpt. New York: Criterion Books, 1956), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> James, A Small Boy and Others, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Wade, introd., The Scenic Art, by Henry James (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1957), p. xii.

<sup>5</sup> Henry James, Letters, 1875-1883, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 179. On January 23, 1895, after the disastrous opening of Guy Domville, James tersely notes: "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."

<sup>7</sup> Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (1914) in Autobiography, p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> James, "Honoré de Balzac," in French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), p. 94; James, "The Parisian Stage" (1872) in The Scenic Art, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Leon Edel, introd., The Complete Plays of Henry James (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1949), p. 34-5.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, in The Early Development of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965) provides a thorough discussion of the influences on James during 1864 to 1881.

<sup>11</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, "Henry James and the Plastic Arts," Kenyon Review, 5 (1943), 535. Matthiessen notes, however, that in "A Passionate Pilgrim" the portrait is used as a Hawthornian device.



- 12 Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 123.
- 13 James, Letters, 1875-1883, p. 193.
- 14 Walter Isle, in Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels 1896-1901 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), calls the novels of the 1880s "Victorian" and draws comparisons between James's "Victorian" novels and those written during the nineties, which bear many characteristics of the "twentieth-century novel" (p. 15).
- 15 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1911), pp. 375-408; hereafter cited in text.
- 16 Sergio Perosa, Henry James and the Experimental Novel (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), pp. 5-6.
- 17 Robert J. Reilly, "Henry James and the Morality of Fiction," American Literature, 39 (1967), 13.
- 18 James has mixed feelings about Trollope. In his 1883 essay in Partial Portraits on Trollope, James praises the novelist for his "complete appreciation of the usual" (pp. 100-1) and compares him favorably with the French realists (pp. 123-4). However, James accuses him of never taking himself seriously (p. 99) and deplores Trollope's "suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story was only, after all, a make-believe." Trollope's "slaps at credulity," his winking behind the scenes, are "deliberately inartistic" (pp. 116-7).
- 19 Henry James, Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 45.
- 20 Reilly's "Henry James and the Morality of Fiction" provides a thorough analysis of James's view of the morality (or lack of) of the French Realists, particularly Flaubert and Maupassant.
- 21 Henry James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," in The Art of the Novel, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 62.
- 22 James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 56; Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," p. 138.
- 23 Ernest Ross Labrie, "Henry James's Idea of Consciousness," American Literature, 39 (1968), 527.



<sup>24</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph A. Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1967), pp. 40-1.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon O. Taylor, The Passages of Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 5-6. Taylor documents the change in conceptualizing the mind that was spread over three decades (1870-1900). Prior to and at the beginning of the period, novelists focused on a single level of awareness; during the period, emphasis shifted to a more complex spectrum of psychological experience (the unconscious, the subconscious, instincts, and so on); while by the end of the period, the main interest was on the connection between interior awareness and exterior behavior (pp. 5-6). Taylor's description of the final focus of the period comes close to defining Jamesian consciousness.

<sup>27</sup> Ward, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Ward, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> James, Letters, 1875-1883, p. 179.

<sup>31</sup> James, Letters, 1875-1883, pp. 171-2.

<sup>32</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> James, Letters, 1875-1883, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> James, "The Parisian Stage," p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Graham, Henry James: The Drama of Fulfillment (London: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 81-83.

<sup>39</sup> James, The Tragic Muse, p. 227.





<sup>40</sup> Perosa, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Fergusson, "James's Ideal of Dramatic Form," Kenyon Review, 5 (1943), 495.

<sup>42</sup> Charles C. Hoffman, The Short Novels of Henry James (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Cargill, p. 207.

<sup>44</sup> Dale E. Peterson, The Clement Vision: Poetic Realism in Turgenev and James (London and Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Peterson, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> Peterson, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," in French Poets and Novelists, p. 244.

<sup>48</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," p. 224.

<sup>49</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," p. 231.

<sup>50</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," p. 219.

<sup>51</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," p. 219.

<sup>52</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff," p. 213.

<sup>53</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff" in Partial Portraits, p. 306.

<sup>54</sup> James, "Ivan Turgenieff" in Partial Portraits, p. 315.

<sup>55</sup> James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 42.

<sup>56</sup> This is strikingly apparent in the essay on Turgenev in French Poets and Novelists. James points to Turgenev's sympathetic treatment of his female characters (p. 225). More to the point, however, James describes the story of Hélène as "all in the portrait of the heroine," a young girl "of will so calmly ardent and intense" (p. 225)--a woman remarkably similar to Isabel Archer. And in the same essay James quotes a passage from Turgenev's novel Spring Torrents which is very much like Isabel's midnight vigil. See pp. 237-8.



<sup>57</sup> Ward, p. 21. Ward is quoting the title of Joseph Wiesenfarth's book, Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1963).

<sup>58</sup> Wiesenfarth, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Wiesenfarth isolates these three elements--intensity, economy, and objectivity--as the characteristics James's dramatic novel shares with the play (p. xii). Wiesenfarth devotes his first chapter to defining these qualities and listing James's comments on them.

<sup>60</sup> James, Preface to "What Maisie Knew," p. 158.

<sup>61</sup> Wiesenfarth describes the alternation of pictures and scene as a "system of structures":

The typical scene treats in dialogue, interpersonally and objectively those thoughts and opinions, facts and probabilities that can find outward expression; the picture typically treats those thoughts, emotions, and desires not easily expressed in conversation, also those actions and situations which press in upon and affect the consciousness. By means of scene and picture the novel treats the social and personal events of an action, the areas of conduct and consciousness. (pp. 35-6)

See also R. W. Short, "Some Critical Terms of Henry James," PMLA, 65 (1950), 667-80, for definitions of picture and scene.

<sup>62</sup> Edna Kenton, "The 'Plays' of Henry James," Theatre Arts, 12 (1928), 350.

<sup>63</sup> Ward, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Perosa, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Isle, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Wiesenfarth applies the "dramatic analogy" only to those novels which follow James's actual playwriting years.

<sup>67</sup> Cargill, p. 206; Kenton, 350.



## CHAPTER II

### Painters and Portraits

During the fall of 1860 the James family settled in Newport, Rhode Island, after a brief sojourn in Europe. Once in Newport, William James began taking drawing lessons from William Morris Hunt, and Henry, more from wanting to emulate his older brother than being convinced of his own artistic talent, loitered around the studio, hoping to catch the eye of the Master with sketches of plaster casts. He gave up his drawing aspirations quite suddenly, so he relates in his autobiography, after watching William sketch a live model and realizing that he could never approach his brother's facility and ease in transferring life to the canvas.<sup>1</sup> After this, Henry "pocketed his drawing pencil,"<sup>2</sup> but in picking up the pen, he never lost his early fascination for art, a "rounded satisfying world."<sup>3</sup> Throughout his writing career, James returns to that world for the material of his fiction: numerous tales and two novels, Roderick Hudson (1875) and The Tragic Muse (1890), directly address issues of art and artists.<sup>4</sup> That "rounded satisfying world" also provided James with an inexhaustible source of imagery for his fiction--The Portrait of a Lady, for example, is permeated with the images of art objects.

The world of the studio suggested method to James. He considered the analogy between the artist's pigment and the novelist's words to be a fruitful one: both the painter and the writer share kinship through their attempts to capture a "direct impression of life."<sup>5</sup> In an 1876

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essay on Flaubert, in which he examines the novelist's concept of art, James imagines Flaubert describing life as "before all things a spectacle, an occupation and entertainment for the eyes." The emphasis is on the visual, and while James's Flaubert acknowledges "something else, beneath and behind" the sensual surface of life, the novelist's task is to "represent the pictorial side of life":

We will "render" things--anything, everything, from a chimney-pot to the shoulders of a duchess--as painters render them. We believe there is a certain particular phrase, better than any other, for everything in the world, and the thoroughly accomplished writer ends by finding it. We care only for what is--we know nothing about what ought to be.<sup>6</sup>

The key word is, of course, "render": it implies more than making a faithful copy; the manner in which James uses it suggests that the imagination assists in producing an image, whether in a painting or in a verbal description. The eye of the artist is a selective one: the impression of life "rendered" in art is personal, because the artist's vision reshapes life even as it records it.<sup>7</sup> James's criticism of Balzac, in spite of his admiration for the French writer, reinforces the personal and selective facets of "rendering": Balzac "sins by extravagance" in his superfluous "enumerations of inanimate objects"; "where another writer makes an allusion Balzac gives you a Dutch picture."<sup>8</sup> Balzac, in other words, records the physical world and does not employ the selectivity that can convey a personal impression of life. By contrast, Flaubert wins James's praise for insisting that the writer must exercise art when depicting "the pictorial side of life." James's Flaubert sanguinely believes that the novelist is equal to expressing any aspect of that life; it is simply a matter of discovering the "certain particular phrase."





Several critics, among them Lyall Powers, David Gervais, and Philip Grover, have examined the relationship between James and the French novelists, particularly Flaubert.<sup>9</sup> James's own "rendering" of Flaubert cited above, however, reveals more than just the impact of the French realists upon Jamesian aesthetic theory; it demonstrates the extent to which James visualizes the work of the writer in terms borrowed from the painter's vocabulary. The work written during the years of the strongest French influence--from the mid-seventies to the publication of The Tragic Muse in 1890--is marked by the realist's attention to detail and the naturalist's themes. It is in one novel, however, that James achieves a near-perfect synthesis of the methods of the painter with the materials of fiction, and that novel is The Portrait of a Lady.

James's own description of the manner in which he first conceived The Portrait justifies the novel's title. Somewhat apologetically, James recounts how "the germ of my idea" consisted of "the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman" instead of the usual "subject" or plot.<sup>10</sup> The main interest--as James saw it--must be in what she will do, but in spite of the necessity for something to happen, the novel is a "portrait" in the fullest sense. The Portrait of a Lady is a detailed and intensive "rendering" of James's "engaging young woman," Isabel Archer; the novel's method of characterization and its structure is dominated by the concept of portraiture.

By using the portrait as a means of shaping his fiction, James adds a new dimension to the novel. Traditionally, the novel depicted



the growth or change of its protagonist, brought about by the pressure of circumstance, experience, and other characters. The journey motif, as a vehicle of both plot and theme, typified this conception of the narrative controlled by linear progress. James transforms this linear view of the novel by conceiving the novel in terms of visual art--the portrait. In the portrait, as James applies it to fiction, the protagonist does not grow or change. The portrait-novel is not static, however, because its movement derives from gradual clarification of the central character's outlines given at the novel's beginning. Joseph Warren Beach, in The Method of Henry James, describes this technique, appropriately enough, with an analogy borrowed from visual art:

You have rather a sense of being present at the gradual unveiling of a picture, or the gradual uncovering of a wall-painting which has been white-washed over and is now being restored to view. The picture was all there from the start; there is nothing new being produced; there is no progress in that sense. The stages are merely those by which the exhibitor or the restorer of the picture uncovers now one, now another, portion of the wall or canvas, until finally the whole appears in its intelligible completeness.<sup>11</sup>

Beach's description is valuable for its emphasis on the sense of movement inherent in this technique. A more precise analogy, however, might be the process by which one's eyes become accustomed to a dimly-lit room. Vague outlines of objects are visible, but it takes time before the finer details are apparent. This is a more accurate illustration of James's structuring of the novelistic portrait, where he gives the character's essential qualities at the beginning; the course of the novel shows these relatively general traits shaping that character's responses to situations and other characters. In this way, the portrait, as James uses it, is a method of characterization which



structures the novel.

The Portrait of a Lady is, as its title suggests, a full-fledged exploration of this technique. But it is not James's first such attempt. Prior to The Portrait, which began appearing serially in 1880 in The Atlantic Monthly and in Macmillan's Magazine, James uses this approach in his "first" novel, Roderick Hudson (1875).<sup>12</sup> The early novel is helpful in examining The Portrait, for it is in Roderick Hudson that James can be seen trying out techniques and methods later refined in The Portrait. In many respects, the two novels are companion-pieces, and James himself seems to suggest a kinship by noting that they were both begun in Florence.<sup>13</sup>

In the earlier novel James sketches the portrait of Roderick Hudson, a sculptor given the opportunity to nurture his talent through Rowland Mallet's generosity; unfortunately, Roderick disintegrates rather than grows in the process. James freely acknowledged the failures of this novel in its Preface for the New York Edition, the most important being the accelerated time scheme of Hudson's deterioration. James employs a second character, Rowland Mallet, as a center of consciousness; Roderick is seen through Rowland, who attempts to understand and interpret Roderick's fall, eliminating the need for an omniscient narrator. But because Rowland himself plays an essential part in the novel--he is the only reason why Roderick can go to Europe--and because he is the center of consciousness, he competes for the main focus. Roderick Hudson is as much about Rowland Mallet as it is about the young sculptor.

James's first novel is a double portrait: the two men are seen from different angles of vision, and they complement and contrast with



each other. James Kraft, in his study of James's early fiction, is even willing to see Rowland and Roderick representing "two sides of one personality," together forming "a balance in character that does not seem possible in reality."<sup>14</sup> But the balance in character is not maintained in the novel's structure. Roderick Hudson splits into two uneven narratives, and Mallet dominates because everything is filtered through his sympathetic intelligence, making him more vivid than his subject, Roderick Hudson. Joseph Warren Beach criticizes James for devoting too many pages to Rowland Mallet;<sup>15</sup> although Mallet should be regarded more tolerantly, Beach is right in noting the problems Mallet's characterization present in the novel.

By 1880, James perfects the technique of portraiture. Isabel Archer is very clearly the subject of the portrait, and although she is surrounded by important if subordinate characters, she dominates The Portrait of a Lady<sup>16</sup> even when not actually present. The novel begins with a broad and general outline of Isabel Archer's essential traits. In the opening chapters the narrative alternates between scenes showing the characters in action and blocks of description giving principle characters' main qualities. Chapters 3 and 6 are devoted to a detailed "rendering" of Isabel herself. In Chapter 3, Isabel's personality is placed before the reader; Chapter 6 focuses primarily upon her major flaws which become increasingly important as the novel progresses. James begins Chapter 6 with the first: she is "a young person of many theories" (p. 46). Her theories are, unfortunately, untested by practice. Indicative of Isabel's willingness to shut out the world is the room she chooses in which to read: the sidelights are covered with green paper so that "the vulgar street" remains unseen (p. 24).





Isabel is also "probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem" (p. 47); wrongly or rightly she considers herself superior to those around her. She is a romantic, too, for James describes Isabel as having "a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action" (p. 48). She sees the world as a happy place, open and simplistic--a place where "she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was (p. 48). Finally, she is presumptuous: she tempts fate for "sometimes she went so far as to wish that she might have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded" (p. 48).

Isabel Archer is a very "theoretical" young woman: she has a multitude of theories untested by life. Significantly, those theories foreshadow the major issues and events of the novel. In fact, her movement through the novel parallels that of James, for as her ideas are put to the test by the other characters and situations, so too is James's general outline of Isabel fleshed out by her responding to those characters and situations.

Isabel's prophetic though presumptuous wish to be tried is fulfilled by the end of the novel, and she demonstrates the sincerity of her values by acting fully in accordance with them. Isabel does prove her superiority. She returns to Osmond and a stultified life because she remains faithful, purely on principle, to her marriage vows. Isabel's need for integrity is noble, but there is also a negative side to her final choice, because it arises from her overwhelming sense of self, prompting Leon Edel to call Isabel "a prisoner of her constituted self"<sup>17</sup> and to accuse her of an egotism similar to that of Osmond.<sup>18</sup> Isabel is a prisoner of self. Ironically for one who



proclaims her independence so insistently, she is confined by romantic ideals even though she is confronted with the realities of the world. Although Isabel may have a clearer knowledge of the implications of those ideals, she remains blinded by them.

Isabel is as fixed by her theories as she is fixed on James's "canvas." The novel is genuinely a "portrait of a lady"--a detailed "rendering" of Isabel Archer's character. Isabel does not change during the course of the novel, yet The Portrait is not a static work because the novel's movement depends upon the delineation and clarification of Isabel's character. The novel moves from general to specific, from theory to practice; it reveals, but does not surprise. The novel's form is as defined and framed as a painted portrait, in keeping with what Laurence Holland describes as the "distinctly painterly objective"<sup>19</sup> of The Portrait.

That objective controls characterization. Beach examines James's "pictorial preoccupation" in The Portrait, noting the chiaroscuro effect of Isabel's portrait placed against a dark background of menacing surroundings and company.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Oscar Cargill points out the sense of movement in this method while acknowledging the importance of background: "Thought of as a developing portrait, Isabel's growth, or better, definition, is rendered sharper by her successive suitors and admirers."<sup>21</sup> Isabel does not change; she shines from the dark canvas like a Rembrandt portrait, and the interest arises from the reader's discovery of fine details first obscured by vague outlines and shadows. Above all, the emphasis is on the pictorial: Richard Poirier calls The Portrait "a spectacle"<sup>22</sup> where the reader does not

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participate in discovery, but only watches the gradual revelation. Isabel Archer and the characters who surround her have been captured and fixed upon the "canvas" of the novel.

Other elements, in fact, contribute to the novel's "distinctly painterly objective." At the time James wrote The Portrait he was influenced by French Naturalism; this influence manifests itself in James's use of heredity as a significant factor in defining and ultimately limiting Isabel. Chapters 3 and 4, for example, relate Isabel's family history, and although "she had a desire to leave the past behind her" (p. 30), Isabel is very aware of her past. She had a very happy childhood; her father kept "the disagreeable" away from her. It happens then that her knowledge of the dark side of life is theoretical: "It appeared to Isabel that the disagreeable had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest, and even of instruction" (p. 31). This is crucial for Isabel's character, because it explains why she regards the world so naively, why she is willing to view life rather than feel it, and why she views it through the distancing medium of art. Hence, her description of Gardencourt as "being just like a novel" (p. 16), and her rejection of the "cup of experience" as a "poisoned drink" (p. 139).

The important point is that Isabel's character is shaped prior to the events related in the novel; she must, in the words of the Preface, "affront her destiny."<sup>23</sup> The novel is a playing-out of Isabel's pre-ordained destiny, a destiny shaped by her background, her ideas, but most obviously by her creator. The artist who paints



Isabel's portrait is present in the narrative: James freely uses an omniscient narrator despite his growing dissatisfaction with this technique. Indeed, it is the narrator who openly shapes the novel into a painting--a portrait. He frequently intrudes into the narrative--especially in the first third of the novel--to "render," to sketch in settings and characters, and to guide the reader's interpretation of character and event. The narrator sets the painterly tone in the very first paragraph of The Portrait by commenting upon "the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch" (p. 6), thereby suggesting his procedure, which entails the gradual filling-in of outlines to create a portrait with detail, depth, and color.

The narrator also intrudes to predict. This function emphasizes the "art" of The Portrait by indicating that the omniscient narrator is a careful artist, who plans his work, and who possesses the sense of the novel as a whole which the reader must experience incrementally. In Chapter 12, for example, the narrator cautions the reader "to smile not" at Isabel for rejecting Warburton before he proposes (itself an example of Isabel's habit of pre-ordaining her own destiny), and then continues:

She was a person of great good faith, and if there was a great deal of folly in her wisdom, 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.  
(pp. 95-96)

By predicting, even obliquely, the nature of Isabel's destiny, James rejects the idea of the novel as an illusion of life in place of it as art, the artist's personal impression of life. Art does not





mirror life; it shapes life: a painted portrait is not a mere reproduction of the subject's image, but is the artist's interpretation of that individual's character.<sup>24</sup> To render that interpretation the artist may select or even distort elements of the physical likeness. But because the characters are defined or "fixed" from the start, and because the narrator who by his intervention actively shapes the course of the novel, the reader cannot have the illusion that such characters are real human beings capable of stepping from the confines of the novel. It is not by chance that the Preface to this novel contains James's metaphor of "the house of fiction" where "the spreading field, the human scene" is shaped by "the pierced aperture" through which both artist and reader watch.<sup>25</sup> The narrator's intrusions constantly remind the reader that the novel is an illusion of life, strengthening the kinship of The Portrait to the painter's work.

The narrator, however, is not the only one who is able to predict: characters speculate upon the future with surprising accuracy; events and images seem to forecast Isabel's destiny--all of which supports this view of the novel as a shaped and controlled work of art. Characters' predictions play an important part in The Portrait. Isabel wishes to be "in a difficult position" so that she may act nobly; her wish is granted, and she acts in accordance with her theories. But lesser characters have an uncanny ability to predict Isabel's future. Henrietta Stackpole, although James caricatures her, describes Isabel and her future accurately:

The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams--you are not enough in contact with reality--with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that



surrounds you. You are too fastidious; you have too many graceful illusions. Your newly acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people, who will be interested in keeping up those illusions. (p. 201)

Henrietta gives a near-perfect thumbnail sketch of the novel.

While such prediction can be accounted for as the natural result of a long friendship between the two women, it also adds to the reader's sense of Isabel's affronting a pre-ordained destiny. Of course, characters affront destinies in any novel--such is the nature of art--but many novels tend to obscure that destiny by maintaining an illusion of life-like development and linear progress. Henrietta's prediction, in contrast, enhances the overall impression of the novel as a deliberate work of art.

Events also function in a predictive manner. Tony Tanner calls these "compressed analogues" which "subtly prepare" the reader for the events that will occur as the narrative unfolds, while providing a summary of antecedent action. One such compressed analogue is Isabel's first visit to Osmond's villa:<sup>26</sup>

The two ladies drove out of the Roman Gate, beneath the enormous blank superstructure which crowns the fine clear arch of that portal and makes it nakedly impressive, and wound beneath high-walled lanes, into which the wealth of blossoming orchards overdrooped and flung a perfume, until they reached the small superurban piazza, of crooked shape, of which the long brown wall of the villa occupied in part by Mr. Osmond formed the principal, or at least the most imposing, side. Isabel went with her friend through a wide, high court, where a clear shadow rested below, and a pair of light-arched galleries, facing each other, caught the upper sunshine upon their slim columns and the flowering plants in which they were dressed. There was something rather severe about the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, it would not be easy to get out. For Isabel, however, there was of course as yet no thought of getting out, but only of advancing. (p. 234)



Isabel begins with a "fine clear" prospect, but is gradually enclosed within a crooked piazza, high walls, and an imposing courtyard; the "as yet" of the last sentence has an ominous ring. Even the road to the piazza, which winds among "high-walled lanes," foreshadows the "dark, narrow alley with the dead wall at the end" of Isabel's mid-night meditation.

Other events contribute to the sense of the novel as an enclosed whole rather than as a progressive narrative. The story is carefully framed: on the obvious level, the novel opens and closes at Gardencourt; Isabel's early wish to see the ghost of Gardencourt is ultimately fulfilled. Some events are less apparent: Mrs. Touchett meets Isabel when the younger woman is disciplining her mind: "Just now she had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of German thought" (p. 24). After Ralph's death, Isabel tries to read, but she is unable to "command" her mind (p. 536). Singly, these incidents may not seem significant; together, however, they create the sense of the novel having come full circle, and an awareness of the total narrative even while the focus is upon a single incident or character. The reader need only look beneath the pictorial surface to discover the complete composition.

Visual art permeates The Portrait of a Lady. While art provides a rich source of imagery and metaphor, it is also an essential part of the novel's meaning. Isabel, Ralph, and Osmond view life as a work of art, although not in exactly the same ways; and as Philip Grover notes, the manner in which the characters respond to art is a significant element of their characterization.<sup>27</sup> But visual art--the world that

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James found so "rounded" and "satisfying"--influences many of the novel's techniques. Painterly objectives control characterization, especially Isabel's, the subject of The Portrait, and structure the novel. As shown above, The Portrait of a Lady is as enclosed and fixed as the artist's canvas--prompting Joseph Warren Beach to call this technique a radical reversal of traditional narrative methods.<sup>28</sup> In The Portrait James applies techniques suggested by the painter's craft, and in so doing transforms the novel.

Besides the synthesis of visual art and fiction, James breaks ground in The Portrait of a Lady by using consciousness on a large scale as a means of characterization. The technique of relating a character's thoughts does not originate with James: he does perfect the technique, however, and relies on it as a narrative method almost exclusively in his later work. James's refinement of this technique is one of his major legacies to the twentieth-century novel.<sup>29</sup>

Use of the center of consciousness does not begin with The Portrait; again, it is helpful to return to Roderick Hudson for James's early attempts with this technique. In that novel, Rowland Mallet is the center of consciousness: everything is seen through his eyes, and he is the interpreter of the novel's events. In using Mallet, James avoids depending on an omniscient narrator to tell the story. The author is careful in making sure that Mallet is present at every occurrence, even though James comes close to resorting to coincidence to narrate important events (such as Mallet happening upon Roderick and Christina at the Coliseum, where the young sculptor recklessly scales some ruins to pick wildflowers). However, James does not give Mallet a distinctive voice or narrative form, and Mallet is so malleable that,





as Gordon Taylor points out, the observer's consciousness melts into the author's omniscience.<sup>30</sup> This is somewhat ironic, considering the central concern of the novel. Both Mallet and Hudson speculate about the impact of experience on the mind and character--it is Mallet's reason for bringing Hudson to Rome. Mallet remains singularly untouched by his experience; James does not permit Mallet's consciousness to be visibly affected by his relationship with Hudson.<sup>31</sup>

In The Portrait of a Lady James refines the technique and employs it to advantage for characterization and theme. James does not rely upon a single point of view for the narrative: the story is told by an omniscient narrator, Ralph, and Isabel.<sup>32</sup> The shifts between these narrators have thematic purpose. In the first six chapters, the authorial narrator sketches the scene and relates the essential background facts and personality traits. Although this narrator never completely steps out of The Portrait, his role diminishes as Ralph's becomes more prominent. Ralph, who in many respects has the novel's most generous, most perceptive, and finest consciousness, provides a broader point of view than Isabel's more limited one, and enables James to interpret events at which Isabel is not present. As the novel moves toward its climax, and as Isabel's distrust of her cousin grows, Ralph's role as center of consciousness decreases while hers accordingly increases. The narrative thus gradually depends upon Isabel, and the reader experiences Isabel's narrow view and her awakening to the grim truth of her situation. Ralph's death and James's "gradual authorial withdrawal" suggest to Ora Segal, who has examined James's centers of consciousness, a strategy by which "James emphasizes the growth of [Isabel's] tragic stature and her ultimate moral isolation."<sup>33</sup>

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But Isabel's coming to the foreground as the central consciousness can also be seen as indicative of her progressive definition: as the subject of The Portrait, Isabel dominates the novel so that her point of view becomes the ultimate source of vision in the novel. Moreover, by having the reader experience Isabel's limited point of view, James achieves a degree of suspense although Isabel is acting out a pre-ordained destiny.<sup>34</sup>

The centers of consciousness also become an important source of characterization in The Portrait. In Roderick Hudson, characters are known largely through dialogue: in conversations they reveal facts about each other, or about themselves, rather than unfold ideas.<sup>35</sup> Characters in Roderick Hudson are also conceived somewhat simplistically: characterizations rely on conventional polarization--Christina Light, the "bad" woman, contrasts against the more angelic Mary Garland.<sup>36</sup> The characters of The Portrait are more subtle, sophisticated creations: they have the psychic complexity lacking in the characters of the earlier novel. James's increasing reliance upon the consciousness as a means of characterization adds considerable depth to the characters of The Portrait. Because Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond are known primarily through Isabel's perceptions, the reader experiences more vividly the contrast between their cultivated surface and the reality of their deception beneath. In this way, the reader is nearly as blind as Isabel herself about the machinations against her. Through the center of consciousness character is revealed gradually, in contrast to the narrator's inclusive and descriptive characterization in the opening chapters of The Portrait.



But that consciousness is also a crucial element in the characterization of the center; the manner in which Isabel perceives and responds to the pressures of circumstance reveals her personality. The reader knows first-hand her idealism, her blindness, and her nobility. And the fact that the center of consciousness comes to focus exclusively on Isabel is important in shaping the response to Isabel: if James had relied on only Isabel's visible actions, the reader would have been distanced from her, and more inclined to judge her follies harshly. By knowing Isabel from within, by seeing through her eyes, the reader can take a more personal, if not more lenient, view of her. James divides Isabel's physical portrait between an omniscient narrator and Ralph Touchett, a sympathetic and sensitive observer, achieving a balance of criticism and sympathy.<sup>37</sup> By employing Isabel as a center of consciousness which ultimately dominates the narrative, James is able to render fully Isabel's personality first sketched in Chapters 3 and 6.

The vigil chapter (Chapter 42) is the most concentrated example of Isabel's consciousness, and thus offers the deepest insight into her character. James was proud of his achievement, because in the novel's Preface he singles out this chapter as "obviously the best thing in the book" and as "a supreme illustration of the general plan."<sup>38</sup> James's technique departs from the mainstream of nineteenth-century fiction; it is a turning point for Isabel Archer and for the art of fiction. The effects of this technique are several: it compresses time; "it throws the action further forward than twenty incidents' might have done."<sup>39</sup> But James achieves more than economy:



he captures in prose the movement of Isabel's mind, and anticipates the stream of consciousness technique of the twentieth-century novel. The prose of Isabel's meditation is considerably different from James's usual style: periodic and complex sentences are replaced by short, frequently choppy, even disjointed ones:

But when, as the months elapsed, she followed him further and he led her into the mansion of his own habitation, then, then she had seen where she really was. She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air. Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. Of course it was not physical suffering; for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. (pp. 395-396)

The rhythm of this passage is feverish, making vivid the "terrors which crowded to the foreground of thought as quickly as a place was made for them" (p. 391). Words and passages are repeated, sentences are broken by semicolons, suggesting the rush of thought in Isabel's mind. James uses images to picture the process of thought;<sup>40</sup> by piling them upon each other--"the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation"--the author graphically creates the feeling of dark walls rising up to imprison Isabel. The language of the meditation chapter reflects the language of the mind: the flood of images is barely contained within the bounds of grammatical, punctuated English.

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Although Isabel's mind becomes vivid as a living, suffering entity, Isabel's meditation does not represent the pure functioning of consciousness. In The Language of Meditation, John Halperin discovers several layers or strata in the vigil's language: one reproducing the sense of Isabel's mind, "the other involving a witnessing distance from it (signalled in the past tense and third person) which expresses . . . the reader's spectatorship and distance."<sup>41</sup> There is a subtle though definite shaping by the narrator, resulting in the reader's being simultaneously within Isabel's mind and outside of it. Consequently, although Isabel's consciousness seems to be rendered impressionistically, the narrator detaches and distances the reader from Isabel, guaranteeing that she remain within the confines of her portrait. This distance, however, is not really judgmental, because the narrator's stance and tone are sympathetic. James no longer needs to instruct the reader to be charitable in judging Isabel, as in the opening chapters. Because the reader directly experiences the terrors crowding upon Isabel, a sympathetic view of Isabel's situation arises from the very texture of the prose.

And there is an additional layer of language. Occasionally the narrator intrudes in the first person: "that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken" and "as I have intimated," for example. These clauses obviously refer to things previously mentioned in the vigil; they suggest the organizing of the "crowd" of individual thoughts into a unified and comprehensive view of Isabel's situation; most of all, they betray the presence of a narrator constructing and shaping his character's mind. Such intrusions place the reader a step

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further from Isabel by acknowledging that she is, despite her lifelike-ness, a work of art. The vigil chapter is an impressive achievement because James blends several modes of perception within the strata of the language.

In fact, Isabel's meditation is such an achievement that it stands apart from the rest of the novel; although James saw it as "only a supreme illustration of the general plan," nothing else in the novel approaches the vigil's depth in depicting the consciousness. Taylor, for example, calls Chapter 42 a "tour-de-force" dominating the novel but not fully integrated into it.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps this chapter's domination is justifiable, considering its importance in the narrative: it summarizes and intensifies Isabel's situation, and accomplishes this by her own perceptions, giving the reader the opportunity to experience the atmosphere of her mind. In later works, however, having refined the technique of consciousness, James presents such passages as more uniform parts of the narrative. Nevertheless, the vigil chapter demonstrates both the essence and power of this technique.

For all its achievements, though, the vigil chapter does have flaws in its depiction of consciousness, flaws which James will correct in subsequent years. The most apparent one is the presence of the narrator who steps between character and reader. In one sense, this intrusion is consonant with the structure of the novel; it ensures that the reader can never ignore the artifice in the art of the novel. Even so, the narrator's intrusion undercuts the primary purpose of using the center of consciousness--the intense experience of a character's perception. As close as the reader comes to knowing Isabel--

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and James wants the reader to have that intimate knowledge--there always remains the very real barrier of art between Isabel and the reader.

Another feature of James's portrayal of consciousness, particularly in the vigil, but generally throughout the novel, is that the character must be isolated in order for consciousness to have free rein. James pointed in the Preface to Isabel's "motionlessly seeing" as one of the triumphs of the meditation, yet his statement implies that the character must be separated from people and action for the consciousness to function. And, despite James's avowal that Isabel's "inward life" "remains perfectly normal,"<sup>43</sup> the mental activity described in the vigil is anything but normal: "Her mind, assailed by visions, was in a state of extraordinary activity;" "her soul was haunted with terrors" (pp. 401, 395). In Roderick Hudson, one of the problems with the presentation of consciousness was the failure to register the impact of experience upon the perceiving consciousness. The pressure of circumstance brings Isabel to a point where her thoughts have a life of their own, and it transforms her mind from the garden of Chapter 6 (p. 50) to the haunted house of Chapter 42. Importantly, however, Chapter 42 does not represent the normal flow of Isabel's consciousness: her consciousness depicted during the vigil is feverish, hyperactive, and disassociated from the ordinary pace of life and the novel. In the retrospective view of the Preface, James regarded the vigil chapter as an example of the "rare chemistry" where the consciousness is transformed into "story."<sup>44</sup> However, the circumstances in which James places that transformation suggest that it would be more accurate

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to consider the vigil as a virtuoso performance incompletely integrated into the novel's texture. The vigil chapter and other uses of centers of consciousness show James trying various strategies to employ the consciousness as a narrative and characterizing mode. Those strategies, though, set that consciousness apart in ways that suggest the necessity for abnormal situations for it to be functional. Nevertheless, James's experiments in The Portrait indicate that he is moving toward new concepts in characterization and narration.

The Portrait of a Lady is influenced--in content, structure, and technique--by James's interest in art. Besides depending almost exclusively on the world of visual art for imagery and metaphor, the novel takes as a major theme the dangers of applying art to life. Specifically, the novel explores the effects of regarding human beings as art objects and the problems created by treating one's life as a work of art. Art necessarily objectifies its subject. The Portrait of a Lady reveals the harm in applying the objectivity of art indiscriminately to life. This is Osmond's sin, and to a degree, part of Isabel's blindness as well.

In spite of the cautionary theme of The Portrait, James envisions the novel itself as visual art. Although using centers of consciousness to bring the characters closer to the reader, James still depends upon an omniscient narrator, albeit in a limited manner, who makes his presence felt--even in scenes where the character's consciousness is most intense. The narrator continually underscores the fact that the illusion of life in the novel is just that--an illusion--by actively shaping narrative and guiding interpretation. As a result, the reader

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cannot make Isabel's and Osmond's mistake by confusing life and art.

Characterization, especially Isabel's, is also influenced by visual art. It is in this novel that James refines the technique of portraiture with its "distinctly painterly objective." Characters do not essentially change; the novel becomes a means by which characters are gradually comprehended. At first glance, this may seem a peculiarly static conception of the novel. But that is not the case in The Portrait, because interest is sustained by progressive revelation about the subject of the portrait, Isabel Archer. And although the novel has several points of view--including an omniscient narrator and Ralph, a center of consciousness--the narration ultimately depends upon Isabel, whose vision is limited. Isabel's limitations lend mystery to the novel's events, although these events are part of Isabel's pre-ordained destiny. More important, though, the gradual reliance on Isabel's point of view creates an increasingly closer relationship between her and the reader. Isabel can be seen most clearly when the reader shares her perception of the world. Granted, nothing new is learned through this shared vision, because it merely illustrates the general, theoretical outlines given in Chapters 3 and 6. And a complex system of prediction, foreshadowing, and analogues contributes to the concept of the portrait by showing that everything is inherent in the character and the work. In essence, The Portrait of a Lady depends upon revelation, not surprise and discovery.

While The Portrait looks backward to James's earlier fiction by virtue of its successful synthesis of painting and fiction, it also indicates the direction in which James will develop his craft. In the

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midnight vigil chapter James relies on the consciousness as a means of narration and characterization. When writing The Portrait, James was unsure about the effectiveness of the consciousness as a technique. In his notebooks, for example, he comments that "the weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological" without enough incident.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the reason, James apparently does not feel confident enough to place the burden of the narrative on a single center of consciousness: he employs two centers and an omniscient narrator. Yet James does move toward greater dependence on one center of consciousness, for Isabel's point of view gradually dominates the novel. This movement, of course, serves James's thematic purposes, but in his later work James abandons shifting points of view for a single center of consciousness, as in The Ambassadors. Significantly, James came to see Isabel's meditation, the most intense presentation of the working of the consciousness, as "obviously the best thing in the book."

The Portrait of a Lady is an important work in the Jamesian canon. It signals the end of his first phase, the early novels focused on the International Theme. This novel also shows James successfully applying painterly techniques to fiction: the effects are apparent in the style, form, and content of The Portrait. But The Portrait indicates new directions in method: in Chapter 42, Isabel's midnight vigil, James demonstrates the manner in which language can be used to communicate several levels of meaning. But he does more. In Isabel's vigil, James develops the consciousness as a means of narration and characterization.

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"The Art of Fiction" (1884),<sup>46</sup> written in response to Walter Besant's lecture to the Royal Academy on "Fiction as One of the Fine Arts," is one of James's most explicit statements of his aesthetic theory. And because the essay relies upon an extensive analogy between the art of the painter and that of the novelist, it can be regarded as the author's commentary on his aims and achievements in The Portrait of a Lady.<sup>47</sup>

"The Art of Fiction" bears the imprint of James's interest in the "L'Art pour l'Art" movement in France during the seventies. James adopts several ideas from the movement: the tendency, for example, to find nature represented in works of art intrinsically more interesting than physical nature itself--Strether sees the French countryside as a Lambinet landscape.<sup>48</sup> More important, James shares the movement's close association of the plastic arts with literature. James's insistence in "The Art of Fiction" that the morality of art is mainly a matter of artistic integrity comes from "L'Art pour l'Art," as does his appropriating the vocabulary of art to describe literature: portrait, tones, values.<sup>49</sup> In the 1884 essay, James takes this association between painter and writer a step further by using it as a defense of the writer's liberty: because there is no such thing as a moral work of art, morality has nothing to do with the novel, thereby freeing the novelist to choose his subject. He refuses to place constraints on the novelist because the novel's purpose is to "attempt to represent life," "the same attempt we see on the canvas of the painter" (p. 378).

James repeatedly stresses the similarities between painter and novelist. For him, the analogy between the two artists is "complete":

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"Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle), is the same, their success is the same" (p. 378). But the similarity most apparent, however, is their "community of method"; "solidity of specification" is where the novelist competes with the painter "in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle" (p. 390). However, James does draw distinctions between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist. Early in the essay, James makes a comparison: "The picture is reality, so the novel is history" (p. 379). In other words, James seems to suggest that the painter is primarily concerned with the tangible, sensual aspects of life, the surface of the human spectacle, while the novelist's subject is the human character as revealed by spectacle--the flow of human thought and emotion. The pictorial elements, which constitute the "air of reality," are crucial to the novelist's art, but the novelist uses these elements as a springboard to discover the essential character beneath the surface. The pictorial surface and character are inextricably intertwined--"What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (p. 392). James gives two examples which demonstrate his distinctly painterly approach to the "illustration of character." He first sketches the "incident" of a woman standing, her hand resting on a table, looking "out at you in a certain way" (p. 393). It is, as James describes it, "an expression of character," but it is also a picture, an image fixed in the mind. More significant, it is a portrait,

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and the novelist's duty is to exploit the tangible surface to reveal character, the woman who looks in a certain way.

James also returns to the novelist's use of the pictorial in his attack upon Besant's declaration that writers must actually experience their subjects, thus barring the young lady from describing garrison life (p. 386). James vehemently disagrees, and emphasizes, in contrast, the need for the writer to have a sensitive eye. He cites the example of an English novelist, "a woman of genius," who could render "the nature and the way of life of the French Protestant youth." Her experience was derived from the visual: understanding youth and Protestantism, she saw a French family gathered around the dinner table, and could experience the personal impression of the character of French Protestant youth beneath the pictorial surface (p. 389). Again, like the woman standing beside the table, the English novelist's French family at dinner is a portrait--both are pictures whose function is to reveal character. Both illustrations have an inner, rather than outer, dynamism, making them very similar to The Portrait of a Lady where the elucidation of character provides the novel's primary movement.

James repeatedly stresses the importance of character--as shown by his two portraits--in "The Art of Fiction." But he focuses his own interest on the consciousness responding to and interpreting experience. In fact, James defines experience pre-eminently in terms of its impact upon the consciousness. Experience, of course, provides the essential material of fiction. But the novelist's "subject" is the manner in which that experience is shaped by the receptive sensibility:

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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 consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the 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, and it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (p. 388)

In a real sense, each human being is an artist of experience, because each shapes the world according to his or her perception and sensibility. "The very atmosphere of the mind" becomes simultaneously the novelist's subject and technique, for above all, the novel is "a personal, a direct impression of life" (p. 385). James defines experience not just as life, but as "feeling, observation, vision" (p. 365), stressing the role of consciousness as a necessary and essential part of experience. In "The Art of Fiction" James clearly signals the importance of the consciousness in fiction. He is not interested in just the raw data of experience, the surface of the human spectacle, the painter's reality; as historian, his interest lies in the process by which the perceptive consciousness receives, organizes, and is itself structured by experience. The relationship between consciousness and experience is a central theme in the early novel Roderick Hudson; this relationship underpins the technique in The Portrait of a Lady. As Viola Winner Hopkins suggests, the center of consciousness performs the function of the painter confronting his subject, thus making the process of seeing James's true subject.<sup>50</sup>

In his first phase, which culminates in The Portrait of a Lady, James conceptualizes the novel in painterly terms. Specifically, James's approach to fiction as a work of visual art results in the

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portrait-novel, where character is not so much developed as it is uncovered. Moreover, he begins the process of refining the center of consciousness as a means of narration and characterization. His development of techniques and strategies to represent that consciousness is incomplete, but Chapter 42 in The Portrait, Isabel's vigil, illustrates the possibilities the center of consciousness offers to fiction. And while "The Art of Fiction," published three years after the completion of The Portrait, can be seen as a statement of James's aesthetic theory, it is important as a commentary on The Portrait, and indicates his commitment to the use of consciousness in his fiction. In the years following the publication of The Portrait, James continually explores the potential of the consciousness, an exploration that will lead him to new methods of representation, and new analogies for the art of fiction.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (1914) in Autobiography, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (London: W. H. Allen, 1956), p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, 1843-1870 (1953; rpt. New York: Avon Books, 1978), p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> James, Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> Tales about art and artists include: "A Landscape Painter" (1866), "The Story of a Masterpiece" (1868), "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux" (1873), "The Last of the Valerii" (1874), "The Liar" (1888), "The Real Thing" (1892), "Glasses" (1896), and "The Beldonald Holbein" (1901). Titles of James's non-fiction also indicate his interest in art: Transatlantic Sketches (1875), Portraits of Places (1883), Partial Portraits (1888), and Picture and Text (1893).

<sup>5</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Company, 1911), p. 384.

<sup>6</sup> Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert," in French Novelists and Poets (1878; rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), pp. 201-202.

<sup>7</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 384.

<sup>8</sup> James, "Honore de Balzac," in French Novelists and Poets, pp. 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> Lyall Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1963); David Gervais, Flaubert and Henry James: A Study in Contrasts (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978); Philip Grover, Henry James and the French Novel: A Study in Inspiration (London: Elek Books, Ltd., 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Henry James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," in The Art of the Novel, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 42. James justified putting "the cart before the horse" (p. 44) by noting that Ivan Turgenev frequently started his novels with the idea of a character en disponibilité, and not with a plot or a sense of setting.

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- 11 Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1964), p. 39.
- 12 James, Preface to "Roderick Hudson," p. 4. James wrote Watch and Ward in 1870; when revising it for publication in book form in 1878 he described it as "very thin and as 'cold' as an icicle" (Leon Edel, Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1881 (1962; rpt. New York: Avon Books, 1978), p. 45).
- 13 James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 40.
- 14 James Kraft, The Early Tales of Henry James (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 68.
- 15 Beach, p. 190.
- 16 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (1881; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1963); hereafter cited in text.
- 17 Leon Edel, Introd., The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1963), p. xx.
- 18 Leon Edel, Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1881, p. 426.
- 19 Laurence B. Holland, The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 43.
- 20 Beach, p. 35.
- 21 Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 109.
- 22 Richard Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 185.
- 23 James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 48.
- 24 That the artist interprets personality instead of imitating the physical likeness is made clear in a later tale, "The Liar" (1888). The tale describes the essential blindness of an artist, Lyon, who paints a portrait of Major Capadose which unmasks the Major's terrible propensity for telling tall stories.

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25 James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 46.

26 Tony Tanner, "The Fearful Self," The Critical Quarterly, 7 (1965), 205-219; rpt. in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of The Portrait of a Lady, ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 77.

27 Grover, p. 31.

28 Beach, p. 38.

29 Walter Isle, Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels 1896-1901 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 15-16.

30 Gordon O. Taylor, The Passages of Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 81.

31 Taylor, p. 52. Taylor criticizes James's use of the center of consciousness: "The actual movements of [Rowland Mallet's] consciousness are diluted by abstraction and by frequent blending into the solution of James's presence as an author," and notes that Mallet's consciousness "remains essentially unaffected by the pressure of circumstance" although a theme is "the impact of changed environment."

32 James also depends on other centers of consciousness, when none of the "narrators" can be present. The meeting during which Osmond discards Madame Merle is seen through Merle's eyes. James was aware that this broke the unity of the narration, but included the scene despite misgivings because he felt it essential to an understanding of Madame Merle's and Osmond's natures.

33 Ora Segal, The Lucid Reflector: The Observer in Henry James's Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 54.

34 Segal, p. 40.

35 Beach, pp. 190, 195.

36 Taylor, p. 69.

37 Segal, p. 40.

38 James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," p. 57.

39 James, Preface, p. 57.

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- <sup>40</sup> John Halperin, The Language of Meditation: Four Studies in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Elms Court, Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., 1973), p. 129.
- <sup>41</sup> Halperin, pp. 130-131.
- <sup>42</sup> Taylor, p. 72.
- <sup>43</sup> James, Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady," pp. 56-57.
- <sup>44</sup> James, Preface, p. 56.
- <sup>45</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 15.
- <sup>46</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Company, 1911), pp. 375-408; hereafter cited in text. "The Art of Fiction" first appeared in Longman's Magazine in September, 1884; James subsequently included it in Partial Portraits--note the painterly title.
- <sup>47</sup> For example, F. O. Matthiessen in referring to "The Art of Fiction" notes: "Composed three or four years after he had brought his method to maturity with The Portrait of a Lady, many of its passages, particularly those on the interrelation between character and action, seem surely to have been written with that novel in mind" (The James Family: A Group Biography (1947; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 349).
- <sup>48</sup> Grover, p. 124. In his study, Henry James and the French Novel, Philip Grover details the particular influences that Balzac, Zola, Daudet, and Flaubert exerted on James.
- <sup>49</sup> Grover, p. 121.
- <sup>50</sup> Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 68.

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### CHAPTER III

#### The Dramatic Side of Human Situations

With some reservation, James's contemporaries generally acknowledge The Portrait of a Lady as "an important work" because it represents the perfecting of "the analytical method in novel-writing," finer and closer in workmanship than anything Mr. James had before done."<sup>1</sup> The Portrait secures James's reputation, not only as master of portraying the "mixture of manners" on the international scene,<sup>2</sup> but as craftsman of a new form, the psychological novel. Despite this security, however, James feels more than ever "the impulse to experiment." "God knows that I have now no time to waste," so James confides to his notebook on November 25, 1881.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-eight years old, James is acutely aware of the quickly passing years and of the changing of his personal world: George Eliot and Gustave Flaubert, major influences on James's work, died in 1881. The next few years will more radically alter that world: James's parents die in 1882; Ivan Turgenev--friend, idol, and mentor--will die in 1883. James's past is literally disappearing; approaching middle age, James feels not only the pressure of time and the weight of "lost impressions," but also the impulse to "try experiments of form," the need to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to perfecting his art.

During the years between completing The Portrait of a Lady in 1881 and beginning The Bostonians, which appears in February, 1885, James wrote eight tales.<sup>4</sup> In many respects, these tales are firmly

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rooted in James's past work: they continue his use of the International Theme, and they employ narrative techniques--authorial omniscience and intrusion, and overt manipulation of the narrative--that James depends upon in The Portrait of a Lady. Yet the tales represent departures from that past work. The International Theme now offers James an opportunity to criticize American and British societies, and James increasingly turns to national types as a medium for this criticism. More important, James refines his use of the center of consciousness as a vehicle for narration and characterization in order to achieve a more dramatic presentation of his material.

James employed the center for both narration and characterization in The Portrait of a Lady. In that novel, the center of consciousness develops the character who functions as center: when Isabel is treated as a center, the reader directly experiences Isabel's perception of the world, thereby deepening the reader's understanding and appreciation of her as character and heroine. In the tales of the early eighties that do involve a center of consciousness,<sup>5</sup> the center becomes the sole means by which the heroine is characterized and developed. Indeed, this objective treatment of the heroine is a hallmark of most of James's fiction during the eighties; he rigorously avoids "going behind" the main female characters of the tales and the three major novels. The center, always a male, registers the external details of the heroine and attempts to comprehend and explain her often puzzling behavior. In many cases, the observing and interpreting center stands as the author's deputy, enabling James to minimize his authorial intrusions.

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This use of the center of consciousness--particularly in "The Siege of London" (1883), "Lady Barberina" (1884), and "Pandora" (1884)<sup>6</sup>--gives James's fiction dramatic immediacy. It is true that in these tales James still turns to traditional methods of narration; the techniques of the tales do not represent radical departures from the techniques of James's past work. Despite this reliance on old techniques, these three tales reveal James giving the center of consciousness increasingly greater roles in narrating and characterizing. James strives for Turgenev's dramatic ideal to let "situations speak for themselves." Because the heroine is projected through another character, the center, rather than being sketched by the author, the heroine is seen in a manner similar to that of an actress on stage. The heroines of these tales--and of most of the fiction of the eighties--are characterized through external details--clothing, speech, actions. But because characterization is accomplished through a center, James's heroines assume greater depth and richness of character than ordinarily possible with objective portraiture. Moreover, because the main character is projected through another character in the narrative, James endows the heroine's characterization with dramatic tension: throughout the tale, the reader remains in suspense about the heroine's true nature. In contrast to Isabel Archer, whom James sketched in a single couple in the opening chapters of The Portrait, the heroines of these tales are developed gradually, almost haphazardly. The center does not possess full knowledge of the heroine; he must gradually piece together and make sense of her; it is only until the end of the tale that both the reader and the center can fully comprehend the heroine. In "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," and "Pandora," James

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presents his heroines dramatically, that is, in a manner which mimics the development of character on the stage.

Drama pervades the 1883 tale, "The Siege of London." First published in Cornhill Magazine, January-February 1883, "The Siege of London" continues James's examination of international manners. Edel speculates that "The Siege" is symptomatic of James's "disenchantment with English society" and his suspicion that he was taken up, like his heroine Nancy Headway, because he was entertaining.<sup>7</sup> Whatever James's motives, it is clear that he is critical of English society: the tale subtly questions whether or not gaining admission to a society which is "'bad manners organized'" is much of an achievement.<sup>8</sup>

The International Theme provides a background of dramatic contrast;<sup>9</sup> the tale's basic issue concerns a gentleman's duty to "tell" on a lady, leaving aside for the moment Mrs. Headway's dubious claim to being a lady. James's emphasis is on the conflict that occurs in the minds of the tale's two observers, Littlemore and Waterville, when they are called upon to defend Mrs. Headway's respectability. The observers' "moral dilemma" is, of course, not terribly complex, arising as it does from a comedy of manners. However, "The Siege of London"<sup>10</sup> is an important tale, not only for its treatment of international contrasts, but for James's use of the consciousness as the stage for the tale's conflict.

The tale depicts Nancy Headway's "siege" of London society, which takes the concrete form of her determination to marry into an aristocratic family so that Mrs. Headway can "snap" her fingers at New York, where she has been snubbed. But Nancy Headway is not respectable: she

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has been divorced so often that "there was one winter when [Nancy's sister] didn't know herself who was Nancy's husband" (p. 24). Mrs. Headway's siege gradually involves the tale's two observers--Littlemore, who knows Mrs. Headway's past, and Waterville, who regards her aspirations ambivalently--particularly when they are called upon to vouch for her respectability. In the end, Littlemore recognizes "the need to utter the simple truth" (p. 109), but his avowal does not hinder Mrs. Headway's campaign. Nancy Headway, now Lady Demesne, has only one regret: "If she had only come to London five years sooner she might have married a duke" (p. 91).

"The Siege of London" is inspired, as James notes in the New York Edition Preface, by the 1877 performance at the Théâtre Français of "Le Demi-Monde" by Dumas fils, a pièce bien faite delineating the unsuccessful siege of Madame d'Ange, an actress who is ultimately exposed by the hero, Olivier de Jalin.<sup>11</sup> Not mentioned in the Preface is another source, Augier's "L'Aventurière," a pièce bien faite with a similar plot. Both plays figure prominently in James's tale; not only do they supply the basic plot, but they provide the American observers with standards against which they measure their own gentlemanly behavior. Yet James diverges from his French models, for Augier's and Dumas's plays focus upon the fate of the disreputable woman who seeks admission to respectable society. Instead, James stresses the "moral" situation of the two Americans who know Mrs. Headway's past and must decide whether or not to use that knowledge.

"The Siege's" relationships to the pièce bien faite in general and Dumas's and Augier's works in particular are examined by Alfred

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Habegger in the only study of this tale--for "The Siege," like so many of James's tales, has been ignored by critics and scholars. Habegger recognizes that James shifts the focus of his tale to the minds of his observers, prompting Habegger to conclude "how little the muse of Henry James had in common with the arts of Scribe," and to wonder "why James ever supposed that his own siege of the London stage could possibly succeed."<sup>12</sup> Habegger's speculations aside, James's linking of the pièce bien faite with his interest in the "psychological reason" exemplifies his dedication to applying dramatic principles to methods of fiction.

The influences of the French models are apparent from the tale's opening. Littlemore and Waterville are attending the Comédie Française to compare Augier's treatment of the adventuress with Dumas's, which they had seen earlier. It is at the Comédie Française that they meet James's adventuress, Nancy Headway, who perhaps recognizes her own affinities with Madame d'Ange because Mrs. Headway wants "to see what becomes of that woman" (p. 21). By initiating his tale with references to the two French plays, James forecasts the movement, though not the outcome, of Mrs. Headway's siege and his own comedy of manners. And at the end of the tale, when the success of Mrs. Headway's campaign is virtually assured, the two Americans turn to the French plays when they debate preventing Mrs. Headway's breach of respectable society. Waterville, for example, urges Littlemore to play the part of Olivier de Jalin or Don Fabrice (Dumas's and Augier's heroes, respectively), and to "step in and push her back" (p. 101). Waterville himself, despite his earlier sympathy with Mrs. Headway's ambitions, sounds

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like the two French heroes when he convinces himself that "Mrs. Headway oughtn't really to be allowed to pass" (p. 101). And in abandoning sympathy for his countrywoman, Waterville assumes distance and detachment as if he views her situation from a balcony of the Théâtre Français: he "had the air of looking at the thing from a great elevation; his tone, the expression of his face, indicated this lofty flight" (p. 101).

James uses the French plays as framing devices: mention of the two plays encloses the tale in the same manner that "that solemn piece of upholstery, the curtain of the Comédie Française" (p. 13), opens and closes each act. The French dramas do more, however, than serve as unifying structural devices. As Rupert Waterville's convictions indicate, the two Americans adopt the plays as moral yardsticks against which they measure their obligations as gentlemen. The two Americans must look to European sources for a code of conduct, for the chivalry of America, where a gentleman never "tells" on a lady, is insufficient for European situations. Both Littlemore and Waterville, like Mrs. Dolphin, Littlemore's sister who has become Anglicized, feel they must protect British society from the incursions of the Nancy Headways. Thus, in the end Littlemore, like his French model Olivier de Jalin, must denounce Mrs. Headway, if only to vindicate Lady Demesne. "Le Demi-Monde" and "L'Aventurière" provide the Americans with a moral code, and in doing so emphasize James's ironic attitude toward American and European manners. America, although it creates characters like Nancy Headway, whose "Americanisms" entertain British aristocracy, can also produce gentlemen more chivalrous and gallant than Europe. In contrast, European behavior, despite the outward appearance of mannerly forms, is governed by the most basic sense of self-preservation, thinly

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masked by manners. Ironic, too, is the quickness with which James's observers adopt European values in spite of their American egalitarianism, so that in the end both see it their duty to "tell" on Nancy Headway. "The Siege of London," although primarily a comedy of manners, reveals how thin the veneer of manners is; it exposes the hypocrisy of the forms of polite behavior.

The French plays, by providing the characters' code of conduct, serve James's purpose in criticizing society, but they also reveal James's admiration for the pièce bien faite. Although James strips his tale of outward, visible action--Habegger compares the tale's inaction with the stalemate of a besieged city<sup>13</sup>--the observers' mental and moral conflict animates the tale. James focuses that conflict within the consciousness of the diplomat Rupert Waterville, and by doing so, endows "The Siege" with a dramatic quality. Yet James does not depend completely upon the center of consciousness for his narrative method; he relies upon authorial omniscience as well as intruding himself into the narrative. Indeed, the treatment of these two observers offers a comparison of James's use of omniscience and the center of consciousness, because James develops Littlemore omnisciently while he casts Waterville as center. In Chapter 1 of the tale, the author summarizes Littlemore's past and his acquaintance with Mrs. Headway. This is similar to the opening chapters of The Portrait, where Isabel's character is sketched in full; in the tale, of course, it is not so lengthy, but it serves as providing a fairly complete sketch of the character from the author's viewpoint. James merely records Littlemore's reactions; in describing the contrast between Waterville, new to Paris

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and filled with curiosity, Littlemore is blasé:

He rarely indulged in these optical excursions; he had been a great deal in Paris and had ceased to care about it, or wonder about it, much; he fancied that the French capital could have no more surprises for him, though it had a good many in former days.  
(p. 14)

James describes Littlemore's attitudes, not immediate and fresh impressions, but the result of experience acquired throughout the years. Moreover, these are rather generalized observations--the passage above does not contain any detail, any specific reference; it foreshortens time because it precisely is a summation of Littlemore's feelings.

Compare James's treatment of Littlemore's attitudes with that of Rupert Waterville. Nancy Headway and Rupert Waterville have been invited as weekend guests at Lady Demesne's; the following passage describes Mrs. Headway's shock at seeing Waterville at the dinner table:

Mrs. Headway gave Waterville no greeting; she evidently had not seen him till they were seated at table, when she simply stared at him with a violence of surprise that for a moment almost effaced her smile. It was a copious and well-ordered banquet, but as Waterville looked up and down the table he wondered whether some of its elements might not be a little dull. As he made this reflection he became conscious that he was judging the affair much more from Mrs. Headway's point of view than from his own. (p. 71)

In contrast to the description of Littlemore's thoughts, this passage shows Waterville in the act of registering impressions; the movement of the passage reflects the movement of Waterville's consciousness as it observes and interprets. More important, the mental functions recorded in this passage are used as a vehicle to reveal an aspect of Mrs. Headway's character--"she simply stared at him with a violence of surprise that for a moment almost effaced her smile."

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Clearly James is not the speaker in this passage: the observations are Waterville's. It is true that in comparison with James's later refinements of the center of consciousness, the passage quoted above is awkward with the preponderance of verbs denoting mental process--wonder, reflect, become conscious, judge. But it is equally true that both the content and method of the passage is quite different from James's treatment of Littlemore's thoughts. In Rupert Waterville, James practices the center of consciousness technique, while he tends to rely on omniscience for developing Littlemore.

James "goes behind," one way or another, his two observers, but he treats Nancy Headway, the "heroine" of "The Siege," dramatically. She is rendered through the two observers, and each of them illuminates different facets of her character depending on James's approach to each observer. Littlemore, developed omnisciently, fills in Mrs. Headway's background and supplies proof of the heroine's lack of respectability. And because James relies on omniscience for Littlemore, this character's rendering of Mrs. Headway is somewhat impersonal resulting in his offering a detached, though not objective, view of Nancy Headway,

Rupert Waterville, whose point of view as center of consciousness dominates the tale's middle (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7), offers a more sympathetic treatment of Mrs. Headway's character. First of a respectable line of Jamesian diplomats,<sup>14</sup> Waterville as newly-appointed secretary of the American legation is more sensitive and observant than the jaded Littlemore. Waterville demonstrates his sensitivity: Littlemore is impatient and frustrated with Mrs. Headway--"he was tired to death of her past" (p. 93)--while Waterville feels

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that "he at last, in the light of that smile, the flash of that almost fierce question, understood Mrs. Headway" (p. 58). Waterville provides a generally sympathetic view of Mrs. Headway, sympathetic until the end when Lady Demesne reveals how crude and provincial Nancy really is.

Because the heroine is characterized through the center of consciousness and James's omniscient treatment of Littlemore, she is the most intriguing character in "The Siege of London." Her presence provokes a mixture of feelings from her observers--they almost admire her bold plan to conquer London society though they deplore her glaring lack of sophistication. Indeed, through Nancy Headway Habegger detects in James ambivalent feeling which exemplify his complex relation to America.<sup>15</sup> But the method in which Mrs. Headway's character is cast enhances the interest created by her. Unlike the male observers, whose thoughts are accessible, Mrs. Headway is seen from the outside: her feelings must be inferred from her words and actions; the reader, like the two Americans, must try to understand her from external evidence. Mrs. Headway is presented dramatically. In the tale, she is literally on stage; the two Americans watch to see if her siege will be successful. Her character, too, develops in much the same way an actor creates character, for James rigorously avoids "going behind" her. Yet, because she is projected through the sympathetic consciousness of Waterville, Mrs. Headway assumes a richer dimension of character than possible on stage.

Moreover, by developing Mrs. Headway's character through the perceptions of other characters, James endows his heroine with dramatic tension--tension because her character is not quickly sketched in and

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developed--as is Littlemore, whose past is described by an omniscient narrator. Instead, knowledge of Mrs. Headway is gradually pieced together with evidence derived from several sources which include characters with limited perspectives. This method of characterization creates a sense of complexity and interest within a character who is basically simple; it gives more importance to that character by virtue of her place within the narrative--the focus of all the characters' attention--rather than by personality. Mrs. Headway "becomes" the central character because she is the subject of Littlemore's and Waterville's speculations; she is the central character because she is the focus of their moral dilemma.

In this tale, then, the center of consciousness has two functions: it presents Nancy Headway's character dramatically, and it is the stage upon which the moral question of the tale is dramatized and decided. In so using the center of consciousness, James enriches the typical intrigue plot, a standard form of the pièce bien faite,<sup>16</sup> by casting it as a dilemma of manners within the framework of "emphasized internationalism." And by using the center to develop character, James explores, at least partially, the dramatic potential the technique offers for his fiction.

One interesting aspect of the society James depicts in "The Siege of London" is the sense that the women are stronger characters than the men. Mrs. Headway, loud, crude, and provincial, nonetheless wins her siege with a native vigor suggested by her name. The other important woman in the tale, Lady Demesne, "a woman still young and fair, with a good deal of height, gentle, tranquil, plainly dressed, yet distinctly imposing" (p. 59), embodies the dignity of the old

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landed aristocracy implicit in her title. She, too, is powerful, because she forces Waterville and Littlemore into their gentlemanly dilemma by asking them to vouch for Mrs. Headway's respectability. In contrast to these vivid women, the male characters are pallid and weak: Sir Arthur, Mrs. Headway's baronet, is quiet, short, controlled by women; Waterville and Littlemore, whose pejorative names bespeak their weakness, are indecisive and ultimately ineffectual in stopping Mrs. Headway.

Women are in control of the societies shown in "Lady Barberina,"<sup>17</sup> first published in Century Magazine, May-July 1884. The men are "elaborately decorative," but the women, with "[t]heir hard little helmets; their neat, compact heads; their straight necks; their firm, tailor-made armour; their blooming, competent physique" look like "amazons about to ride a charge" (p. 200). That the women are characters to be reckoned with is borne out by the events of the tale. Jackson Lemon, hero of "Lady Barberina," discovers himself at the mercy of his wife and his mother-in-law, despite his determination to be firmly in the saddle.

"Lady Barberina" continues James's exploration of "emphasized internationalism" by portraying a variation of the international marriage. Instead of the American girl marrying into European society, Jackson Lemon, a wealthy American doctor, marries Lady Barberina, daughter of the Cantervilles and "product of the English climate and the British constitution" (p. 251). In its day, "Lady Barberina" was influential: it provoked Oscar Wilde to write "The Canterville Ghost" in 1887; in William Dean Howells's A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890),

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the characters debate opening a salon "'like poor Lady Barberina!'"<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the tale's contemporary popularity, it has failed to attract extensive critical attention, although it has not been neglected to the degree that "The Siege" has. Ora Segal and Mary Doyle Springer, for example, devote chapter-length discussions to it: Segal examines the minor characters as reflectors while Springer demonstrates that "Lady Barberina" is "an inductive kind of fable."<sup>19</sup> The tale has also inspired two recent articles, by Elsa Nettels and Adeline Tintner, on James's "idea of race," which figures prominently in "Lady Barberina."<sup>20</sup> Tintner's article in particular is a valuable study of the tale, because she sees the horsemanship metaphors as vehicles for James's criticism of English and American societies--a view which both Mary Doyle Springer and Leon Edel ignore.

Indeed, the tale focuses upon the limitations of both societies, and in doing so continues James's critique of and disenchantment with the notion of "getting into society" investigated in "The Siege of London." Through "horsey" metaphors, James depicts British society as superficial, materialistic, and intellectually narrow, and exposes American society, with its need to acquire the "look of race," to be equally shallow and grasping in its attempt to spend new fortunes buying vitiated traditions.<sup>21</sup> James's treatment of characterization supports his aim of social criticism. Lady Barb, who gives her name to the tale, is virtually reduced to a type; as James explains in the New York Edition Preface:

The contrast in "Lady Barbarina" depends altogether on the immitigable Anglicism of this young woman. . . . She has her personal qualities, but the very interest, the very curiosity of the matter is that her imbroglio

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is able to attest itself with scarce so much as a reference to them. It plays itself out quite consistently on the plane of her general, her instinctive, her exasperatedly conscious ones.<sup>22</sup>

James casts Lady Barb as a one-dimensional character; Springer, using Sheldon Sacks's terminology, calls her an apologue, a character whose realism is developed just short of the dominant didactic emphasis of the work.<sup>23</sup> Lady Barb is seen primarily through the eyes of Jackson Lemon, her suitor and ultimately her husband. James explains in the Preface that the one "fine-drawn" quality of her character is her caring for Lemon;<sup>24</sup> otherwise, her characteristics are simple, frequently approaching an almost animal dumbness. Lady Barb's most distinguishing physical trait is a revealing beauty which is "simple and robust," having "the quietness of an old Greek statue;" "her head was antique" (p. 223), but her quiet eyes "were as beautiful as if they had been blank, like those of antique busts" (p. 290). She is not strikingly clever (p. 223), that "so long as she didn't hunt, it didn't much matter what she did" (p. 267). Animal-like, she is "filled with a dumb, insuperable, ineradicable purpose"--for her husband, Lady Barb's "antique beauty" is "but the magnificent expression of a dense, patient, imperturbable obstinacy" (p. 227). Beyond these descriptions, Lady Barb is little characterized; indeed, in the tale James so finely draws Barb's "caring" for her husband that it is barely perceptible.

For the most part, James projects Lady Barb's characterization through the consciousness of Jackson Lemon; what the reader sees and learns of Lady Barb is from Lemon's point of view. However, in the tale James uses a variety of narrative modes, and perhaps one of the more interesting features of the tales is that whatever Lady Barb's

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limitations, she does function briefly as a center of consciousness. During the first half of part 6, when Lemon brings up the subject of Lady Barb's opening a "saloon," the reader glimpses briefly into Lady Barb's mind. This glimpse underscores her limitations: regarding the "saloon," "she had never seen one, and for the most part she never thought of things she had not seen" (p. 288). Along with her poverty of imagination, Lady Barb's conception of social skills regarding a "saloon" is peculiarly lacking:

Conversation, in Lady Barb's experience, had never been continuous; in such a case it would surely have been a bore. It had been occasional and fragmentary, a trifle jerky, with allusions that were never explained; it had a dread of detail; it seldom pursued anything very far, or kept hold of it very long.  
(p. 288)

The last sentence quoted above, in fact, vividly captures the texture of Lady Barb's mind; it is "a trifle jerky," lacking continuity and detail, and it does not--nor cannot--pursue anything very far.

Although Lady Barb's functioning as a center emphasizes her limitations, it also becomes a vantage point for James's criticism of American society. Again, in reference to Lemon's wish for an "Anglo-American saloon" Lady Barb envisions "familiarity, high-pitched talk . . . and exaggerated laughter" (p. 287). That vigorous crudity of New York and America, for Lady Barb, is embodied in the "brilliant, bristling Mrs. Vanderdecken" who is "young, pretty, clever, absurdly pretentious (Lady Barb thought), and had a wonderfully artistic house" (p. 289). Mrs. Vanderdecken establishes herself as Lady Barb's rival: "Ambition, also, was expressed in every rustle of her garments; and if she was the first person in America (this had an immense sound),

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it was plain she intended to remain so" (p. 288). Lady Barb views America simplistically, but her limited perspective is appropriate to her characterization as a type. And, the simplicity of Lady Barb's perspective enables James to criticize American society without his intruding satire in the text. The picture of American society and its shortcomings is dramatically presented through the character of Lady Barb, even while those shortcomings reinforce her own limitations as a character.

Lady Barb's consciousness, briefly employed in the tale, functions as an important part of James's critique of American society and thus contributes to balancing the reader's sympathy: James is critical of both the Americans and the English. But James provides an even more devastating portrait of the two societies through Jackson Lemon, whose perspective dominates the tale. Indeed, Lady Barberina's characterization is achieved through Lemon's view of her, and what he sees to the exclusion of all other qualities is her "look of race" which he hopes will be apparent in his brood (p. 223). Lemon reduces Lady Barb to a type, and because he sees her only as a "daughter of the Crusaders" (p. 250), "a flower of an ancient stem [to] be worn upon his own breast" (p. 268), and "a product of the English climate and the British constitution" (p. 251), it is consistent that he would be "very much astonished" at Lady Barb's "irritation" at Mrs. Vanderdecken's ambitions (p. 289)--that Barb would feel anything.

Despite Jackson Lemon's tendency to regard Lady Barb as a beautiful specimen and possession, James's protagonist is one of the more finely drawn characters in the tale. Lemon's characterization worried James. In the notebook entry for the tales James decided that "the

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thing is to make the marriage with Lady B. seem natural and possible to my hero, without making him appear snobbish."<sup>25</sup> Again, in the Preface, James acknowledged the focus of his tale to be the young doctor. Because "shades" would not be part of Lady Barb's characterization, James "somehow quite took for granted the getting of [the] young woman," but "Jackson Lemon and his shades, comparatively, and his comparative sense of shades" most interested James.<sup>26</sup> James dealt with this problem, at least in part, by projecting the tale primarily through Lemon's consciousness. Because he functions as a center of consciousness, Lemon necessarily assumes more depth of character. Moreover, Lemon's situation continually forces him into making decisions between contradictory impulses: he initially refuses to cooperate with the Cantervilles' condition of a marriage settlement, yet Mrs. Freer's regarding his marriage as "unnatural" and unlikely to be successful motivates Lemon to acquiesce to the Cantervilles. Again, in America Lemon is determined to plant his "flower of an ancient stem" in the New World. He is forced, however, to return to England because he must not appear to be on the newspapers' side when Lady Agatha, Barb's sister, elopes with Mr. Longstraw and her coup de tête is "emblazoned in enormous capitals" in the Western papers (p. 299). Because Lemon is confronted with conflicting interests and impulses, his character becomes more complex than that of Lady Barb, who is possessed of a dumb and obstinate single-mindedness.

Yet, to a certain degree Lemon is as much a type as his wife, Lady Barb. One of the central motivations of his character is typical American acquisitiveness: he desires to make Lady Barb his possession

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precisely because she exemplifies venerable traditions lacking in America. In his own way, Lemon is proud; he is determined that his millions can buy him anything, even race--he considers himself the "heir of all the ages" (p. 259), an idea suggesting that America, with all the benefits of the ages but without its drawbacks--"the fogs and the Queen" (p. 294)--epitomizes human civilization. And as Segal notes, Lemon's manner of viewing the question of the marriage settlement "has the value of an American criticism of an English tradition but is also an exemplification of the fatal American 'simplicity.'"<sup>27</sup>

James's use of the center of consciousness in this tale marks "Lady Barberina" as one of the more interesting technical experiments of the early eighties. James depends upon the center as his primary narrative mode, although typically he includes a variety of methods as well. Because James's purpose in "Lady Barberina" is to provide a balanced critique of both societies, these methods carefully control the reader's sympathy and judgment. An omniscient narrator paints the subordinate characters, particularly the "Greek chorus" of the Freers. (The Freers themselves, by the way, divide their sympathies: Mr. Freer encourages Lemon in his "international project," while Mrs. Freer is distinctly pessimistic about the prospects for an "unnatural" marriage.) James also directly intrudes into the narrative, yet his authorial presence is confined to the tale's beginning and conclusion, where he addresses the reader. James's intrusions are functional: at the opening of the tale, direct address is a device that quickly involves the reader with the narrative. By this means James leads the reader into the perspective of the individual character, moving from

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observers, the Freers, to the participants, Jackson Lemon and Lady Barberina. At the end of the tale, James intrudes again, to begin distancing the reader from his characters. Yet James's intrusion here is different from that at the tale's beginning. The final paragraphs assume a tone that mixes the impersonal newspaper report--"the international project has not . . . received an impetus"--with the gossipy society column--"Lady Agatha Longstraw and her husband arrived a year ago in England, and Mr. Longstraw's personality had an immense success during the last London season" (pp. 300, 301).<sup>28</sup> James's intrusion and the resulting distance between narrative and reader contribute to the balance James wishes to strike between the two cultures. In the end, "Lady Barberina" exposes the tradition-bound emptiness of English society and the acquisitiveness and competitiveness of American society.

James dramatizes this critique by depending upon the perspective of his central characters. It is not the author who articulates the critical perspective on the two societies; rather, the shortcomings of the American wealthy and the English aristocracy are presented through the characters' viewpoints. In this tale, James's strategy in employing this method in the critique is immensely effective. Lemon, for example, takes his ideas about "race" most seriously--and the reader is depended upon to judge both the shallowness of the English race and the foolishness of Lemon's ideas. James thus achieves pointed criticism without having to be intrusively satirical. Likewise, James can unmask American society simply by projecting the predatory Mrs. Vanderdecken through Lady Barb's bewildered consciousness, a tactic again obviating the author's need to editorialize.

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At the same time James criticizes, he also characterizes dramatically through the center of consciousness. Lemon's need to acquire Lady Barb for her look of race reveals more about Lemon as a character than it does about the constituents of the English aristocracy--without the author explaining and organizing. Similarly, Barb's revulsion at "screeching" American women and her lack of imagination further develop her character, although well within the limitations of her portrayal as a type. Segal notes that with the dramatic passages--the consciousness of Lady Barb and Jackson Lemon--James invites the reader to view the impersonal international "experiment" as a personal entanglement; by using the center of consciousness, James manages to humanize his type-cast characters so that to a certain degree the reader can become personally involved.<sup>29</sup> In this manner, then, "Lady Barberina" is not simply a parable. James creates characters who are essentially types but who can also function simultaneously as individuals.

In this tale, one of the longer ones written during the early eighties, James employs a variety of narrative methods. But in contrast to "The Siege of London," James depends upon the center of consciousness as his major narrative mode in "Lady Barberina." Such is his skill with this method that James is able to dramatize his major characters and his critique of English and American society. Indeed, "Lady Barberina" attests to James's refinement of the center of consciousness as a means of dramatically presenting character and theme.

James continues both his social criticism and his refinement of the center of consciousness method when he attempts, in 1884, to reach a new audience by writing tales for the newspapers. Two tales were the product of this effort: "Georgina's Reasons," a sensationalistic

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tale of bigamy and child-neglect, and "Pandora," which ran in the New York Sun June 1 and 8, 1884.<sup>30</sup> James thought highly enough of the latter tale to revise and include it in the New York Edition. Unfortunately, however, it has suffered, as many of James's other tales, from critical neglect. Perhaps critics take their cue from James himself, who dismisses the tale in his Preface to "Daisy Miller" by suggesting that the American girl's evolution has passed Pandora by: "the Pandora Days can no longer . . . pass for quaint or fresh or for exclusively native to any one tract of Anglo-Saxon soil."<sup>31</sup> Yet as Leon Edel notes, it is important in the Jamesian canon, for it is the last tale in James's international series of the seventies and eighties, and it contains cameo appearance by Henry and Clover Adams in the Bonnycastles.<sup>32</sup> "Pandora" repays study; it merits attention by virtue of its content, form, and technique.

As the last tale in the long international series, "Pandora" continues James's critique of society--albeit in milder, more genial vein than "The Siege of London" and "Lady Barberina"--as well as his ongoing development of the center of consciousness as a narrative method. Indeed, the extent to which James has refined his use of the center of consciousness is vividly apparent when "Pandora" is approached as a companion-piece to James's first famous international tale, "Daisy Miller."

James himself suggests the comparison by playing off features of "Daisy Miller" with the 1884 tale. Count Otto Vogelstein, diplomat to the German Embassy in Washington and the tale's center of consciousness, turns to American literature to educate himself about America; it happens that he reads "a Tauschnitz novel by an American author whose

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pages, he had been assured, would help to prepare him" (p. 361). The "Tauschnitz novel" treats "of a flighty, forward little American girl, who plants herself in front of a young man in the garden of an hotel" (p. 363). Vogelstein compares Pandora Day, whom he meets on the ship, to "that unfortunate maid" by seeing Pandora's older brother as "a candy-loving Madison, Hamilton, or Jefferson"--deciding that Mr. Day "was what the little Madison would have grown up to at nineteen" (p. 369). "Daisy Miller" is, of course, Vogelstein's American tale.

In many ways "Pandora" is both a commentary on and counterpoint to "Daisy Miller." Written six years after the tale that made the American Girl famous, "Pandora" examines the evolution of the "flighty, forward little American girl." Pandora Day, the heroine of the tale, is a new type--the "self-made girl"; "she had not been born with the silver spoon of social opportunity; she had grasped it by honest exertion" (p. 397). The tale records the rise of Pandora, and her social successes are registered by Count Otto Vogelstein, who as a diplomat new to the United States, is making serious study of the New World and the American Girl. Vogelstein is a transmutation of the "neat German waiters, who look like secretaries of legation" mentioned in "Daisy Miller."<sup>33</sup> There are other points of comparison: Daisy Miller tours the castle of Chillon with Winterbourne, while Pandora tours the Capitol building with Vogelstein. Indeed, these two incidents, similar though they be, reveal the extent of the American Girl's evolution. Daisy Miller, flighty, forward, capricious in her innocence, is a romantic figure made tragic through society's rejection and her death from malaria. She is thus a victim of both her innocence and her society, and as such assumes a romantic aura similar to that of

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Bonnivard, the prisoner of Chillon. Pandora Day is the antithesis of Daisy Miller; rather than being victimized by her society, she is its cynosure: there are articles about the new type in the newspapers; she has the power to extract promises from "the ruler of fifty millions of people," as Vogelstein quaintly calls the President (p. 389). It is appropriate then that Pandora tours the capital of the nation of self-made men, men who traditionally have transcended their origins in a nation where fortune is not inherited but is grasped by "honest exertion." American evolution--or "American Revolution" as Vogelstein calls it--is embodied in the character of Pandora Day.

Like "Daisy Miller," "Pandora" is a critique of society. In the earlier tale, James exposes the society that creates and destroys Daisy Miller. In "Pandora" social criticism is present, but it is light-hearted. At its most obvious form, James's criticism becomes broad humor, when, for example, Alfred Bonnycastle exclaims "'Hang it, there is only a month left; let us have some fun--let us invite the President!'" (p. 383). James most trenchant criticism is effected through Count Vogelstein, who is bewildered by the existence of invisible classes in a society that proclaims its inherent classlessness. James also shows American society controlled by the young; from the President Pandora wheedles a diplomatic mission for her fiancé. James's good-humored criticism of America is apparent in society's response to Pandora's rise and in the manner in which Vogelstein, observer and outsider, sees that society.

Technically, "Pandora" is significant because it represents James's most consistent use of the center of consciousness in all of the tales of the early eighties. Comparing "Daisy Miller" with

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"Pandora" clearly shows the extent to which James has refined this technique in the 1884 tale. In "Daisy Miller," James relies on omniscience to characterize. Here is James's first description of Daisy Miller:

The young lady meanwhile had drawn near. She was dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-coloured ribbon. She was bare-headed; but she balanced in her hand a large parasol, with a deep border of embroidery; and she was strikingly, admirably pretty. 'How pretty they are!' thought Winterbourne, straightening himself in his seat, as if he were prepared to rise.<sup>34</sup>

It is the author who intrudes, albeit not in the first person, to portray Daisy. The description, though focusing on details like the dress and the parasol, remains fairly general and detached; although the parasol, for example, has a "deep border of embroidery," James specifies neither the colors of the fabric nor of the needlework. There is nothing graphic about this description. And the language of the passage is not individualized; it bears no idiosyncracies of personalized thought or speech. Moreover, James distinguishes between what he is recording in his role of author and what Winterbourne is thinking. James describes Daisy as "admirably pretty;" Winterbourne, whose thought is set off in quotation marks, echoes the author's sentiments: "'How pretty they are!' thought Winterbourne." Clearly, the description that precedes Winterbourne's thought is not a part of Winterbourne's perceptions--both language and punctuation draw clearly defined boundaries between the author's information and the character's response to it.

By contrast, in "Pandora" James gives little information in his own voice, and instead reflects description of the characters,

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particularly that of Pandora, through Vogelstein's consciousness:

His glance was arrested by the figure of a young lady who had just ascended to the deck, and who paused at the mouth of the companion-way. In itself this was not an extraordinary phenomenon; but what attracted Vogelstein's attention was the fact that the young person appeared to have fixed her eyes on him. She was slim, brightly dressed, and rather pretty. Vogelstein remembered in a moment that he had noticed her among the people on the wharf at Southampton. She very soon saw that he was looking at her; whereupon she began to move along the deck with a step which seemed to indicate that she was coming straight towards him. Vogelstein had time to wonder whether she could be one of the girls he had known at Dresden; but he presently reflected that they would now be much older than this. It was true they came straight toward one, like that. This young lady, however, was no longer looking at him, and though she passed near him it was now tolerably clear that she had come upstairs simply to take a general survey. (p. 362)

In this description of Vogelstein's first sight of Pandora Day, the focus is upon the German's mental activity. After registering upon the count's perceptions, Pandora induces a train of memory: he recalls having seen her board the ship at Southampton, and she reminds him of the American girls he met at Dresden. More important, sheer observation and interpretation inextricably mingle. This mixture is apparent in James's choice of language: "appeared to have fixed," "remembered," "seemed to indicate," "wonder," "reflected," "now tolerably clear"--all of which denote thought processes, and all of which are attached to bits of physical observation--"the young person appeared to have fixed her eyes upon him." In this manner, the communication of actual details about the observed character assumes the quality of the observer's thought, so that those details reveal the observer's response to them. The process of observing and interpreting occur simultaneously, and thus the prose captures the very movement of the mind.

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Verbs such as wonder and reflect are James's obvious attempts to emphasize Vogelstein's active mental processes, but occasional sentences-- "It was true they came straight toward one, like that"--exemplify the pure functioning of Vogelstein's consciousness. In such a sentence, James as author does not intervene between the observing consciousness and the reader.

Vogelstein, as center of consciousness, is the vehicle of Pandora's characterization. The young German Count is fascinated by Pandora, and it is through him that James reveals Pandora's divergence from the old type, Daisy Miller. Pandora is, as the Bonnycastles and the newspapers explain, a new type, the self-made girl. In contrast to Winterbourne, who is bewildered by Daisy because she does not fit into his experience of American girls, Vogelstein is bewildered by his lack of experience. Because Vogelstein comes to America with a minimum of preconceptions and an observant, "scientific" mind, he is eminently suited to reveal Pandora's character, as both person and "type." Vogelstein captures Pandora's revolutionary qualities:

It was not customary to disturb the President, even simply to shake hands, when he was sitting on a sofa with a lady, and Vogelstein felt it in this case to be less possible than ever to break the rule, for the lady on the sofa was none other than Pandora Day. He had recognized her without her appearing to see him, and even in his momentary look he had perceived that she was now a person to be reckoned with. She had an air of elation, of success; she looked brilliant in her rose-coloured dress; she was extracting promises from the ruler of fifty millions of people. What an odd place to meet her, Vogelstein thought, and how little one could tell, after all, in America, who people were! (p. 389)

This passage is Vogelstein's--not the author's response to Pandora Day. James imbues the language with a vivid sense of Vogelstein's character.

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Moreover, by focusing on a few qualities of Pandora, general and specific--elation, success, brilliant, rose-coloured dress--James captures the essence of Pandora's personality while reproducing Vogelstein's response to her impact upon him. The language simultaneously records Vogelstein's vision of Pandora and his response to her. And although Vogelstein's vision of Pandora contains little specific detail, the passage graphically conveys Pandora's personality.

The reader sees Pandora through Vogelstein's consciousness, but also learns much about the center himself. For example, describing the President as the "ruler of fifty millions" reveals more about Vogelstein's personality and prejudices than it does about the President. Yet James's treatment of the center of consciousness is interesting, because the author still intrudes through gentle satire and humor into a character admittedly humorless:

In America, when one fell in love with a girl, there was nothing to be done but marry her, and what should he say, for instance, to finding himself a near relation of Mr. and Mrs. P. W. Day? . . . Vogelstein felt the peril, for he could immediately think of a dozen men he knew who had married American girls. There appeared now to be a constant danger of marrying the American girl; it was something one had to reckon with, like the rise in prices, the telephone, the discovery of dynamite, the Chassepôt rifle, the socialistic spirit; it was one of the complications of modern life. (p. 370)

Vogelstein prosaically equates involvement with the "American girl" with an escalating scale of revolutionary menaces--telephones, rifles, and socialism. These are Vogelstein's observations, of course, but Vogelstein's seeing the American girl as a serious threat gives the passage a humorous, even satirical cast--and in so doing dramatizes James's attitude toward the diplomat. As a result, the center of

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consciousness operates on two levels in the text: first, the actual record of that functioning consciousness; and second, James's mildly satirical judgment of Teutonic literalness. James's use of the center of consciousness in "Pandora" results in the reader's double perspective: that of the character himself and of the author's attitude toward his center.

Although James permits the center to function as the primary narrative mode in the tale, he still intrudes into the narration. As in "Lady Barberina," James opens the tale speaking in his own voice:

To watch from a point of vantage the struggles of late comers--of the uninformed, the unprovided, the bewildered--is an occupation not devoid of sweetness, and there was nothing to mitigate the complacency with which our young friend gave himself up to it; nothing, that is, save a natural benevolence which had not yet been extinguished by the consciousness of official greatness. For Count Vogelstein was official, as I think you would have seen from the straightness of his back, the lustre of his light, elegant spectacles, and something discreet and diplomatic in the curve of his moustache, which looked as if it might well contribute to the principle function, as cynics say, of the lips--the concealment of thought. (p. 357)

James himself sets the scene and sketches Vogelstein's character, preparing for Vogelstein's taking over the narration as center. In the tale's opening, James also relies upon omniscience--at least in his treatment of Vogelstein, which quickly establishes character and James's own satiric tone. In describing Vogelstein's lack of a sense of humor, for example, James mentions that the German's mind "contained several millions of facts, packed too closely together for the light breeze of the imagination to draw through the mass" (p. 358). James interjects mild humor in straightforward descriptions of Vogelstein: "He inquired with his eyes (that is, with his spectacles),

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with his ears, with his nose, with his palate, with all his senses and organs" (p. 358). James's light-hearted tone at the beginning of "Pandora" prepares the reader for his less than serious rendering of Vogelstein's consciousness. And, at the end of the tale, James abandons Vogelstein as center of consciousness and speaks authorially; he notes, for example that Vogelstein walked home "in some intensity of meditation" (p. 412). By retreating from the intimacy of the center of consciousness and returning to omniscience, James distances the reader from the tale.

James also intrudes by directly manipulating narrative movement; addressing the reader, James mentions that he "must pass briefly over the incidents that immediately followed [Vogelstein's making Pandora's acquaintance]" (p. 365). Despite his use of the center, James still remains the author who structures and engineers the tale, and does so openly. Moreover, on occasion he professes ignorance about what is occurring in his center's mind--when Vogelstein is watching German emigrants board the steamer, he "doubtless said to himself that they would not improve [America's] quality. Their numbers, however, were striking, and I know not what he thought of the nature of this evidence" (p. 359). Obviously, James does not wish to examine what Vogelstein "thought of the nature of this evidence," but the manner in which James excludes it from the tale is unwieldy. Although awkward, James's admissions of ignorance do focus the narrative on the center of consciousness, and eliminates extraneous material that would blur the emphasis on Vogelstein and Pandora. When James confesses that he cannot see into his characters' minds, he implicitly suggests that the reader must rely on Vogelstein's point of view. Thus, the author sets

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his center of consciousness apart from the other characters: Vogelstein is central and special because he provides the personal point of view. And because James relies upon Vogelstein as the dominant means of narration, James achieves a dramatic rendering of character, especially Pandora's, for she is seen only through the German count's eyes.

"Pandora," as well as "The Siege of London" and "Lady Barberina," reveal many of James's interests, both thematic and technical, that pervade his writing during the eighties. These tales are concerned, for example, with social criticism, reflecting James's own disenchantment with American and English society. This criticism will come to the fore in his two 1886 novels, The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, which expose the deterioration of American ideals and the devastating inequities of stratified society. Ancillary to this criticism is James's use of type characters, another feature characteristic of the tales and much of the eighties' fiction. He frequently turns to types, the purest example being Lady Barberina, to exemplify nationality; the relative flatness of the character embodies and magnifies traits James wishes to attack. Yet even his types are not cardboard figures; James humanizes and personalizes his type characters by using the center of consciousness technique, having them function either as center or as the object of the center's observation.

Indeed, one of James's major technical concerns in these tales is the refining of the center of consciousness as a means of narration and characterization. Although these tales reveal hesitation in using this technique--James continues to rely on omniscience and occasionally awkward manipulations of the narrative--they also show the center

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gradually assuming more control in the narrative. In short, James moves away from the picture actively rendered by the author to a more dramatic presentation realized through a character who is both actor and observer.

James's tales of the early eighties, particularly "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," and "Pandora," do not deserve the critical oblivion to which they have been consigned. These tales exemplify James's witty and often humorous treatment of the follies and foibles of the social and international scene; they are among the finest of his short stories. While these tales possess intrinsic importance, however, they are also significant for the light they shed upon James's work of this period--a light which reveals both subject and theme.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unsigned review, Nation, 34 (1882), 102; unsigned review, Critic, 1 (1881), 333; unsigned review, Lippincott's Magazine, 29 (1882), 213. These reviews are reprinted in Henry James: The Critical Heritage, ed. Roger Gard, (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), pp. 113, 107, and 118 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, Preface to "Lady Barbarina," The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> "The Siege of London" (1883); "The Impressions of a Cousin" (1883); "Lady Barberina" (1884); "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" (1884); "Pandora" (1884); "Georgina's Reasons" (1884); "A New England Winter" (1884); "The Path of Duty" (1884). This is the order in which Leon Edel reprints the tales in The Complete Tales (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), vols. V and VI.

<sup>5</sup> Of the eight tales noted above, only three--"The Author of 'Beltraffio,'" "The Impressions of a Cousin," and "The Path of Duty"--use the first-person narrator. The remaining five contain, to varying degrees, examples of centers of consciousness.

<sup>6</sup> The three tales in this chapter are discussed in their chronological order. In an April, 1883 notebook entry, James transcribes a letter to J. R. Osgood, his publisher, describing the plan for The Bostonians. In the same letter James notes that he "gave a sketch of the plan of a short story of the 'international' family (like Daisy Miller, the Siege of London, etc.). 'The name of the thing to be Lady Barberina.'" (Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 49). Obviously, "Siege" was written before "Lady Barberina." By a strange lapse of memory, James misdates "Lady Barberina" in the Preface to the New York Edition (there called "Lady Barbarina"), dating the tale 1888, when in fact during that year James was little concerned with the international theme. In an entry dated May 17, 1883 James gives a detailed description of the tale which ran in Century Magazine from May through July, 1884.

At the end of the May entry, James notes: "'The self-made girl' --a very good subject for a short story. Very modern, very local; much might be done" (Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 51). James returns to this idea, the seed of "Pandora," in January, 1884, setting up the tale as a deliberate rival to "Daisy Miller" (Matthiessen and Murdock,

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p. 56). James's notebook, therefore, establishes the order in which these three tales were written, James's Preface notwithstanding.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years, 1882-1895 (1962; rpt. New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1978), pp. 50-1.

<sup>8</sup> Edel, p. 50. Edel quotes James, but does not supply a reference.

<sup>9</sup> In the Preface to Volume XI, which includes "The Siege of London," James defends his reliance on "emphasized internationalism" by pointing to its value as a contrast: James is "struck with no possibility of contrast in the human lot so great as that encountered as we turn back and forth between the distinctively American and the distinctively European outlook" (The Art of the Novel, p. 198). And for James, contrast is the essence of drama: "The dramatic side of human situations subsists of course on contrast" (p. 199).

<sup>10</sup> Henry James, "The Siege of London," The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963, V, pp. 13-110; hereafter cited in text.

<sup>11</sup> James, Preface to "Lady Barbarina," p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Habegger, "'The Siege of London': Henry James and the Pièce Bien Faite," Modern Fiction Studies, 15 (1969), 230.

<sup>13</sup> Habegger, 229.

<sup>14</sup> James's "ambassadors" are both literal and figurative. In "Pandora," also discussed in this chapter, Count Otto Vogelstein, secretary of the German legation in Washington, is the observant and bewildered center of consciousness through whom Pandora's rise as the self-made girl is projected. And James's most famous ambassador is Lambert Strether, whose center of consciousness forms the very tissue of the 1901 novel. James's choice of "diplomats" for his center suggest that he saw these men as intrinsically more sensitive since they must function tactfully in alien cultures. James might have also seen diplomats as emblematic of his own situation, an expatriated American attempting to understand the "mixture of manners."

<sup>15</sup> Habegger sees the perplexity of the two observers mirroring "the divided mind of Henry James himself, who admired the vigor and freedom of Americans at the same time that he deplored their rudeness and provinciality" ("The Siege of London': Henry James and the Pièce Bien Faite," 221).

<sup>16</sup> Habegger, 221.

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<sup>17</sup> Henry James, "Lady Barberina," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), V, pp. 195-301; hereafter cited in text.

<sup>18</sup> Adeline Tintner's article, "Lady into Horse: James's 'Lady Barberina' and Gulliver's Travels, Part IV," Journal of Narrative Technique, 8 (1978), 79-96, brought to my attention the tale's influence on these contemporary works.

<sup>19</sup> Ora Segal, The Lucid Reflector: The Observer in Henry James's Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 56-73; Mary Doyle Springer, A Rhetoric of Literary Character: Some Women of Henry James (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 129-39. Springer sees Lady Barberina as an apologue in a fable which shows that the American aristocracy-of-wealth cannot make a successful marriage with the European aristocracy-of-blood until the American aristocracy has a traditional and superior sense of self. Springer shares this view with Leon Edel, who sees the point of the tale as being James's analysis of the incompatibilities between aristocracy of blood and its inflexibilities, and an aristocracy of wealth and its pretensions (Henry James: The Middle Years, p. 85). Neither Springer nor Edel do justice to the tale for they ignore James's emphasis on race. Adeline Tintner's article provides a more thorough and balanced treatment.

<sup>20</sup> Elsa Nettels, "Henry James and the Idea of Race," English Studies, 59 (1978), 35-47, and Adeline Tintner, "Lady into Horse."

<sup>21</sup> Tintner offers a detailed catalogue of James's horsemanship metaphors. The Barb, she notes, is a breed of thoroughbred horse interbred with the Arabian and brought to England by the Crusaders [Lady Barb is also called "a daughter of the Crusaders" (p. 250)]; Canterville brings to mind a horse's gait, while Pastern, the Canterville's estate, is named after part of a horse's leg. Lord Canterville sports a gray beard and his "big fist" is "gloved in pearl-gray" perfectly matching "the coat of his admirable steed" (pp. 203, 202). Lord Canterville appreciates Jackson Lemon's profession as doctor only from the standpoint that the lord "used to have a horse named Doctor, and a devilish good one too" (p. 242).

<sup>22</sup> Henry James, Preface to "Lady Barbarina," p. 200. James altered the spelling of Barberina to Barbarina in the New York Edition to emphasize, so Springer explains, the original Latin meaning of barbarian or invader (Springer, p. 133).

<sup>23</sup> Springer, p. 127. In explaining Sacks's view of character she notes that "all literary characters, when compared with the vagaries of characters in real life, are type characters, or partial characters, in that we get only those parts of the character that will aid the design of the work" (p. 232). In an apologue, however, a character

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is an unabashed type: "What is revealed about any major character is almost of necessity and almost ruthlessly, limited to qualities directly required for their role in the apologue" [Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 59-60].

- 24 James, Preface to "Lady Barbarina," p. 205.
- 25 Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 50.
- 26 James, Preface to "Lady Barbarina," p. 205.
- 27 Segal, p. 59.
- 28 Mr. Longstraw probably entertains English aristocracy with his Americanisms in much the same way that Nancy Headway did.
- 29 Segal, pp. 66-67.
- 30 Henry James, "Pandora," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), V, pp. 357-412; hereafter cited in text.
- 31 James, Preface to "Daisy Miller," p. 271.
- 32 Leon Edel, Introduction, The Complete Tales, V, p. 10.
- 33 James, "Daisy Miller," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), IV, pp. 141-2.
- 34 James, "Daisy Miller," pp. 144-5.

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## CHAPTER IV

### A Most Salient and Peculiar Tale

The women of the early tales--Nancy Headway, Lady Barb, and Pandora Day--are strong and manipulative; the women of James's 1886 novel, The Bostonians,<sup>1</sup> seem to control the very country, prompting the novel's hero to protest: "The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities" (p. 290). "The most damnable feminization" of American culture forms the background of The Bostonians, first serialized in Century Magazine, 1885-1886, James's most "American tale" about the "situation of women."<sup>2</sup> As such, the novel continues the subjects of the early eighties' tales: James's exploration of strong women characters and his increasingly sharp criticism of American society and culture. The Bostonians, according to James's own admission, examines "the decline of the sentiment of sex,"<sup>3</sup> but it also scrutinizes the deterioration of Puritanism and Transcendentalism into the half-baked notions of "witches and wizards, mediums, and spirit-rappers and roaring radicals" (p. 7).

The novel, whose action spans two years of the 1870s, is "a study of one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England."<sup>4</sup> Olive Chancellor, a wealthy Boston spinster and "roaring radical" dedicated to the women's movement, takes up Verena Tarrant,

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a charismatic though naive daughter of a mesmeric healer. The friendship, mostly on Olive's side, is intense and possessive: to protect Verena from the onslaught of interested young men and the less-than-desirable influences of her bohemian parents, Olive literally purchases the young woman from the Tarrants. Together, the women spend winter nights studying the history of women's sufferings to prepare Verena, who possesses a gift for "inspirational speaking," to win Boston and from thence the nation to the cause of women's liberation. Unfortunately, Olive's distant cousin, Basil Ransom, a Mississippian trying to start a law practice in New York, falls in love with Verena, dismissing her impassioned speeches as "pretty moonshine." Ransom vows "to keep [Verena] at home and have a better time with [her] there than ever" (p. 291); to this end, he is determined to "squench" the movement. He is unalterably opposed to Olive's ideals and her possession of Verena, and so the relationship between the two cousins rapidly becomes a "war to the knife."

The battle is seriously engaged during the summer all three characters spend in Cape Cod, where Basil and Olive fight over the possession of Verena. Verena capitulates, agreeing to marry Basil; but Olive hides her friend, who is to address a "Boston mob" at the Music Hall, in a speech which promises to launch Verena fairly upon her career. In an intense and melodramatic conclusion, Basil "rescues" Verena from this fate by abducting her moments before her grand debut. Olive, desolate and humiliated, achieves the martyrdom she has always hoped for by facing the thwarted crowd. Although Basil wins Verena, his marriage falls short of the ideal: "But though [Verena] was glad,

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[Basil] presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed" (p. 390). Thus, although Basil ostensibly wins the contest and affirms the place of love and marriage within human affairs, his qualified victory also suggests the rockiness of the path those affairs usually take.

James's concern with social issues and social criticism, constituting the novel's backdrop and the result of James's friendship with Zola, Flaubert, and Daudet,<sup>5</sup> distinguishes this novel from his fiction of the seventies and presents an abrupt break with the urbane study of manners developed in The Portrait of a Lady. Attention to detail, particularly in regard to vivid rendering of place, also sets this novel apart from James's previous work and reveals his talent for close observation, as this description of a "Dutch grocery" in New York reveals:

The two sides of the shop were protected by an immense pent-house shed, which projected over a greasy pavement and was supported by wooden posts fixed in the curbstone. Beneath it, on the dislocated flags, barrels and baskets were freely and picturesquely grouped; an open cellarway yawned beneath the feet of those who might pause to gaze too fondly on the savoury wares in the window; a strong odour of smoked fish, combined with the fragrance of molasses, hung about the spot; the pavement, toward the gutters, was fringed with dirty panniers, heaped with potatoes, carrots, and onions; and a smart, bright waggon, with the horse detached from the shafts, drawn up on the edge of the abominable road (it contained holes and ruts a foot deep, and immemorial accumulations of stagnant mud), imparted an idle, rural, pastoral air to a scene otherwise perhaps expressive of a rank civilization. (p. 160)

James paints the scene vividly, engaging all the reader's senses. Whether the setting is laid in Miss Birdseye's dingy parlor, Mrs.

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Burrage's glittering drawingroom, or the summer cottage in Cape Cod, James masterfully captures the very essence of the American atmosphere.

By employing the contemporary women's movement as the novel's ideological background,<sup>6</sup> James also demonstrates his allegiance with the French naturalists, who saw the contemporary subject as a means to expose social ills. The suffragist movement exemplifies for James, as his notebook attests, "the most salient and peculiar" feature of the American scene;<sup>7</sup> it embodies the American penchant for reform and occasions the more deplorable aspects of American democracy--publicity and sensationalism. In adopting contemporary events as the setting of his fiction, James affirms his kinship with the historian, as outlined earlier in "The Art of Fiction," in that both the novelist and the historian have the task of illustrating the past and the actions of men.<sup>8</sup> It is important, though, to recognize that contemporary events constitute the novel's background; to see The Bostonians as a novel about feminism and as a chronicle of "the struggle for women's emancipation," as feminist critic Nan Bauer Maglin does, invariably leads to the conclusion that "James's attitude is that of disgust and mockery" toward "independent women, the women's movement, and women in general."<sup>9</sup> The real subject of the novel is human relationships; as James specifies in his notebook, The Bostonians examines the "Boston marriage"<sup>10</sup> as well as the relationship between the sexes and the complications resulting from applying abstractions to human affairs. Rather than being an exposé of the women's movement, The Bostonians is a study of clash of personalities and ideologies, embodied in the battle between Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom for the possession of Verena Tarrant.

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Because, perhaps, the novel's subject concerns the war of the sexes, most critics adamantly reject or accept the novel and strongly advocate one or the other of the characters as the novel's blameless protagonist. Whatever the reason, most criticism is rarely lukewarm. William James's admonitory criticism of Miss Birdseye, a minor character, presages the critical tendency to react strongly to the novel's characters. William, after reading the first installments in Century Magazine, quickly took Henry to task for satirizing Elizabeth Peabody, respected Boston reformer and sister-in-law of Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the philanthropic though ineffectual Miss Birdseye.<sup>11</sup> Henry responded in a lengthy apologia, defending his right to create character, but the depth to which William wounded his brother is evident in Henry's pained exclamation that "[t]he story is, I think, the best fiction I have written, and I expected you, if you said anything about it, would intimate that you thought as much--so that I find this charge on the subject of Miss Peabody a very cold douche indeed."<sup>12</sup>

After having read the entire novel, William placatingly praised it,<sup>13</sup> but by then James himself was bored with the novel and admitted that "the whole thing is too long and dawdling."<sup>14</sup> Despite his own depreciations of the novel, James remained convinced of the merits of The Bostonians, prompting him to complain to W. D. Howells on August 17, 1908 that the "tolerably full and good 'Bostonians'" never "received any sort of justice."<sup>15</sup>

It could be argued that even today, despite a renewed interest in the novel, The Bostonians has yet to receive justice. For the most

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part, critics tend to approve of those qualities and characters which coincide with their conception of James's fiction and their view of the sexes, and dismiss conflicting elements as technical flaws. Male critics--Walcutt, Andreas, Edgar, Anderson, and Oliver, for example--champion Basil Ransom as James's spokesman; Anderson explains away James's satiric treatment of Basil as evidence that James relied on popularized misconceptions about Southerners in creating his hero.<sup>16</sup> If Basil is the hero, then Olive is the villainess; and many male critics accuse her of lesbianism and perverted sexual designs upon Verena.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, female critics--Davis, Johnson, Faderman, and Maglin--rally to Olive's support, either by showing that her relationship with Verena was a typical nineteenth-century Boston marriage, or by accusing James of incipient anti-feminism.<sup>18</sup> And no one, male or female, can agree about the novel's heroine, Verena Tarrant, who has been called everything from James's "embodiment of the feminine principle" to Basil Ransom's "booby prize."<sup>19</sup>

While the characters arouse controversy, the critics fairly concur that The Bostonians is flawed. Except for a few dissenting voices, F. R. Leavis's and Irving Howe's being the most prominent,<sup>20</sup> critics agree that the novel lacks unity and consistency. Walcutt feels that James fails to incorporate the novel's ideas into plot and characterization; Berthoff sees the structure as falling apart at the novel's midpoint; Habegger cites shifts in tone, emphasis, and point of view in Book 2 as reasons for The Bostonians' "disunity"; and Stone discovers a discrepancy between James's intention to write an American tale and the Victorian novel The Bostonians actually is.<sup>21</sup> Samuels

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and Buitenhuis object to the novel's complex points of view, while others, among them Miller, McMahan, Johnson, and Anderson, take issue with James's treatment of his characters.<sup>22</sup> Samuels goes so far to suggest that the novel is a Jamesian aberration when he notes that "the essential James is not perceptible in *The Bostonians*."<sup>23</sup>

*The Bostonians* is not an aberration; although it may be a curiosity--and James himself recognized it as such<sup>24</sup>--the novel continues the line of development initiated in the tales of the early eighties. *The Bostonians* carries on James's criticism of American society apparent in "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," and "Pandora"; and in the novel's larger scale, James's critical vision focuses upon many facets of American manners and mores. James's satiric perspective of society is as devastating as Thackeray's, but James's "Vanity Fair" is saved from mordancy by good-natured humor and subtle wit. And rather than taking sides in the battle between the sexes--as James's critics accuse him of doing--James exposes the narrow points of view and self-imposed limitations of all his characters.

Many of the novel's technical and structural aspects, heretofore regarded as flaws, are actually the result of James's continuing experiments with point of view and center of consciousness. Critics tend to examine the novel in terms of its antecedents; they see *The Bostonians* informed by works as diverse as *L'Évangéliste*, *The Blithedale Romance*, *Adam Bede*, and *Antigone*, and literary forms ranging from the pastoral to the fairy-tale.<sup>25</sup> Doubtless, such works influence James's novel, but these sources have occupied critics' attention to the exclusion of seeing the novel as an important development of James's technical

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skill. Perosa and Isle acknowledge, of course, the novel's experimental themes;<sup>26</sup> of all the critics who discuss The Bostonians, only Irving Howe comes close to suggesting that the novel is technically experimental.<sup>27</sup>

Although Victorian in many of its characteristics, as Stone demonstrates,<sup>28</sup> The Bostonians reveals James's continuing the technical experiments of the tales on the novel's wider stage. In particular, the functions of the narrator and the center of consciousness are most boldly experimental. Page has rightfully called the novel's narration "curious,"<sup>29</sup> taking his cue from James himself who called the novel's subject "most salient and peculiar," and who vowed that if he ever revised the novel he would make it "more curious."<sup>30</sup> In no other of James's novels do various modes of narration and characterization jostle each other as they do in The Bostonians. Indeed, echoing the ideological conflict incarnated in Olive and Basil is the dialectical but complementary movement between the methods of painting and the methods of dramatizing. As noted above, The Bostonians is distinguished by James's vivid rendering of place and the sketching of character--features which are essentially pictorial in method. Yet much of the novel's excitement arises from James's ability to reflect the novel's action through his characters' perspectives, capturing the very movement of their minds and thus achieving in the novel a penetrating psychological study of character.

Dramatizing and pictorializing are aims essentially opposed. In the novel, generally throughout but most intensively in Book I (Chapters 1-22), an omniscient narrator attempts to reconcile these two aims. This narrator, an amplification of the intrusive narrators

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of the tales of the early eighties, functions traditionally. He introduces the major characters, but it is in the painting of minor characters that the omniscient narrator waxes most elaborately. The description of Mrs. Tarrant exemplifies the traditional and witty narratorial voice:

She was queer, indeed--a flaccid, relaxed, unhealthy, whimsical woman, who still had a capacity to cling. What she clung to was 'society,' and a position in the world which a secret whisper told her she never had and a voice more audible reminded her she was in danger of losing. To keep it, to recover it, to reconsecrate it, was the ambition of her heart; this was one of the reasons why Providence had judged her worthy of having so wonderful a child. Verena was born not only to lead their common sex out of bondage, but to remodel a visiting-list which bulged and contracted in the wrong places, like a country-made garment. (p. 62)

The narrator reveals Mrs. Tarrant's ambitions. Yet, simultaneously, he exposes her by showing that she equates the women's movement with her social rehabilitation--and he does so humorously because he seems to take her as seriously as she takes herself. The narrator records Mrs. Tarrant's thoughts with all their intrinsic contradictions--she is in danger of losing, for example, a social position she never had; Verena will enable her to keep the position, recover it, reconsecrate it. By reproducing Mrs. Tarrant's incongruous thoughts, the narrator captures the essence of her mind: authorial omniscience recreates the fabric of her thoughts while conveying a vivid sense of character. Mrs. Tarrant's personality surfaces not by direct statement but by the narrator's enabling the reader to experience her inconsistencies firsthand.

Indeed, as the passage progresses, it assumes a unique texture and rhythm, so that although it is primarily an example of omniscience,

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it is permeated with Mrs. Tarrant's character. The passage continues by describing her association with her husband, Selah:

As the daughter of Abraham Greenstreet, Mrs. Tarrant had passed her youth in the first Abolitionist circles, and she was aware how much such a prospect was clouded by her union with a young man who had begun life as an itinerant vendor of lead-pencils (he had called at Mr. Greenstreet's door in the exercise of this function), had afterwards been for a while a member of the celebrated Cayuga community, where there were no wives, or no husbands, or something of that sort (Mrs. Tarrant could never remember), and had still later (though before the development of the healing faculty) achieved distinction in the spiritualistic world. (He was an extraordinarily favoured medium, only he had to stop for reasons of which Mrs. Tarrant possessed her version.) (p. 62)

Frequent parenthetical asides distinguish this passage, although it is difficult to determine who speaks in them. The material outside the parentheses is fairly straightforward description of past events; the parenthetical comments directly relate these events to Mrs. Tarrant or establish specific details of the past. The narrator wavers between pure description and Mrs. Tarrant's thoughts. Thus, though the passage provides background, it also develops Mrs. Tarrant's character by mirroring her uncertainty and her ambivalence toward Selah: she "hated him for the manner in which, somehow, as she felt, he had lowered her social tone; yet at the same time she admired him for an impudence so consummate that it had ended . . . by imposing itself on her as a kind of infallibility" (p. 64). The omniscient narrator functions brilliantly, blending biographical summary with the texture of the character's personality--a blend that economically obviates editorial commentary yet achieves James's satiric purposes.

However, the intrusive narrator does not always function within his traditional role; indeed, the narrator is frequently one of the

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most curious features of The Bostonians. His peculiarities are apparent in the physical description and historical sketch of his hero, Basil

Ransom:

[Basil] came, in fact, from Mississippi, and he spoke very perceptibly with the accent of that country. It is not in my power to reproduce by any combination of characters this charming dialect; but the initiated reader will have no difficulty in evoking the sound, which is to be associated in the present instance with nothing vulgar or vain. This lean, pale, sallow, shabby, striking young man, with his superior head, his sedentary shoulders, his expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his provincial, distinguished appearance, is, as a representative of his sex, the most important personage in my narrative; he played a very active part in the events I have undertaken in some degree to set forth. And yet the reader who likes a complete image, who desires to read with the senses as well as with reason, is entreated not to forget that he prolonged his consonants and swallowed his vowels, that he was guilty of elisions and interpolations which were equally unexpected, and that his discourse was pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its rich basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the cottonfield. (p. 6)

Basil is introduced by an omniscient narrator, who like Trollope's and Thackeray's narrators, is uninhibited in intruding and manipulating the narrative. The narrator designates Basil as his hero, "the most important personage in my narrative," a statement which begins to anticipate narrative events and the reader's judgment. Yet, curiously, the narrator also transforms the reader into a co-creator of the text: the "initiated reader" will be able to reproduce Basil's Mississippian dialect. Basil's dialect forces the narrator, however, into making the first of many admissions of helplessness in regard to his material--"it is not in my power to reproduce . . . this charming dialect"--an admission which Page sees as calling attention to the limitations of "the novel's language, all printed language, and all

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novels."<sup>31</sup> The narrator's inability to reproduce the dialect's actual sounds leads him to mask his deficiencies with self-consciously literary language: he lyricizes Basil's dialect as "sultry and vast," "African in its rich basking tone," recalling the "teeming expanse of the cottonfields." The narrator not only probes the limitations of language; his ironic and self-conscious stance calls into question the role of omniscient narrators, of all narrators.

Indeed, James's curious narrator is alternately coy and bold; he earns a prominent place in the novel--Stone comments, for example, that the narrator is a character in his own right.<sup>32</sup> The narrator will turn to elaborate language to capture the essence of character, yet he is quick to keep them at arm's length. In describing Basil's reaction to Mrs. Farrinder, who labors "to give the ballot to every woman in the country and to take the flowing bowl from every man" (p. 28), the narrator worriedly denies his own responsibility: "I am but the reporter of his angry formulae" (p. 44). Although the narrator blithely singles out Basil as his "most important personage," he reduces himself to a mere reporter when Basil begins spouting "formulae."

The narrator maintains an equally slippery presence throughout the novel,<sup>33</sup> particularly in his function as the narrative's manipulator. The narrator in The Portrait of a Lady was masterful and confident; he freely explored his characters' minds and collapsed narrative chronology through prediction and foreshadowing. The narrator of The Bostonians possesses an arsenal of peculiar excuses, all of which are used to deny his omniscience while he overtly manipulates. When Olive "purchases" Verena from her disreputable father, the narrator confides

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that "This interview, which had some curious features, would be worth describing, but I am forbidden to do more than mention the most striking of these" (p. 143). Unfortunately, the narrator never specifies what forces him to abdicate his narratorial role. And, as the novel progresses, the narrator continues to rationalize his omission of material; these excuses increasingly become pleas of incompetence or helplessness. Referring, for example, to the relationship between Olive and Verena at Marmion, where they struggle against Basil, the narrator confesses: "No stranger situation can be imagined than that of these extraordinary young women at this juncture; it was so singular on Verena's part, in particular, that I despair of presenting it to the reader with the air of reality" (p. 328). And in attempting to describe Olive's state of mind when she realizes she has lost Verena to Basil, the narrator concedes that "here again I must plead a certain incompetence . . ." (p. 355). Incompetence notwithstanding, the narrator can assume control of the narrative and boldly wave aside the unknowable. He speculates, for example, whether "Verena's strange aberration" causes Olive to lose faith in the women's movement: "These are mysteries into which I shall not attempt to enter, speculations with which I have no concern" (p. 354).

The narrator's asides are indeed curious. Although he can function within an omniscient point of view, his avowals are singular denials of the traditional narrator's role. By acknowledging his helplessness or his ignorance, the narrator gives these characters--particularly the main ones--a life that seems to exist beyond the text, a life to which neither author nor reader is privy. In a very real sense, the narrator's confessions maintain the integrity of character

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by suggesting that these characters are at least partially out of his reach. Moreover, such admissions serve James's thematic purpose. Although the narrator's disclaimers may point to James's unwillingness to prescribe or even judge, it is perhaps more accurate to see these admissions of ignorance and "withdrawals" from characters as foils to the characters' own perspectives. The narrator's lack of knowledge and his readiness to own up to that lack contrast ironically with the characters' complacent self-assurance and their determination to impose their ideologies on others. And ultimately, such confessions distance author from character, enhancing James's humorous and satiric purposes.

The narrator figures importantly in The Bostonians. As the novel progresses, however, the centers of consciousness, Olive and Basil, take over many of the narratorial functions; consequently, the methods of painting give way to the methods of dramatizing. Indeed, the characterization of Olive and Basil offers an opportunity to compare the differences implicit in each method. Basil is delineated by the omniscient narrator, but Olive is presented through Basil's perceptions:

He perceived very quickly that Miss Chancellor belonged to the [class of people who take things hard]. This was written so intensely in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they exchanged twenty words. He himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflection, and because circumstances pressed him close. But this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was plain as day that she was morbid. (p. 11)

Basil begins with Olive's physical features, glossing over them with the simplest of descriptions; her eyes are "light-green," in contrast to the more literary narrator who comments that "the curious tint of her eyes was a living colour; when she turned it upon you, you thought

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vaguely of the glitter of green ice" (pp. 17-8). The narrator's word play--green eyes and green ice--and his suggestive comparison distinguishes between Basil's view of Olive and the narrator's self-conscious and more complex one. In other words, the narrator's and the characters' use of language becomes a means by which omniscience and center of consciousness can frequently be identified.

Basil, naturally enough, moves quickly from Olive's uninspiring features to speculations about her personality. And, as the passage continues, Basil tries to "square" his cousin with his past experience of women:

The women he had hitherto known had been mainly of his own soft clime, and it was not often they exhibited the tendency he detected (and cursorily deplored) in Mrs. Luna's sister. That was the way he liked them--not to think too much, not to feel any responsibility for the government of the world, such as he was sure Miss Chancellor felt. If they would only be private and passive, and have no feeling but for that, and leave publicity to the sex of tougher hide! Ransom was pleased with the vision of that remedy; it must be repeated that he was very provincial. (p. 11)

Basil's mind moves from physical reality to memory then opinion; thus the passage reflects the mind as process, rather than as a satiric picture. And because the focus is upon that process with its sense of movement, James dramatizes the mind's movement, instead of simply rendering--painting--character traits. Moreover, in this process, Basil's character is dramatically revealed: the reader learns more about his past and his ideas. Interestingly, however, the narrator feels compelled to intrude at this point, disassociating himself from Basil's "Boeotian" views. Particularly at the novel's beginning, the narrator reinforces his control over the narrative, a control he relinquishes

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somewhat in Books 2 and 3. Basil's ideas echo the traditional conservative values held by much of the novel's contemporary audience; the narrator's intrusive disclaimer is perhaps James's attempt to question those values. It is true that such intrusions reflect James's insecurity about the reader's ability to distinguish between his and Basil's values, but James's doubts are well-founded, since even sophisticated modern readers are inclined to cast Basil as James's spokesman. This passage exemplifies the problems with the mixture of narrative modes, and especially with the center of consciousness. In places, the distinction between the narrator's voice and Basil's consciousness is subtle; without careful reading, it is easy to mistake Basil's views for the narrator's. Hence, the necessity of the narrator's obvious satiric intrusions and blatant disclaimers--especially in those passages, like the one above, where such views are inclined to be popularly accepted.

Although the narrator intrudes when Basil dwells on sexual politics, he generally recedes when Basil functions as a means to describe place. For example, the reader sees Olive's parlor through Basil's consciousness:

The general character of the place struck him as Bostonian; this was, in fact, very much what he had supposed Boston to be. He had always heard Boston was a city of culture, and now there was culture in Miss Chancellor's tables and sofas, in the books that were everywhere, on little shelves like brackets (as if a book were a statuette), in the photographs and water-colours that covered the walls, in the curtains that were festooned rather stiffly in the doorways. (pp. 15-6)

Olive's parlor is sketched with few details, with Basil's reaction to it predominating. The description is general and vague--

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naturally, someone as "provincial" and masculine as Basil would not linger over specifics of furniture and bibelots. The details he does notice--the books "on little shelves like brackets (as if a book were a statuette)"--suggest Basil's own love of books. Moreover, his comparing a book to a statuette is an individual touch revealing the hero's provinciality while enabling James to poke fun at the Bostonians' seriousness without intruding into the text. Thus, by reflecting description through the center of consciousness, James characterizes and satirizes simultaneously.

Although James maintains the narrator's presence throughout the novel, the center of consciousness gradually assumes a more important place as the novel progresses. This is particularly true of Basil as center. Ransom's view dominates the major changes of scene opening each book; in the description of Marmion narratorial intrusions are considerably diminished, and Cape Cod's quaint charm is conveyed through Basil's eyes. Indeed, it is at Marmion that Basil functions as an almost "pure" center of consciousness. He is the means, for example, through which the lines of Olive's and Basil's "war to the knife" are drawn:

[Basil asked] himself what amount of consideration he should (from the most refined Southern point of view), owe Miss Chancellor in the event of his deciding to go after Verena Tarrant in earnest. He was not slow to decide that he owed her none. Chivalry had to do with one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved. He didn't hate poor Miss Olive, though she might make him yet; and even if he did, any chivalry was all moonshine which should require him to give up the girl he adored in order that his third cousin should see he could be gallant. Chivalry was forbearance and generosity with regard to the weak; and there was nothing weak about Miss Olive, she was a fighting woman, and she would fight

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him to the death, giving him not an inch of odds. He felt that she was fighting there all day long, in her cottage-fortress; her resistance was in the air he breathed and Verena came out to him sometimes quite limp and pale from the tussle. (pp. 338-9)

The sound of Basil's voice dominates.<sup>34</sup> The narrator, for example, never refers to Olive as "poor Miss Olive"--the expression reverberates of Basil, gallant Southerner. "Moonshine" as a reference to foolish ideas is characteristic of Basil; earlier in the novel, he asks Verena if she really believed "all that pretty moonshine" about women's sufferings (p. 79). Also, the ideas presented here are confused and contradictory--Ransom defines chivalry as governing "one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved"--and although he does not hate "poor Miss Olive," he certainly does not love her either--so that as a result the passage possesses the immediacy of thought rather than being structured and organized by the narrator. Notice that James does not depend on the expressions "he thought" or "he perceived." In the sentence describing chivalry and "Miss Olive's" strength, all such expressions are eliminated, so that the reader directly experiences the matter at hand through Basil.

Basil's characterization, then, is a combination of narratorial omniscience and center of consciousness. The narrator relates Basil's history and his personality traits omnisciently and usually satirically. Incidentally, the narrator's satiric treatment of Basil disturbs those critics who wish to see Basil as James's spokesman; they refuse to recognize that narratorial distance from Basil reveals Basil's narrowness--a narrowness comparable to Olive's. This satiric treatment prepares the reader to judge Basil's performance as center by suggesting that because Basil is both strong-minded and prejudiced, his point of

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view is limited and slanted. In this manner, too, Basil's functioning as center approaches James's goal of dramatizing character. Having been apprised of Basil's limitation, the reader can experience the hero's point of view first-hand, yet retain enough distance to consider his shortcomings. Indeed, the manner in which the narration continually shifts in perspective should warn the reader not to see any point of view as trustworthy,

Olive functions as the novel's other center of consciousness, although the manner in which James presents her character differs from Basil's. James is more inclined to see Olive from the outside, as opposed to the omniscient treatment of Basil. Olive's past, for example, is never related by the narrator; it must be pieced together from Olive's and other characters' remarks. Occasionally, the reader receives a more detailed look at her past, but that occurs within the context of her consciousness. Olive, for example, learns that Matthias Pardon has accompanied Verena to the theatre; Olive "was accordingly not shocked at the idea of such adventures on Verena's part; than which, indeed, judging from her own experience, nothing could well have been less adventurous" (p. 102). Olive then recollects her own "expeditions" and her feelings toward them:

The whole affair had always a primness; this was discernable even to Olive's very limited sense of humour. It was not so religious as going to evening-service at King's Chapel; but it was the next thing to it. Of course all girls didn't do it; there were families that viewed such a custom with disfavour. But this was where the girls were of the romping sort; there had to be some things they were known not to do. As a general thing, moreover, the practice was confined to the decorous; it was a sign of culture and quiet tastes. (p. 102)

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This revelation from Olive's past is embedded in a smooth, continuous flow of present thought. Although Olive's memory might have provided an opportunity for omniscient narration, James permits Olive to maintain her integrity as center. The section beginning with "It was not so religious" is straightforward; verbs of mental process or perception are absent from the sentences following it. Clearly, this is Olive's view--the passage echoes with her typical seriousness and conservatism; the implicit judgment of girls "of the romping sort" reiterates Olive's condemnation of "people who disapproved of the marriage-tie" (p. 74). The omniscient narrator stands aside so that Olive as center can function. Olive thus exposes her humorless seriousness, permitting the reader to comprehend and judge her character.

Olive is generally present externally--as opposed to Basil's omniscient treatment--and James also permits her to function as center of consciousness to develop her character. That is not to say, of course, that she is never developed omnisciently, but James relies for the most part on other characters' reactions and impressions to characterize her, as Basil does early in the novel:

What Basil Ransom actually perceived was that Miss Chancellor was a signal old maid. That was her quality, her destiny; nothing could be more distinctly written. There are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option; but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry. (p. 17)

Basil's description reveals more about Basil than it does about Olive--it is one more example of Basil's tendency to pigeon-hole people because of sex. However, it is equally important that Olive strikes

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Basil so strongly, so strongly that her nun-like stance is a large part of his first impression of her. Olive radiates seriousness, subtly foreshadowing her all-or-nothing dedication.

In Books 1 and 2, Olive is developed externally or omnisciently; she rarely functions as a center of consciousness. As long as Olive is kept at a distance, (the reader being deprived of directly experiencing her perspective), Olive is a legitimate object of satire, with Mrs. Luna, Basil, and the narrator making jokes at Olive's expense. In Book 3, when it becomes clear that Olive is losing "the war to the knife," Olive is dealt with more sympathetically. Through omniscience and more frequent use of the center of consciousness, James examines the shattering of Olive's hopes and her relationship with Verena. In Book 3, Olive begins to assume a tragic heroine's stature, and the reader, although judging her stifling hold on Verena, must also sympathize with Olive. James facilitates the growth of this sympathy by enabling the reader to experience Olive's point of view. The day Verena capitulates to Basil marks a high point of the reader's identification with and sympathy for Olive:

[Olive] only went to Verena and sat down beside her. She didn't know what to make of her manner; she had never been like that before. She was unwilling to speak; she seemed crushed and humbled. This was almost the worst--if anything could be worse than what had gone before; and Olive took her hand with an irresistible impulse of compassion and reassurance. From the way it lay in her own she guessed her whole feeling--saw it was a kind of shame, shame for her weakness, her swift surrender, her insane gyration, in the morning. Verena expressed it by no protest and no explanation; she appeared not even to wish to hear the sound of her own voice. Her silence itself was an appeal--an appeal to Olive to ask no questions (she could trust her to inflict no spoken reproach); only to wait till she could lift up her head again. Olive

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understood, or thought she understood, and the woe-fulness of it all only seemed the deeper. She would just sit there and hold her hand; that was all she could do; they were beyond each other's help in any way now. Verena leaned her head back and closed her eyes, and for an hour, as nightfall settled in the room, neither of the young women spoke. Distinctly, it was a kind of shame. After a while the parlour-maid, very casual, in the manner of the servants at Marmion, appeared on the threshold with a lamp; but Olive motioned her frantically away. She wished to keep the darkness. It was a kind of shame. (pp. 356-7)

Olive's consciousness functions here at its purest. Her perceptions are directed inwardly and outwardly: Verena, who has surrendered, is shown vividly, yet Olive's reactions are also apparent. The language, appropriate to the intensity of the occasion, is simple, strong, choppy, and unembellished; the three-fold repetition of the clause "it was a kind of shame"--a clause summarizing the women's feelings and the capitulation's enormity--gives the passage the cadence of a mind under stress so great that thought is dull and repetitious. Olive enlists the reader's sympathy through this intense dramatization of her loss and shame.

James's interest in dramatization is most clearly revealed in Verena Tarrant's characterization. Although he "goes behind" her at critical junctures--her first visit to Olive and the day she spends with Basil in Central Park--James renders her dramatically by characterizing her only through external means. James originally conceived her as the novel's center when in his notebook he designates her as "heroine," noting that "the tale relates the struggle that takes place in the mind of the [heroine]." <sup>35</sup> In the novel James diverges from his original plan by presenting her through Olive's and Basil's perceptions.

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As a result, Verena as heroine is an intriguing character because her inner struggle and "capitulation" are not exposed and she is seen through those characters trying to possess her. However much Verena's characterization deviates from James's original intentions, its actual form presents no great departure from the line of development James had been following in the early eighties. The tales of those years show James remaining outside of his heroines. This tactic enabled him to experiment with the heroine's dramatic presentation through the center of consciousness. Verena's characterization is a continuation of the experiments begun in *Nancy Headway*, *Lady Barb*, and *Pandora Day*.<sup>36</sup>

Verena is unusually pliable and passive. She is very much the American girl; Olive sees her as having "kept the consummate innocence of the American girl, that innocence which was the greatest of all, for it had survived the abolition of walls and locks" (p. 106). Her innocence and her lack of self-awareness make her admirably suited to being manipulated by those who possess both a strong sense of self and the conviction of their views. Because Verena lacks self-awareness, her thoughts and perceptions would not be very illuminating to the reader nor would they enhance the novel's conflict, Basil's and Olive's "war to the knife." Indeed, that Verena is presented through the antagonists' and narrator's points of view thus gives interest to a character whose personality is as yet nascent.

The Bostonians is an important novel, not only for its subject, which reflects James's friendship with the French Naturalists, but for its techniques as well. James's most American tale, the novel combines brilliant evocations of the American scene with the satiric

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exposure of the American penchant for espousing clauses. But The Bostonians is also significant in terms of its place within James's total work. Essentially experimental in both form and point of view, the novel continues James's development evident in "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," and "Pandora." Although there is considerable use of a narrator, who wavers between omniscience and ignorance, James gradually depends on centers of consciousness to narrate and to characterize. Specifically, the centers become means to dramatize character: when Olive and Basil function as centers, they develop each other's characters as well as their own, and they present dramatically Verena Tarrant, the novel's heroine. Thus, The Bostonians sustains, on a much larger scale, the experimental techniques initiated in the tales of the early eighties. And most criticism of the novel as a flawed masterpiece stems from the failure to recognize the novel's experimental nature. As a result, James's experiments in The Bostonians have not been examined in detail.

Many readers take exception to the narrator; because he unabashedly manipulates the narrative and does not deny any character his own satire and criticism, the narrator may seem a troubling presence and an alien element in a James novel. The narrator, who gives The Bostonians much of James's deliberate curiousness, becomes less problematic if he is seen as part of James's attempt to reconcile the methods of painting with the methods of dramatizing. The narrator sets the scene and introduces the characters, providing a stage upon which Olive and Basil can perform as centers who dramatically develop character. In this function, the centers provide an intimate view of

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character, typical of the center of consciousness technique. This intimacy, however, is at odds with James's aim of criticizing American culture. The narrator, then, in his merciless satire, balances the intimacy and the criticism by continually interposing distance between reader and character. To be sure, at times James's shifting between the narrator and the characters is less than smooth. Yet within the framework of James's thematic purposes and technical experiments in a novel "most salient and peculiar," the narrator is, finally, an essential element.

The Bostonians, true to its peculiar nature, has endured a curious critical history: when not totally ignored, it has been subjected to serious misinterpretation. Because of its controversial and provocative subject, the novel is used to support or refute narrow ideological standpoints--a treatment ironic because The Bostonians is ultimately James's plea for open-mindedness. Certainly, the novel is an intriguing example of James's art, and to approach The Bostonians as a significant technical experiment delineates its remarkable--and peculiar--qualities.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, The Bostonians (1886; rpt. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1966); hereafter cited in text.

<sup>2</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds. The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 47; James's emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> James acknowledges the French Naturalists' influence in the notebook entry of April 8, 1883 when he admits that "Daudet's Évangéliste has given me the idea of this thing" (Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 47). James, in reviewing L'Évangéliste, found fault with Daudet's characterization, particularly that of the women: "[Madame Autheman's character] was a great opportunity for a piece of spiritual portraiture; but we know nothing about Madame Autheman's inner springs and I think we fail to believe in her" ["Alphonse Daudet," (1883) in Partial Portraits (London: Macmillan, 1888), p. 199]. Others have documented The Bostonians' kinship with French realism and naturalism, among them Daniel Lerner and Oscar Cargill, "Henry James at the Grecian Urn," PMLA, 66 (1951), 316-31; Lyall Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971), pp. 56-8; Powers, "James's Debt to Alphonse Daudet," Comparative Literature, 24 (1972), 150-62; Philip Grover, Henry James and the French Novel: A Study in Inspiration (London: Elek Books, Ltd., 1973); Adelina R. Tintner, "James and Balzac: The Bostonians and 'La Fille aux Yeux d'Or,'" Comparative Literature, 29 (1977), 241-54; and David Gervais, Flaubert and Henry James: A Study in Contrasts (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Critics who trace the relationship between the women's movement of the sixties and seventies include Abigail Ann Hamblen, "Henry James and the Freedom Fighters of the Seventies," Georgia Review, 20 (1966), 35-44; Howard Kerr, Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 190-222; Sara deSaussure Davis, "Feminist Sources in The Bostonians," American Literature, 50 (1979), 570-87; Robert Emmet Long, The Great Succession: Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), pp. 118-20; and Ruth Evelyn Quebe, "The Bostonians: Some

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Historical Sources and Their Implications," Centennial Review, 25 (1981), 80-100. These articles, particularly Davis's and Quebe's, demonstrate that James based many of the novel's characters on individuals prominent in the movement and in the daily newspapers.

<sup>7</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," Partial Portraits, pp. 379-80.

<sup>9</sup> Nan Bauer Maglin, "Fictional Feminists in The Bostonians and The Odd Women," in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1972), p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> In Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1981), Lillian Faderman defines the Boston marriage as "a long-term monogamous relationship between two otherwise unmarried women" (p. 190). According to Faderman, the relationship was common during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Faderman's definition can be considered as a gloss to James's notebook description of "one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England."

<sup>11</sup> In The James Family: A Group Biography (1947; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1980), F. O. Matthiessen notes that William's letter has been lost (p. 325). His charges against the novel can be inferred, however, from Henry's defense of the novel and his characterization of Miss Birdseye, in a letter written February 14, 1885 [Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 68-70]. Henry eloquently denied William's accusation by responding in a classic description of the manner in which authors create character. Nevertheless, to compare the early description of Miss Birdseye with the James family's descriptions of Miss Peabody as recorded in Jean Strouse's Alice James: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980), p. 66, is to recognize considerable truth in William's charge. And when Miss Birdseye appears later in the novel, particularly in those chapters describing her last summer in Marmion, James treats her with gentle dignity--and no satire. Daniel H. Heaton, in "The Altered Characterization of Miss Birdseye in Henry James's The Bostonians" American Literature, 50 (1979), 588-603 details the controversy Miss Birdseye aroused and the shift in her characterization.

<sup>12</sup> James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> F. O. Matthiessen reprints the text of William's letter in The James Family, pp. 328-9. Although William praised The Bostonians

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enthusiastically, he tempered his enthusiasm by pointing out that "one can easily imagine the story cut out and made into a bright, short, sparkling thing of a hundred pages, which would have been an absolute success."

<sup>14</sup> James, Letters, 1883-1895, pp. 121-2. James, in reminiscing to Edmund Gosse about the novel, "seemed to recall that he found the subject and the material, after [he] had got launched in it, under some illusion, less interesting and repaying than [he] had assumed it to be" [Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), II, p. 498].

<sup>15</sup> Lubbock, II, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1966), pp. 183, 187; Osborn Andreas, Henry James and the Expanding Horizon (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1948), p. 34; Pelham Edgar, Henry James: Man and Author (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), p. 262; Charles R. Anderson, "James's Portrait of the Southerner," American Literature, 27 (1955), 309-31; and Clinton Forrest Oliver, "Henry James as Social Critic," Antioch Review, 7 (1947), 243-58.

<sup>17</sup> Walcutt, pp. 183, 187, 190; Andreas, p. 34; Clinton Hartley Grattan, The Three Jameses: A Family of Minds (1932; rpt. New York: New York University Press, 1962), p. 267; Charles Thomas Samuels, The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 98-99; and Ronald M. Meldrum, "Three of Henry James's Dark Ladies," Research Studies of Washington State University, 37 (1969), 54-60.

<sup>18</sup> Sara deSaussure Davis, "The Bostonians Reconsidered," Tulane Studies in English, 23 (1978), 39-60; Lee Ann Johnson, "The Psychology of Characterization: James's Portraits of Verena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor," Studies in the Novel, 6 (1974), 295-303; Lillian Faderman discusses the Boston marriage with particular reference to James's novel in Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present, pp. 190-5; and Maglin paints James as an anti-feminist in "Fictional Feminists in The Bostonians and The Odd Women."

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, p. 314 and Gerald Haslam, "Olive Chancellor's Painful Victory in The Bostonians," Research Studies of Washington State University, 36 (1968), 237, respectively. Critics who see Verena positively include Walcutt, pp. 191-2; W. R. Martin, "The Use of the Fairy-Tale: A Note on the Structure of The Bostonians," English Studies in Africa, 2 (1959), 98-109; Robert L. Selig, "The Red-Haired Lady Orator: Parallel Passages in The Bostonians and Adam Bede," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 16 (September, 1961), 164-9; Hamblen,

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35-44; and David Green, "Witch and Bewitchment in The Bostonians," Papers on Language and Literature, 3 (1967), 267-9. Those more critical of Verena: Philip Page, "The Curious Narration of The Bostonians," American Literature, 46 (1974), 374-83; William McMurray, "Pragmatic Realism in The Bostonians," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (1962), 339-44; Martha Banta, Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 18; and Sallie J. Hall, "Henry James and the Bluestockings: Satire and Morality in The Bostonians," Aeolian Harps: Essays in Literature in Honor of Maurice Browning Cramer, ed. Donna G. Fricke and Douglas C. Fricke (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1976), pp. 207-25.

20 Leavis calls The Bostonians "a wonderfully rich, intelligent, and brilliant book," noting that "it is one of James's achieved major classics, and among the works that he devoted to American life it is supreme" The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1962), p. 154. Irving Howe sees the novel as "great," and points to its "charm" and "wit" [Politics and the Novel (1957; rpt. Greenwich, Ct.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), pp. 186-7].

21 Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 107; Alfred Habegger, "The Disunity of The Bostonians," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 24 (1969), 193-209; and Donald David Stone, Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James, and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880's (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 278.

22 Samuels, p. 100 and Peter Buitenhuis, The Grasping Imagination: The American Writings of Henry James (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 158; Theodore C. Miller, "The Muddled Politics of The Bostonians," Georgia Review, 26 (1972), 336-46; Elizabeth McMahan, "Sexual Desire and Illusion in The Bostonians," Modern Fiction Studies, 25 (1979), 241-51; Johnson, p. 295; and Anderson, p. 323.

23 Samuels, p. 107.

24 In an August 25, 1915 letter to Edmund Gosse, James wishes that he could have included it in the New York Edition: "All the same, I should have liked to review it for the Edition--it would have come out a much truer and more curious thing (it meant to be curious from the first)" [Lubbock, II, p. 498].

25 Besides the most obvious source, Daudet's L'Évangéliste [Lyall H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement, and Daniel Lerner and Oscar Cargill, "Henry James at the Grecian Urn], critics are inclined to see a bewildering variety of works as sources for The Bostonians. By no means an exhaustive list, these sources include The Blithedale Romance [Marius Bewley, "James's Debt to Hawthorne (I): The Blithedale Romance and The Bostonians," Scrutiny, 16 (1949),

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178-95; Robert Emmet Long, The Great Succession: Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne, pp. 117-57]; The Scarlet Letter [R. W. B. Lewis, Trials of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 88-96]; Howells's Dr. Breen's Practice [Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), pp. 124-6]; Adam Bede [Robert A. Selig, "The Red-Haired Lady Orator: Parallel Passages in The Bostonians and Adam Bede, 164-6]; Notre Dame and Lohengrin [David Green, "Witch and Bewitchment in The Bostonians," 267-9]; Antigone [Lerner and Cargill]; and "La Fille aux Yeux d'Or" [Adeline R. Tintner, "James and Balzac: The Bostonians and 'La Fille aux Yeux d'Or,'" 241-54]. The Bostonians has been related to various genres: the fairy-tale [W. R. Martin, "The Use of the Fairy-Tale: A Note on the Structure of The Bostonians," 98-109; Howard D. Pearce, "Witchcraft Imagery and Allusions in James's Bostonians," Studies in the Novel, 6 (1974), 236-47]; the pastoral [Robert C. McLean, "The Bostonians: New England Pastoral," Papers on Language and Literature, 7 (1971), 374-81]; and the romance [Elizabeth Schultz, "The Bostonians: The Contagion of Romantic Illusion," Genre, 4 (1971), 45-59].

26 Sergio Perosa, Henry James and the Experimental Novel (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 19; Walter Isle, Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels, 1896-1901 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 12-3.

27 Irving Howe excuses the novel's defects by noting that "it is true that The Bostonians does falter about half way, but only because James is not quite sure how to manage one of the boldest and most brilliant transitions of his entire work" [Politics and the Novel, p. 201]. Unfortunately, Howe does not elaborate upon this tantalizing statement.

28 Stone, Novelists in a Changing World, pp. 261-2, 277-8. Stone cites the presence of an omniscient narrator, a closed ending (in contrast to James's typically ambiguous ones), Dickensian satire, and a passive Trollopean heroine as the Victorian features of The Bostonians. One can, of course, argue with Stone's definitions of the Victorian novel; nevertheless, aspects of the narrative technique, a wide variety of characters, the brilliant evocation of urban life, and the concern with social issues are similarities that The Bostonians shares with the "typical" Victorian novel.

29 Philip Page, "The Curious Narration of The Bostonians," pp. 374-83.

30 Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 47; Lubbock, II, p. 498.

31 Page, p. 379.

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<sup>32</sup> Stone, p. 262. In this regard, Habegger makes the provocative point that "the narrator makes his own consciousness the 'center'" ["The Disunity of The Bostonians," p. 200].

<sup>33</sup> I am indebted to Sara deSaussure Davis for her description of the "slippery irony of the narrative voice" ["Feminist Sources in The Bostonians," p. 585].

<sup>34</sup> The passage seems to begin with the omniscient narrator, stripped of his satire. However, in The Bostonians, the narrator is consistently satirical and deprecating. In contrast, the center of consciousness is usually straightforward and serious in tone. That is not to say that the center does not serve James's satiric purposes. When functioning as center, the character exposes his or her foolishness; the reader judges, unaided by direct authorial statement, that character's absurdity. It is also important to note that in passages of the center's point of view, the language assumes the character's idiosyncratic speech rhythms, so that the language operates on two levels: the passage's actual content, and the "personality" revealed in vocabulary, content, and grammatical structures.

<sup>35</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, pp. 46, 47.

<sup>36</sup> By not seeing Verena as a continuation of this experiment, critics tend to regard Verena's characterization as a failure. Lee Ann Johnson, in "The Psychology of Characterization: James's Portraits of Verena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor," exemplifies this position.

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## CHAPTER V

### The Penetrating Imagination

In "The Art of Fiction" James argues for fiction as a fine art by noting the kinship between the novelist and the painter: the novelist "competes with his brother the painter in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."<sup>1</sup> The novelist, like the painter, captures the tangible surface of life to communicate meaning. The Bostonians, the novel directly following James's 1884 essay, amply illustrates James's conception of the kinship between novelist and painter, in that the novel is devoted to rendering "the air of reality (solidity or specification)" set forth as "the supreme virtue of a novel."<sup>2</sup> Although the novel's narrator avows that certain situations make him despair of presenting them "with the air of reality,"<sup>3</sup> vivid character sketches and evocations of place achieve the essay's ideal of "solidity." Of all James's novels, The Bostonians is distinguished by the dense and palpable texture of its surface and its accurate portrayal of a specific time and place in the human spectacle.

Additionally, the novel justifies another kinship proposed in "The Art of Fiction," the novelist's brotherhood with the historian. "As the picture is reality, so the novel is history"; the novelist and the historian share the intent of representing and illustrating the past and the actions of men.<sup>4</sup> Again, The Bostonians exemplifies the

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novel as history in recreating the past with "solidity of specification." Yet the novel, as conceptualized in "The Art of Fiction" and as realized in The Bostonians, does not merely record the past. The novelist probes beneath the surface of the human spectacle to touch truth.<sup>5</sup> Rejecting the popular belief that the novelist is not concerned with truth, James compares the novelist to the philosopher.<sup>6</sup> In making this comparison James repudiates Besant who prescribes rules for the novel; James asserts that the novel's purpose is "to reveal a particular mind," making fiction "a personal, a direct impression of life."<sup>7</sup>

James's view of the novel as "an attempt to represent life" from an individual, personal perspective prompts him to redefine the nature of perception itself:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications 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 knowing any particular corner of it--this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience.<sup>8</sup>

For James, experience is an act of the imagination, enabling him to move from the surface of the human spectacle "to trace the implications of things." In defining experience James stresses the receptive and perceptive consciousness--experience is the action of the consciousness receiving and organizing physical reality, going beyond the perceptible surface "to guess the unseen from the seen." Experience, then, is a matter of personal impressions. It is this kind of experience that James transmutes into the fabric of fiction.

As The Bostonians attempts to capture the "solidity of specification," so The Princess Casamassima,<sup>9</sup> serialized in Atlantic Monthly

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September 1885-October 1886 (the same time The Bostonians was appearing in Century Magazine), is concerned with the reciprocal relationship between experience and the receptive consciousness. The Princess Casamassima is James's attempt to guess the unseen from the seen--the novel's backdrop is the political unrest among London's lower classes--and to examine the nature of the consciousness as it perceives and interprets life. The novel traces the development of Hyacinth Robinson from his tenth year to his death, ten years later, by suicide. Son of a French seamstress imprisoned for murdering an English lord who was her seducer, Hyacinth is raised by Amanda Pynsent, a poor dressmaker, who instills in the boy a vivid sense of his noble origins. Hyacinth, however, learns of his plebeian heritage when he is taken to the prison to visit his dying mother. As he grows older, Hyacinth is apprenticed to a bookbinder, and at the bindery he meets Eustace Poupin, a political exile from Paris. Poupin nurtures in Hyacinth an acute awareness of social inequities and the necessity for social revolution. Poupin also introduces Hyacinth to Paul Muniment, who involves the impressionable bookbinder in the anarchist movement. Hyacinth, goaded by the revolutionaries' inaction, pledges himself to assassinating a duke on the demand of Hoffendahl, leader of the underground.

Although Hyacinth vows his life to the revolution, he is increasingly sensitive to art and culture. For Hyacinth, the beautiful things of civilization are incarnated in the Princess Casamassima, the willful Christina Light of Roderick Hudson, now estranged from her Prince. Believing herself deeply involved with the revolutionaries and bored by the banal, the Princess cultivates Hyacinth because he represents the "people." She discovers, however, that he is tainted: he has,

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at least partially, an aristocratic parentage, and he appreciates civilization's treasures--an appreciation further enhanced by a brief sojourn in Paris and Venice. The Princess drops Hyacinth because he no longer wholeheartedly sympathizes with the movement, although he still considers himself bound by his vow. Hyacinth's conflicting loyalties are put to the test when he is ordered to carry out the assassination. Unwilling to repeat the crime of his mother and bring her shame to life, Hyacinth turns the pistol upon his own heart.

Although The Princess Casamassima is inspired by actual events,<sup>10</sup> the novel's real subject is the consciousness as it is described in "The Art of Fiction." The novel is James's experiment on a wide scale "to guess the unseen from the seen," "to judge the whole piece from the pattern."<sup>11</sup> It is true that James depends upon actual observations: he boasts to T. S. Perry of his expedition to Millbank prison; he jots down "phrases of people"; and like Dickens he haunts the London streets.<sup>12</sup> In spite of all this gathered data, James still has a difficult time achieving solidity of specification--actual details remained vague<sup>13</sup>--but James turns his "not knowing" to advantage: "My scheme," James recollects in the novel's New York Edition Preface, "called for the suggested 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."<sup>14</sup> Thus James enlarges his "not knowing" to "the value [he wishes] most to render."<sup>15</sup>

The Preface to The Princess Casamassima, dominated by James's discussion of the consciousness, is in many respects an elaboration

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of the concepts put forth in "The Art of Fiction," confirming the essay's influence upon the novel. James returns, for example, to the relationship between experience and consciousness in the Preface. There, James defines experience as "our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures."<sup>16</sup> Experience is the result of active participation in the world--"what happens to us as social creatures"--not the passive aestheticism of which James has been accused. James continues to stress action as he acknowledges his abiding interest in the individual consciousness:

This in fact I have ever found rather terribly the point--that the figures in any pictures, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it.<sup>17</sup>

James shifts metaphors here, moving from the passive "figures in any picture" to the active "agents in any drama," thereby emphasizing that the link between the consciousness and the situation is a dynamic one. What is important is not what the "agents in any drama" see, but what they feel. That feeling is a reciprocal relationship, and it constitutes James's interest: "The interest of that attitude and the act would be the actor's imagination and vision of them, together with the nature and degree of their felt return upon him."<sup>18</sup> Thus The Princess Casamassima, the product of James's attempt to unite observation and imagination, is James's celebration of the power of his own consciousness "convert[ing] the very pulses of the air into revelations."<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, James sees the action of the consciousness as a means to capture dramatic intensity:

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Intimacy with a man's specific behavior, with his given case, is desperately certain to make us see it as a whole--in which even arbitrary limitations of our own vision lose whatever beauty they may on occasion have pretended to. What a man thinks and what he feels are the history and character of what he does; on all of which things the logic of intensity rests. Without intensity where is the vividness, and without vividness where is presentability?<sup>20</sup>

The manner in which a man responds to individual things and experiences is the key to his character; his responses are "the history and character of what he does"--reiterating James's joining, in "The Art of Fiction," character and incident as inseparable. Importantly for James's fiction, this passage shows James transmuting his subject, the consciousness, into practice--"what a man thinks and what he feels" form the foundations for dramatic "presentability."

Thus Hyacinth Robinson, as the receptive and organizing consciousness, assumes the author's place in the narrative as a means of achieving that dramatic presentability. Indeed, in the Preface James recognizes his affinity with Hyacinth as the perceiving consciousness, and therefore Hyacinth's qualifying to replace James as the narrating consciousness: "I had only to conceive his watching the same public show, the same innumerable appearances, I had watched myself, and of his watching very much as I had watched."<sup>21</sup> The human spectacle of London acquires dramatic immediacy because it is reflected through Hyacinth's often bewildered consciousness. But more significantly, Hyacinth's consciousness struggling to reconcile his dual heritage, constitutes James's subject and provides a method for presenting that subject. In The Princess Casamassima, James achieves in Hyacinth many of the objectives proposed in "The Art of Fiction"--it is no mistake when in

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the novel James describes the bookbinder as "a youth on whom nothing was lost" (p. 125), echoing James's admonition in the 1884 essay.<sup>22</sup>

The city of London reflected through Hyacinth is vivid and palpable, inspiring Cargill and Dupee to see the novel's subject as London.<sup>23</sup> The city's pervasive and dominating presence has prompted Ward to call London a character in its own right<sup>24</sup>--a claim testifying to the success of the center of consciousness as a means of creating sense of place. The London of The Princess Casamassima is brilliantly rendered, from the dinginess of back street pubs and shops to the elegance of Mayfair. James is quick to point out in the novel's Preface that he drew upon impressions gathered during his first year of residence in London.<sup>25</sup> The Princess derives from James's direct observation of the London scene in much the same way as The Bostonians depends on his American observations. And as in his "peculiar" American tale, James focuses a critical eye on society. These similarities have induced critics to pair the two novels: Putt emphasizes the novel's shared qualities, as does Goode and Trilling; Kimmey regards The Princess as James's "rewrite" of his American failure; and Powers calls the novels "companion pieces."<sup>26</sup> Granted, both novels bear the mark of James's interest in French naturalism--both novels presuppose a naturalistic view of heredity and environment--but divergent conclusions about that view come out of each novel. The overall tone of The Bostonians is satiric; James employs a merciless narrator who unmasks the characters' limitations and who deflates their ridiculous rhetoric. The narrator's admissions of ignorance, however, suggest that the characters exist beyond the text--they have a life to which

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both narrator and reader are not privy--and the characters' inaccessibility taken together with the novel's ambiguous ending indicate in James's "very American tale" that human beings are not irrevocably bound by their past or their environment.

The Princess Casamassima is at once more intimate and pessimistic. In place of The Bostonians' objectivity that results from many points of view, James depends upon the dominating perspective of Hyacinth; the narrator's brief appearances reveal him to be tenderly solicitous over the hero. Moreover, Hyacinth Robinson is a man divided against himself, split between a "French impropriety" who dies ignominiously in prison and who ties him to the people and a dissolute English aristocrat who represents Hyacinth's link to culture and civilization. To what degree Hyacinth's heritage is responsible for his fate is moot; what is crucial for the novel is that Hyacinth believes he is to be torn between his mother's and father's influences. And so intense is this conflict that Hyacinth can choose only death. In The Bostonians, the ambiguous ending leaves open the possibility that the characters may attain some happiness; the ending of The Princess Casamassima admits of no hope or escape.

The Princess Casamassima reflects James's interest in French naturalism and social criticism--interests dominating much of his fiction of the eighties. The novel's involvement with social issues, particularly economic inequities and political agitation, has deflected many critics from the novel's true subject--the workings of Hyacinth's consciousness. For example, Tilley, Stoehr, and Trilling search for the actual figures who serve as James's models for Hyacinth, Paul, the

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Princess, and Hoffendahl.<sup>27</sup> Despite these factual studies, there is a lengthy debate about James's success in rendering the political scene. Winters compares James's rendition of social unrest to a "small boy under a sheet at Hallowe'en"; less vehemently, Howe asserts that James does not have "a commanding vision of the political life"; both Woodcock and Oliver cite James's historical inaccuracies in his depicting the anarchist movement of the 1880s.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Spender praises James's observation of political types as "remarkable and curiously undated," and Trilling regards James's picture of political unrest as real and "confirmed by multitudinous records."<sup>29</sup>

Although the majority of studies on The Princess Casamassima have been concerned with source-hunting<sup>30</sup> or James's politics, other critics have focused on issues more closely related to James's interests suggested by "The Art of Fiction" and explained in the novel's preface. Vidan, for example, approaches the novel as the story of Hyacinth's growing awareness of his world, and Powers recognizes that Hyacinth's consciousness provides James with both subject and narrative technique.<sup>31</sup> In spite of the general acknowledgment of Hyacinth as the novel's hero and controlling point of view, few critics focus on Hyacinth's character or consciousness; only Luecke, Kimmey, and Page have made detailed examination of Hyacinth's "fallible consciousness."<sup>32</sup> Yet opinion widely diverges on the nature of his character, ranging from seeing Hyacinth as a "prig" to a "victim of his own despair."<sup>33</sup> Many, however, including Bogan, Oliver, Dubler, and Luecke, recognize Hyacinth as the novel's "finest intelligence," a "significant reflection of the complexities of his society," and a crucial technical

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device.<sup>34</sup> Others cast Hyacinth as a major flaw in the novel. Stone, for example, asserts that the problem with Hyacinth is the problem with James who stuffs Hyacinth with his own illusions about life and art.<sup>35</sup> For Dupee, Howe, and Ward, Hyacinth is not an effective means for conveying James's political and social insights because he is too passive and hypersensitive: Dupee sees Hyacinth dying of a poverty of ideas while Howe faults his "feminine insularity of character," and Ward describes Hyacinth as a spectator rather than victim of tragedy.<sup>36</sup>

Whether or not the characterization of Hyacinth is flawed, his perspective is the major narrating and characterizing mode in The Princess Casamassima. Yet James also employs an omniscient narrator who maintains a pervasive though subdued presence throughout the novel. The narrator functions most freely in the first five chapters where he goes behind Miss Pynsent and Mr. Vetch to develop ten-year-old Hyacinth and to trace his rearing. Thus even with an omniscient narrator James avoids the traditional sketch of the hero by projecting Hyacinth's background through his surrogate parents. And when the narrator does report to the traditional biographical sketch, as he does with Eustace Poupin, the narrator limits himself to essential facts rather than psychological summaries.

The narrator continues his restraint throughout the novel, usually confining himself to references to "our hero." Occasionally the narrator is more intrusive, particularly when James must shift from Hyacinth's consciousness to other means of narration. The narrator prefaces Hyacinth's letter to the Princess: "Three weeks after this he found himself in Venice, whence he addressed to the Princess

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Casamassima a letter of which I reproduce the principal passages" (p. 332). And an even more awkward shift, reminiscent of The Bostonians' narrator, occurs when Hyacinth meets the Prince: "It is forbidden us to try the question of what Hyacinth . . . may have had on his conscience . . ." (p. 441).

But these ungainly intrusions are relatively infrequent. Where the narrator might be expected to be most prominent--the scenes where Hyacinth is absent--are purely objective and dramatic. The narrator does not make his presence felt. Instead, these scenes are composed of dialogue and minimal stage directions. Such scenes, vital in balancing Hyacinth's warped view of characters, are narrated straightforwardly, the characters themselves generating the narrative movement without the benefit of a narrator who edits, structures, and interprets.

The characters thus perform as if they were on a stage; when Hyacinth enters, the scene shifts to the perspective of his consciousness which like a narrator edits and interprets. Hyacinth's consciousness is the receptive medium through which James reflects setting, action, and character. Hyacinth truly embodies James's ideal artist of "The Art of Fiction"--he is "a youth on whom nothing is lost" (p. 125). This is not to say, however, that Hyacinth's point of view is objective or even realistic. Adhering to James's definition that a novel is "a personal, a direct impression of life," Hyacinth's perspective is highly colored by the world of art, justifying Powers in calling the bookbinder a romantic and Halliburton, a visionary.<sup>37</sup> Hyacinth's romantic propensities are established early. Pinnie continually embellishes Hyacinth's fairy-tale origins. And Hyacinth himself spends his spare time and spare money feeding his imagination:

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He used to stand [in front of the little sweetshop] for half an hour at a time and spell out the first page of the romances in the Family Herald and the London Journal, where he particularly admired the obligatory illustration in which the noble characters (they were always of the highest birth) were presented to the carnal eye. When he had a penny he spent only a fraction of it on stale sugar-candy; for the remaining halfpenny he always bought a ballad with a vivid woodcut at the top. (p. 24)

Hyacinth is fascinated by art, such as is accessible to him--newspaper portraits of noble characters and lurid woodcuts--all very much divorced from the dingy reality of Lomax Place. As a child James's hero finds in visual art and in fiction means of escaping everyday life. Even though Hyacinth is only ten years old, Mr. Vetch accurately describes him and his future: "'He's a thin-skinned, morbid, mooning, introspective little beggar, with a good deal of imagination and not much perseverance, who'll expect a good deal more of life than he'll find in it'" (p. 41).

Hyacinth's imagination and his tendency to see life through the medium of literature are evident in the manner in which he registers his environment. The magic that Medley represents for Hyacinth is palpable in his first response to it:

Hyacinth got up early--an operation attended with very little effort, as he had scarce closed his eyes all night. What he saw from his window made him dress as quickly as a young man might who desired more than ever that his appearance shouldn't give strange ideas about him: an old garden with parterres in curious figures and little intervals of lawn that seemed to our hero's cockney vision fantastically green. At one end of the garden was a parapet of mossy brick which looked down on the other side into a canal, a moat, a quaint old pond (he hardly knew what to call it) and from the same standpoint showed a considerable part of the main body of the house--Hyacinth's room belonging to a wing that commanded the extensive irregular back--which was richly grey wherever clear of the ivy and the other dense

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creepers, and everywhere infinitely a picture: with a high-piled ancient russet roof broken by huge chimneys and queer peep-holes and all manner of odd gables and windows on different lines, with all manner of antique patches and protrusions and with a particularly fascinating architectural excrescence where a wonderful clock-face was lodged, a clock-face covered with gilding and blazonry but showing many traces of the years and the weather. (p. 247)

The first two sentences, which open Book 3, place Hyacinth at Medley, dramatically contrasting with the closing of Book 2, Hyacinth's night-journey through London to Hoffendahl. The narrator is present in these two sentences--he refers to Hyacinth as "our hero," and he sets the stage for Hyacinth's consciousness which assumes the narrative in the final sentence of the excerpt. This lengthy sentence captures the pulse of Hyacinth's mind as it is confronted by Medley's romantic atmosphere; the sentence is long and breathless, with details piling on details, leaping from one architectural feature to another. The language can barely contain or convey Hyacinth's wonder, suggesting that the bookbinder hardly possesses the vocabulary to articulate his impression. Details with literary resonance--"a parapet of mossy brick"--alternate with vague descriptions--"a particularly fascinating architectural excrescence." Hyacinth struggles with the inadequacy of his experience--"a canal, a moat, a quaint old pond (he hardly knew what to call it)"--and lapses into repetition--"all manner of odd gables and windows on different lines, with all manner of antique patches and protrusions." Hyacinth cannot convey his impressions, and his inability enables the reader to experience dramatically both Hyacinth's wonderment and the limitations of his past.

Simultaneously, by virtue of Hyacinth's inability to describe the house, Medley assumes a magical, fairy-tale quality, stark contrast

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to London's darkness and squalor. Medley becomes, for Hyacinth, a retreat into the world of romantic literature: "The repast was delicate-- though his other senses were so awake that hunger dropped out and he ate, as it were, without eating--and the grave automatic servant filled his glass with a liquor that reminded him of some lines of Keats in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'" (p. 248).<sup>38</sup>

Hyacinth transmutes that real "liquor" into a poetic symbol of experience, also redolent of the Keatsian ode:

The cup of an exquisite experience--a week in that enchanted palace, a week of such immunity from Lomax Place and old Crook as he had never dreamed of--was at his lips; it was purple with the wine of romance, of reality, of civilisation, and he couldn't push it aside without drinking. He might go home ashamed, but he would have for evermore in his mouth the taste of nectar. (p. 271)

Hyacinth is inclined to see life, especially life at Medley, as a Keatsian romance. Significantly, he blurs important distinctions--the imaginary and symbolic wine is "of romance, of reality, of civilisation" as if somehow all three are interchangeable.

The wine of romance intoxicates Hyacinth, so that the aristocratic world is shrouded in Keatsian veils. Hyacinth, having returned to London, sifts its reality through the sieve of literature:

The long light of the grey summer evening was still in the air and Madeira Crescent wore a soiled, dusty expression. A hand-organ droned in front of a neighboring house and the cart of the local washerwoman, to which a donkey was harnessed, was drawn up opposite. The local children as well were dancing on the pavement to the music of the organ, and the scene was surveyed from one of the windows by a gentleman in a dirty dressing-gown, smoking a pipe, who made Hyacinth think of Mr Micawber. (p. 353).

Madeira Crescent, despite its exotic name, is far from the fairy-tale palace of Medley. But Hyacinth's response to Madeira Crescent is

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still conditioned by literature--Hyacinth sees Dickens's Mr. Micawber in a "gentleman." Admittedly, Hyacinth is aware of the vulgarity and philistinism of the setting, but he uses literature here to intervene between perceiver and perceived. Seeing a man in a dirty dressing-gown as Mr. Micawber makes that man more acceptable than if he were simply a man in a dirty dressing-gown.<sup>39</sup>

It is understandable that Hyacinth, sensitive and intelligent, would be inclined to paint over the ugly realities of life. But he extends his romanticizing tendencies to the people around him, which leads him to misjudge them grossly. Millicent Henning is, for Hyacinth, magnificently plebeian:

She summed up the sociable humorous ignorant chatter of the masses, their capacity for offensive and defensive passion, their instinctive perception of their strength on the day they should really exercise it; and as much as any of this their ideal of something smug and prosperous, where washed hands and oiled hair and plates in rows on dressers and stuffed birds under glass and family photographs of a quite similar effect would symbolize success. She was none the less plucky for being at bottom a shameless Philistine, ambitious of a front garden with rockwork; and she presented the plebeian character in none the less plastic a form. Having the history of the French Revolution at his fingers' ends, Hyacinth could easily see her (if there should ever be barricades in the streets of London) with a red cap of liberty on her head and her white throat bared so that she should be able to shout the louder the Marseillaise of that hour, whatever it might be. (p. 122)

Granted, Millicent is "to her blunt, expanded finger-tips a daughter of London" (p. 59) and represents the vitality of the London masses. To this extent Hyacinth's view of Millicent is consistent with her portrayal in the opening chapters of the novel where she is presented omnisciently. However, Hyacinth's perception of Millicent is

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considerably mistaken, too: Millicent aspires to bourgeois comforts and stability: she "only asked to keep her skirts clear and marry some respectable tea-merchant" (p. 122), making it unlikely that she will fulfill Hyacinth's vision of her mounting the barricades.

Millicent is presented through Hyacinth's consciousness, and that presentation is a means by which the reader can judge the degree to which Hyacinth warps the physical world to coincide with his literature-conditioned perspective. Such judgment is possible because Millicent has been introduced and partially developed by the narrator in the novel's early chapters. As a result, the reader recognizes the justice of Hyacinth's perspective and his divergence from the real world. Actually, Hyacinth's view of Millicent exposes more about Hyacinth than it does about Millicent.

If Millicent Henning reveals the extent to which Hyacinth romanticizes other characters, Paul Muniment demonstrates how dangerous Hyacinth's failure of judgment is. Hyacinth accepts Paul as "an elder brother" who "in the light of cheerful stoicism" could sacrifice Hyacinth to "the stiff engagement of Hoffendahl" (p. 328). Strange elder brother indeed. Moreover, Hyacinth admires Paul immensely for his cold detachment that enables the chemist to use people as instruments:

Muniment's absence of passion, his fresh-coloured coolness, his easy, exact knowledge, the way he kept himself clean (save for fine chemical stains on his hands) in circumstances of foul contact, constituted a group of qualities that had always appeared to his admirer singularly enviable. Most enviable of all was the force that enabled him to sink personal sentiment where a great public good was to be attempted and yet keep up the form of caring for that minor interest. (pp. 329-30)

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For Hyacinth, Paul keeps himself untouched by the world of "foul contact." Such is Paul's inviolability that he can coldly "sink personal sentiment" into vague "public good"--an ability Hyacinth, who is so sensitive, finds enviable. Hyacinth ultimately casts Paul as hero:

[Paul] struck Hyacinth while he spoke these words as such a fine embodiment of the spirit of the people; he stood there in his powerful, sturdy newness with such an air of having learnt what he had learnt and of good nature that had purposes in it, that our hero felt the simple inrush of his old, frequent pride at having a person of that promise, a nature of that capacity, for a friend. (p. 380)

Such is Hyacinth's admiration that he willingly relinquishes his autonomy, exclaiming, "'I'd go by what you tell me anywhere'" (p. 380). Yet, if Paul is a hero, he is a vague one--he had "an air of having learnt what he had learnt and of good nature that had purposes in it"--a statement forcing the reader to realize that Hyacinth's illusions, which permit him to see Paul as "a fine embodiment of the spirit of the people," are once again at work. Hyacinth is too inclined to abstract and intellectualize his friends--as Millicent can figure as "the Goddess of Reason" (p. 122), Paul is the spirit of the proletariat.

Seeing Paul through Hyacinth, the reader can discover Paul's true nature, which is cold and calculating. Nevertheless, James feels compelled to balance Hyacinth's perception of Paul by employing scenes objectively rendered. In such scenes, the most memorable being Paul's rejection of the Princess when her money is cut off, Paul exhibits his cynical exploitation of people, revealing his true colors and the extent to which Hyacinth's "fallible consciousness" idealizes the chemist. With both Paul and Millicent (who is developed omnisciently

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in Book 1), James adds another frame of reference, as it were, to assist the reader in evaluating those characters and Hyacinth's misreading of them. Undoubtedly, the extra frame of reference adds balance to Millicent's and Paul's characterization, but it also indicates James's insecurity about relying totally on Hyacinth's point of view, an insecurity apparent in all the narratorial references to Hyacinth as "our hero." James's unwillingness to trust Hyacinth's flawed perception and to trust the reader's judgment of that perception marks The Princess Casamassima as an experimental novel. Compared to The Bostonians, particularly in that novel's dependence upon the curious and intrusive narrator, The Princess Casamassima demonstrates that James has come a long way in employing the center of consciousness as his primary characterizing and narrating mode. Nevertheless, James cannot as yet completely relinquish narratorial control.

Although the narrator maintains a constant though subdued presence, Hyacinth is the novel's dominating perspective. Because Hyacinth has a natural sensitivity to art and literature, he tends to see his world through their distorting mirrors; not only does he romanticize his environment, but he harbors illusions about the people around him. By providing escape and delusion, art and literature acquire dubious value in the novel. The Princess Casamassima shows the extent of James's own disillusionment with the arts of the painter and of the novelist. James's distrust is apparent in The Portrait of a Lady, where Isabel permits herself to be regarded as an art-object, and becomes trapped in Osmond's museum. Art is looked upon with suspicion in The Bostonians: Olive sees it as a means to keep the down-trodden satisfied and to deflect energy from reform. And to a real extent, the

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novel's narrator casts doubt on novelistic traditions, and Page sees James as questioning the ability of language to communicate and create.<sup>40</sup> Finally, in The Princess Casamassima, the arts are the means by which Hyacinth blurs distinctions between romance and reality.

With his growing disenchantment with painting and literature, James turns to drama as a more accurate reflection of his characters and his art. The drama makes no pretense about pretending--pretense is the very nature of drama, whereas both painting and literature, by capturing the "air of reality," attempt to maintain their illusions as reality. The novel is pervaded with the drama; many of its characters are theatrical. Madame Grandoni, who wears an obvious wig, looks like a badly made-up actress; Millicent Henning makes a living "dressing up" as a clothes model; and Lady Aurora strikes Hyacinth as "a personage in a comedy" (p. 97). Anastasius Vetch plays a fiddle in a third-rate theatre. Even Captain Sholto, who reminds Hyacinth of "certain of Bulwer's novels" (p. 186), "was nothing whatever in himself and had no character or merit save by tradition, reflexion, imitation, superstition" (p. 296); "he was not in the least a natural, quiet person, and had only a hundred affectations and attitudes" (p. 297). Hyacinth is also an actor--he assumes the costume of a Frenchman (p. 68), and Paul calls him "a duke in disguise" (p. 397). Millicent's first impression of Hyacinth after a ten-year hiatus stresses his appearance as actor:

What she liked was his face and something jaunty and romantic, almost theatrical, in his whole little person. Miss Henning was not acquainted with any member of the dramatic profession, but she supposed vaguely that that was the way an actor would look in private life. (p. 69)

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Hyacinth is indeed an actor, who alternates between his roles of orphan, gentleman, bookbinder, and revolutionary so that his own character is hidden. In response to Millicent's suggestion that he would "look very nice in a fancy costume," Hyacinth reflects:

He was on the point of replying that he didn't care for fancy costumes, he wished to go through life in his own character; but he checked himself with the reflexion that this was exactly what he was apparently destined not to do. His own character? He was to cover that up as carefully as possible; he was to go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle; he was to be every day and every hour an actor. (p. 74)

Hyacinth covers up "his own character" because he does not know who he is. In fact, Lyall Powers sees Hyacinth's tragedy stemming from Hyacinth's impulsive committing his life before he knew who and what he is.<sup>41</sup> Thus, to regard Hyacinth as an actor is to see him in terms of a metaphor that accurately describes Hyacinth's situation in the novel. Hyacinth's wearing "a mask" and "a borrowed mantle" exemplifies Hyacinth's real dilemma--of not knowing his own character and of permitting himself to be split in his loyalties.

If Hyacinth is an actor, then his situation is a drama played out against the backdrop of London. Appropriately, Hyacinth's conflict is cast in dramatic terms:

It was not so much that he wanted to enjoy as that he wanted to know; his desire wasn't to be pampered but to be initiated. Sometimes of a Saturday in the long evenings of June and July he made his way into Hyde Park at the hour when the throng of carriages, of riders, of brilliant pedestrians was thickest; and though lately, on two or three of these occasions, he had been accompanied by Miss Henning, whose criticism of the scene was rich and distinct, a tremendous little drama had taken place privately on the stage of his inner consciousness. He wanted to drive in every carriage, to mount on every horse, to feel on his arm the hand of every pretty woman in the place,

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. . . And this was not the fruit of a morbid vanity on his part, or of a jealousy that couldn't be intelligent; his personal discomfort was the result of an intense admiration for what he had missed. (pp. 125-6)

The "tremendous little drama" is Hyacinth's realization that he can never know "what it was to be the flower of a high civilisation" (p. 126). Hyacinth's consciousness is the stage whereupon the drama of his heredity—"his fate to be divided to the point of torture, to be split open by sympathies that pulled him in different ways" (p. 126)—is played out.

Hyacinth's consciousness is also the means whereby James presents his material dramatically. As has been shown above, Hyacinth's consciousness is a major factor in developing the novel's characters. Following the theoretical concerns outlined in "The Art of Fiction," James makes Hyacinth's consciousness, "a spider-web of the finest silken threads," the novel's subject and its method of narration and characterization. By having Hyacinth register impressions and respond to characters, James dramatically presents the movement of Hyacinth's mind creating experience and struggling with split loyalties. As a result, the reader directly experiences the novel's subject, Hyacinth's consciousness, without narratorial intervention.

Moreover, in the passage describing Hyacinth's "tremendous little drama" James's dramatic method is at work in developing Hyacinth himself. The details of the human spectacle are barely registered; James permits the reader only a glimpse of a "throng of carriages, of riders, of brilliant pedestrians." Taking precedence over concrete details are Hyacinth's responses to the crowd in Hyde Park and subsequent train of thought leading him inexorably to "the cause he had

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secretly espoused" and the "extraordinarily mingled current in his blood" (p. 126). Hyacinth's whole history and character are dramatized in his responses to the physical world; Hyacinth's dilemma is played "privately on the stage of his inner consciousness." As a result, James's approach to the surface of the human spectacle is considerably different in The Princess Casamassima than it is in The Bostonians. In the "very American tale," the physical world exists independently of the characters. Although characters are revealed by the manner in which they respond to various settings, those settings are peripheral to the characters' conflicts and moral situations. In contrast, the settings of The Princess Casamassima dramatize Hyacinth's "fate to be divided." To this end, the settings purposively shift from Keatsian Medley to Dickensian London, and in so doing function primarily to reveal Hyacinth's personality.

The importance of drama in The Princess Casamassima is further evident in James's employing it as a structural device. Millicent persuades Hyacinth that she deserves "a high-class treat" (p. 123), so together they attend The Pearl of Paraguay at a theatre in the Strand. The play is an important part of Hyacinth's own drama, for during its performance Hyacinth meets the Princess Cassamassima. Hyacinth is most "friendly to the dramatic illusion" (p. 136); when he is summoned by the Princess, "he took in all these things and finally said to himself that if she wanted nothing more of him he was content, he would like it to go on; so pleasant was it to be enthroned with fine ladies in a dusky, spacious receptacle which framed the bright picture of the stage and made one's own situation seem a play within the play" (p. 148). Hyacinth's own "tremendous little drama" takes place against

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the melodramatic backdrop of The Pearl of Paraguay--he becomes both actor and spectator.

And it is also quite appropriate that Hyacinth meets Christina Light at The Pearl because the play begins to dramatize her destructive nature. It recapitulates her history in Roderick Hudson--"It's terribly complicated; some one or other was hurled over a precipice" (p. 151)--and intimates the fate of the other "artist" she becomes involved with--in the play's final act there is "a violent scene which included pistol-shots and shrieks" (p. 159).<sup>42</sup> The Pearl of Paraguay is James's means of introducing Christina Light, and it contains her past and her future.

If the novel as a whole is cast as a play--a "tremendous little drama [taking] place privately on the stage of [Hyacinth's] inner consciousness"--then Christina Light, the Princess Casamassima, is the play's supreme actress. Hyacinth first sees her as a museum-piece: "That head, where two or three diamond stars glittered in the thick, delicate hair which defined its shape, suggested to Hyacinth something antique and celebrated, something he had admired of old--the memory was vague--in a statue, in a picture, in a museum" (p. 148). Hyacinth is dazzled and blinded by her mysterious, pictorial resonances of painting and statuary. But when Hyacinth goes to visit the Princess in Mayfair, he sees her for what she really is, an actress:

When at last the door opened and the servant, re-appearing, threw it far back as to make a wide passage for a person of the importance of his mistress, Hyacinth's suspense became very acute; it was much the same feeling with which, at the theatre, he had sometimes awaited the entrance of a celebrated actress. In this case the actress was to perform for him alone. There was still a moment before she came on, and when

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she arrived she was so simply dressed--besides his seeing her now on her feet--that she looked quite a different figure. (p. 197)

Hyacinth is never sure just who the Princess is. She might be "divine" (p. 148), she might be "one of the most remarkable women in Europe" (p. 198). Indeed, Hyacinth's problem is the reader's problem: as Charles Anderson asks, "Is Christina sincere, or merely play-acting?"<sup>43</sup> The mystery of and uncertainty about her true nature is further complicated by the fact that the Princess evokes a wide variety of responses among the characters. Hyacinth questions "if she were really of the same substance with the humanity he had hitherto known" (p. 148), while Paul Muniment calls her a monster (p. 181). Even Rowland Mallet, who had known Christina when she was ten years younger, is bewildered in his responses; he compares her to a goddess, but adds that "she is corrupt, perverse, as proud as a potentate; and a coquette of the first magnitude; but she is generous and intelligent."<sup>44</sup> Mallet concludes that "she is an actress" "more dangerous in her virtuous moods than in her vicious ones."<sup>45</sup> Even critical opinion regards Christina ambivalently. She is called a "femme fatale," "a destroyer," "the flame to Hyacinth's moth";<sup>46</sup> less negatively, she "evokes mixed feelings of admiration and exasperation."<sup>47</sup> The only agreement about her is that she is complex and "vitally feminine."<sup>48</sup>

The Princess is both visionary and destroyer, goddess and femme fatale. According to the Preface of The Princess Casamassima, Christina is "world-weary" and has "an aversion to the banal"; "she can, or she believes she can, feel freshly about the 'people' and their wrongs and their sorrows and their perpetual smothered ferment."<sup>49</sup>

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Doubtless she is concerned with the plight of the poor, yet her charity has a large element of self-gratification and naivete about it. In this respect, she nearly becomes a comic figure;<sup>50</sup> she is disappointed when Hyacinth does not dress his "part" in the play:

"The only objection to you individually is that you've nothing of the people about you--to-day not even the dress." Her eyes wandered over him from head to foot, and their recognition made him ashamed. "I wish you had come in the clothes you wear at your work." (p. 201)

The Princess may be sincerely concerned with the down-trodden, but along with her concern is a large measure of exploitation.

The Princess is contradictory and alluring, and James's characterization of her enhances the complexity of her character. The characterization of the Princess is a triumph of the dramatic method. She is the only character in the novel whom James consistently presents from the outside. She is most vividly seen through Hyacinth's consciousness; he typically romanticizes her as the fairy-tale mistress of Medley or as Madeira Crescent's housewife reminding Hyacinth of French fiction (p. 411). Other characters correct Hyacinth's view of the Princess: Mr. Vetch sees her as exercising a dangerous influence upon Hyacinth (p. 196); Madame Grandoni rightly calls her a cappriciosa (p. 251); and Paul sees her as a trifler and an instrument to be used and discarded. James provides a variety of perspectives upon Christina, including her own words and deeds; as a result of this multiplicity of view-points, the reader acquires a deep knowledge of the Princess's complexity. The Princess is presented dramatically--James never goes behind her--but she achieves considerable depth of character because of James's multiplication of aspects and the reader's remaining ignorant of her true thoughts and feelings.

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More than any of James's fiction, The Princess Casamassima fulfills James's description of the novel and its subject proposed in "The Art of Fiction." Moreover, in depending upon Hyacinth Robinson's consciousness as the novel's narration and characterization, James integrates the methods and ideals of drama into the texture of his fiction. In both subject and technique, The Princess Casamassima is a crucial turning point in James's practice of fiction.

Many critics have recognized, like Seed, the transitional nature of James's London novel: Howe calls it "an experiment in craft and imagination" while Oliver notes that in this novel James exhausts the major themes and forms of the nineteenth-century novel.<sup>51</sup> Beyond these rather vague statements, however, little has been done in terms of James's technique in The Princess Casamassima. Indeed, the only detailed analysis of the novel as part of James's technical development is Dubler's, a study which describes the novel as both terminal and seminal in James development. The first three books, for Dubler, recall James's previous work including his use of an omniscient narrator, while Books 4 through 6 anticipate the novels of the major phase by depending upon Hyacinth's point of view.<sup>52</sup> The Princess Casamassima occupies a crucial place in the James canon because it is James's first experiment in organizing a major work around a center of consciousness. Although the novel bears evidence of James's hesitance in relying completely on the center as a means of narrating and characterizing, it represents a significant step in James's striving to incorporate dramatic principles in his fiction.

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Like The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima was poorly received by contemporary readers and critics, despite James's high hopes for the novels to be popular and financial successes. The reception of the two novels further discouraged James about "the art of fiction," and impelled him toward his decision later in the decade to abandon novel-writing for play-wrighting. Nevertheless, The Princess Casamassima is James's personal triumph, because in it he demonstrates the power of the sensitive mind and celebrates the penetrating imagination:

What it all came back to was, no doubt, something like this wisdom--that if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but that if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, The Bostonians (1886; rpt. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," pp. 379-80.

<sup>5</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 398.

<sup>6</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 380.

<sup>7</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 384.

<sup>8</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 389.

<sup>9</sup> Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (1886; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1968); hereafter cited in text.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Tilley, in Backgrounds of The Princess Casamassima (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961), documents in detail articles on anarchists appearing in The Times during the period when James was writing The Princess Casamassima.

<sup>11</sup> In Henry James (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), F. W. Dupee also notes that "of all his novels The Princess Casamassima was [James's] largest attempt to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the whole piece being in this case the entire structure of civil society" (p. 133).

<sup>12</sup> Henry James, Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 61; F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds. The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 69); Henry James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima" in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 59.

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13 On August 10, 1885 James complained in his notebook that "I have never yet become engaged in a novel in which, after I had begun to write and send off my MS., the details had remained so vague" (Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 68).

14 James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," p. 76.

15 James, Preface, p. 77.

16 James, Preface, p. 64.

17 James, Preface, p. 62.

18 James, Preface, p. 63.

19 James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 388.

20 James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," p. 66.

21 James, Preface, p. 60.

22 "Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, 'Write from experience and experience only,' I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, 'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!'" ("The Art of Fiction," pp. 389-90).

23 Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 150; Dupee, p. 132.

24 Joseph A. Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1967), p. 117.

25 James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," p. 59.

26 S. Gorley Putt, Scholars of the Heart: Essays in Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 188; John Goode, "The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James," in Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, ed. David Howard, John Lucas, and John Goode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 268, 272; Lionel Trilling, "The Princess Casamassima," in Discussions of Henry James, ed. Naomi Lebowitz (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1962), p. 92; John L. Kimmey, "The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 9 (1968), 537-46; and Lyall H.

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Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1972), p. 88.

27 Taylor Stoehr, "Words and Deeds in The Princess Casamassima," Journal of English Literary History, 37 (1970), 95-135; Tilley, Backgrounds of The Princess Casamassima; Trilling, pp. 36-9.

28 Ivor Winters, Maule's Curse (Norfolk, Ct.: New Directions, 1938), p. 205; Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (Greenwich, Ct.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 153; George Woodcock, "Henry James and the Conspirators," Sewanee Review, 60 (1952), 223; and Clinton F. Oliver, "Henry James as a Social Critic," Antioch Review, 7 (1947), 255.

29 Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1936), p. 44; Trilling, p. 36.

30 As The Bostonians was written to remedy the flaws in Daudet's L'Évangéliste, so The Princess Casamassima, for some critics, corrects the weaknesses in Turgenev's Virgin Soil. Daniel Lerner, in "The Influence of Turgenev on Henry James," Slavonic and East European Review, 20 (1941), 28-54, made the pioneering study, followed by R. J. Kane, "Virgin Soil and The Princess Casamassima," Gifthorse (Ohio State University, 1949), 25-29; Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, pp. 147-9; Eunice C. Hamilton, "Henry James's The Princess Casamassima and Ivan Turgenev's Virgin Soil," South Atlantic Quarterly, 61 (1962), 354-64; Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Henry James's Divergence from His Russian Model in The Princess Casamassima," Revue des Langues Vivantes, 37 (1971), 535-44; and Anthony D. Briggs, "Someone Else's Sledge: Further Notes on Turgenev's Virgin Soil and Henry James's The Princess Casamassima," Oxford Slavonic Studies, 5 (1972), 52-60. Adeline Tintner, in "Octave Feuillet: La petite comtesse and Henry James," Revue de Littérature Comparée, 48 (1974), 218-32, has examined the French writer's influence on The Princess Casamassima.

31 Ivo Vidan, "James's Novel of 'Looming Possibilities'" in Renaissance and Modern Essays Presented to Vivian de Sole Pinto, ed. G. R. Hibbard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 139; Powers, p. 119.

32 Sr. Mary Jane Luecke, "The Princess Casamassima: Hyacinth's Fallible Consciousness," Modern Philology, 60 (1963), 274-80; John L. Kimmey, "The Princess Casamassima and the Quality of Bewilderment," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 22 (1967), 47-62; and Philip Page, "The Princess Casamassima: Suicide and 'the Penetrating Imagination,'" Tennessee Studies in Literature, 22 (1977), 162-9.

33 David Seed, "Hyacinth Robinson and the Politics of The Princess Casamassima," Etudes Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne, Etats-Unis,

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30 (1977), 31; Mildred E. Hartsock, "The Princess Casamassima: The Politics of Power," Studies in the Novel, 1 (1969), 300.

34 Louise Bogan, "James on a Revolutionary Theme," Nation, 146, 23 April, 1938, p. 474; Oliver, 252; Walter Dubler, "The Princess Casamassima: Its Place in the James Canon," Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (1966), 58; and Luecke, 274.

35 Donald David Stone, Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James, and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880s (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 294. Other critics note James's identification with Hyacinth: Trilling, p. 41; Ward, p. 125; Goode, 275; and Charles R. Anderson, Person, Place and Thing in Henry James's Novels (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1977), p. 126, although they do not see this similarity as negatively as Stone does.

36 Dupee, p. 136; Howe, p. 155; and Ward, p. 124.

37 Powers, p. 96; D. S. Halliburton, "Self and Secularization in The Princess Casamassima," Modern Fiction Studies, 11 (1965), 120.

38 Anderson examines the manner in which Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" permeates the interlude at Medley in Person, Place and Thing in Henry James's Novels, p. 155; Adeline Tintner has written two articles on Keats's influence of James: "The Elgin Marbles and Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne': A Cluster of Keatsian Associations in Henry James," Notes and Queries, 20 (1973), 250-2 and "Keats and James and The Princess Casamassima," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 28 (1973), 179-93.

39 F. R. Leavis's statement in The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1962) that The Princess's "earthy and sappy vitality" derives from Dickens (p. 191), initiated a gentleman's controversy between Leavis and S. Gorley Putt, who accused Leavis of discounting and dismissing James's own observations. See Gorley Putt, "Henry James and Dickens," Times Literary Supplement, 5 March 1971, p. 271 and 19 March 1971, p. 325; and F. R. Leavis, "Henry James and Dickens," Times Literary Supplement, 19 February 1971, p. 213; 12 March 1971, p. 296; and 26 March 1971, p. 353. Arthur Freeman also entered the debate on Putt's side in "Henry James and Dickens," Times Literary Supplement, 12 March 1971, p. 296. Others who have noted Dickensian elements in The Princess Casamassima include Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 104; Bogan, p. 471; and Anderson, pp. 140, 144, 154.

40 Philip Page, "The Curious Narration of The Bostonians," American Literature, 46 (1974), 379.

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- 41 Powers, p. 122.
- 42 Adeline Tintner, in "Hyacinth at the Play: The Play Within the Play as a Novelistic Device in James," Journal of Narrative Technique, 2 (1972), 171-85, examines in depth James's use of the play within the play and traces the device's antecedents in other authors and in James's earlier works.
- 43 Anderson, p. 137. Christina Light has been the subject of several thorough studies, all of which provide insight into her complex character: M. E. Grenander, "Henry James's Capricciosa: Christina Light in Roderick Hudson and The Princess Casamassima," PMLA, 75 (1960), 309-19; George Monteiro, "The Campaign of Henry James's Disinherited Princess," English Studies, 45 (1964), 442-54; and Edward Wagenknecht, Eve and Henry James: Portraits of Women and Girls in His Fiction (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978).
- 44 Henry James, Roderick Hudson (1874; rpt. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 205.
- 45 James, Roderick Hudson, p. 205.
- 46 Wagenknecht, p. 56; Halliburton, 119; and Stone, p. 302.
- 47 Bogan, p. 472.
- 48 Oliver, 250; Wagenknecht, p. 65; and Stone, p. 302.
- 49 James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," p. 74.
- 50 Dupee, p. 137; Howe, p. 146.
- 51 Seed, 39; Howe, p. 144; and Oliver, 257.
- 52 Dubler, 45.
- 53 James, Preface to "The Princess Casamassima," p. 78.

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## CHAPTER VI

### Direct Impressions of Life

Although James regards "the penetrating imagination" as a vital element of the novelist's art, he repeatedly stresses the necessity for anchoring that imagination to the palpable surface and substance of life. As he insists in "The Art of Fiction," the goal of fiction is, after all, to recreate the "air of reality." While the need for fidelity to physical reality links the painter and the novelist--in that both register the surface of life--the novelist recreates not merely the "look" of things, but also renders "a direct, a personal impression of life."<sup>1</sup> James's definition of the novel stresses the personal nature of imagination and observation. Of course, James does not deny that the painter must exercise his imagination. However, in "The Art of Fiction" he recognizes the novelist's duty to probe beneath life's tangible surface as a critical one, because the novel as a personal impression of life focuses on the study of character and motive, "the psychological reason."<sup>2</sup>

"The Art of Fiction," first published in 1884, sheds light on James's fiction of the eighties because the essay defines James's conception of the novelist's responsibilities at a time he was re-evaluating his development as a craftsman. The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima were the results of James's self-examination, for in the two novels he abandoned his successful international theme for such contemporary issues as American reform movements and British

social unrest. In spite of James's "high hopes" for The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima,<sup>3</sup> these novels were failures. Indeed, the public reception of the two novels prompted James once again to scrutinize the art of the novelist, and implicitly his own goals and expectations as a writer of fiction.

Partial Portraits (1888), a direct consequence of James's stock-taking, contains James's major pronouncements on the art of fiction. Besides reprinting the seminal 1884 essay, "The Art of Fiction," James includes his loving appraisal of Turgenev, an essay defining James's intent to apply dramatic principles to the practice of fiction. Partial Portraits also contains "Guy de Maupassant," an essay previously published in March, 1888, in the Fortnightly Review. Written four years after "The Art of Fiction," the 1888 essay re-affirms the major tenets of the aesthetic theory proposed in the earlier essay. James esteems Maupassant's ability to render the sensual aspects of life within the brief compass of the short story; he was to invoke the spirit of Maupassant whenever he strove for concision. James, however, did not applaud Maupassant uncritically; he deplored Maupassant's refusal to probe beneath characters' surfaces for motive and the "psychological reason," and he suggested that Maupassant overly stressed the sexual side of human nature.<sup>4</sup> Whatever reservations James had about Maupassant, however he saw the French raconteur as an example of the central principles of "The Art of Fiction." Maupassant brilliantly renders the surface of life:

[Maupassant] is plainly of the opinion that the first duty of the artist, and the thing that makes him most useful to his fellow-men is to master his instrument, whatever it may happen to be.

His own is that of the senses, and it is through them alone, or almost alone, that life appeals to him; it is almost alone by their help that he describes it, that he produces brilliant works. They render him this great assistance because they are evidently, in his constitution, extraordinarily alive; there is scarcely a page in all his twenty volumes that does not testify to their vivacity.<sup>5</sup>

James praises Maupassant's ability to capture the very small of things,<sup>6</sup> but he insists that the French writer's visual sense is as crucial to his particular genius:

Not less powerful is his visual sense, the quick, direct discrimination of his eye, which explains the singularly vivid concision of his descriptions. These are never prolonged nor analytic, have nothing of enumeration, of the quality of the observer, who counts the items to be sure he has made up the sum. His eye selects unerringly, unscrupulously, almost impudently--catches the particular thing in which the character of the object or the scene resides, and, by expressing it with the artful brevity of a master, leaves a convincing, original picture. If he is inveterately synthetic, he is never more so than in the way he brings this hard, short, intelligent gaze to bear.<sup>7</sup>

James attributes Maupassant's concision to his visual sense; the French raconteur focuses on a "telling" object which communicates atmosphere, character, and theme. James thus introduces a refinement of "The Art of Fiction's" stress on fidelity to close, accurate observation: observation must be paired with selection. For James, Balzac is great because of his talent in rendering atmosphere, but Maupassant is greater because through selectivity he achieves concision and therefore, intensity.

Most significantly for James, Maupassant's works exemplify James's ideal definition of fiction as a personal and direct impression of life. In the 1888 essay, he repeats the dominating theme of "The Art of Fiction." Maupassant pursues his own vision of the craft and his own

"particular instrument," prompting James to proclaim:

This seems to me to put into a nutshell the whole question of the different classes of fiction, concerning which there has recently been so much discourse. There are simply as many different kinds as there are persons practicing the art, for if a picture, a tale, or a novel be a direct impression of life (and that surely constitutes its interest and value), the impression will vary according to the plate that takes it, the particular structure and mixture of the recipient.<sup>8</sup>

James emphasizes the individual nature of the artist's vision, an emphasis that forces him to recognize "the value of the artist resides in the clearness with which he gives forth that impression."<sup>9</sup> Thus, in "Guy de Maupassant," James argues for the artistic freedom he proposed in "The Art of Fiction," freedom logically following from his belief in the integrity of each artist's response to "felt life."

The definition of fiction as "a direct, a personal impression of life" guides James's tales of the late eighties particularly in theme and technique. In these tales James employs various narrative strategies designed to suppress the authorial voice and to enhance the illusion of character speaking directly to the reader. During the years between the completion of The Princess Casamassima in 1886 and the appearance of the first serial installment of The Tragic Muse in 1889, James published ten tales and a short novel, The Reverberator.<sup>10</sup> Although James uses various points of view in the tales, he continues developing the center of consciousness to achieve "a direct, a personal impression of life." He employs centers of consciousness in "Mrs. Temperly" (1887), "A London Life" (1888), "The Liar" (1888), and "The Lesson of the Master" (1888). In these tales the authorial narrator continues to make appearances, but intrusions are considerably limited



in frequency and length, compared to the intrusions in the early eighties tales. James also begins the tale in media res, so that he can eliminate biographical summaries of the characters. Information about the characters—even details as basic as names and occupations—is revealed through chance comments and elliptical references.

With the suppression of the narrator, the center assumes greater importance. In fact, James's treatment of information is a strategy to present his centers functioning naturally, with all the disorder of "felt life." As a result of James's attempt to make his centers more life-like, the tales of the late eighties are pervaded with an ambiguity not present in James's earlier tales. Because the authorial narrator does not intrude to guide the reader or judge the center, the center's point of view, regardless of that character's limitation, exercises complete control over the narrative. Ultimately, the reader alone must judge the center's validity and integrity as perceiver and interpreter. Such is the ambiguity of these tales that critics widely disagree on their themes and James's intent in writing them.

Indeed, James's use of the center of consciousness in the late eighties clearly exhibits his growing confidence with this technique. The tales employing the center show James more than ever before exploiting the dramatic possibilities of the center of consciousness. Moreover, with increasing dependence upon centers who are limited, James achieves an ambiguity in these tales that makes them deeper and richer in meaning than were his previous tales.

Yet the ambiguity resulting from advances in technique also reflects a shift in James's thematic interests of the eighties. In his

fiction of the first half of the decade, James criticizes American and English societies. These early tales humorously examine manners and mores. The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, written at the decade's midpoint, reveal a more critical James, exposing the hypocrisy, pretensions, and failures of American and English societies. In contrast, the tales of the late eighties focus upon the individual's assumptions about society and his or her sense of moral values. Human beings are fallible, capricious, and inconsistent; the humanity of James's characters is vividly captured within the tales' themes and techniques.

"A London Life," first published in Scribner's Magazine June-September 1888 and later revised in Volume 7 of the New York Edition, exemplifies James's interest in the individual in society.<sup>11</sup> The tale's focus is Laura Wing, a young American who comes to London to live with her sister Selina. Selina is married to Lionel Barrington, an Englishman, but the marriage is not happy; the tale records the break-up of the marriage from Laura's point of view. Laura, morally rigid, is horrified at the impending scandal and Lionel's attempt to force her to testify against Selina. Laura demands that Selina give up what she sees as liaisons; Selina ostensibly complies, but during an evening at the opera Selina bolts with her lover, Captain Crispin. Panicking at her own untenable position--Selina leaves her sister alone in the opera box with a young man, Wendover--Laura virtually proposes to Wendover as a way of shielding herself from Selina's scandalous behavior. Wendover is bewildered by and less than enthusiastic about Laura's implied proposal. Laura, now fully disgusted with herself,

leaves for Belgium to persuade her sister to return to London. Eventually, Laura returns to America, with Wendover pursuing her.

Laura Wing, the tale's intense and inflexible heroine, functions as the center of consciousness: events and characters are seen through her eyes, and her judgments govern the tale. Other than a few brief authorial comments, there is only one major departure from Laura's point of view, occurring during a scene between Lady Davenant, Laura's worldly-wise confidante and advisor, and Wendover. In the tale's Preface to the New York Edition, James was to recognize his violation of the "law" he established for the tale by saying of that scene:

Here indeed is a lapse from artistic dignity, a confession of want of resource, which I may not pretend to explain to-day, and on behalf of which I have nothing to urge save a consciousness of my dereliction presumably too vague at the time.<sup>12</sup>

James defends his violation by noting that the interview during Laura's absence was crucial to the tale. Yet James also admits that he awkwardly thrusts a "lump sum" on the reader:

I might of course have adopted another plan--the artist is free, surely, to adopt any he fancies, provided it be a plan and he adopt it intelligently; and to that scheme of composition the independent picture of a passage between Lady Davenant and young Wendover might perfectly have conformed. As the case stands it conforms to nothing; whereas the beauty of a thing of this order really done as a whole is ever, certainly, that its parts are in abject dependence, and that even any great charm they may individually and capriciously put forth is infirm so far as it does n't measurably contribute to a harmony.<sup>13</sup>

What is significant about James's comments is not his confession of a "lapse of artistic dignity," but his implicit recognition that the center of consciousness is a means by which he can order and unify a piece of fiction, and that the center provides a law creating harmony

and intensity. Indeed, James makes this recognition explicit when he discusses Laura's function as center. Excluding the lapse from Laura's perspective, James makes his "attack" on the reader's consciousness "a call as immediate as a postman's knock"

through the medium of the interesting girl's own vision, own experiences, with which all the facts are richly charged and coloured. That saturates our sense of them with the savour of Laura's sense-- thanks to which enhancement we get intensity.<sup>14</sup>

The center of consciousness thus conveys "a direct, a personal impression of life" because all "facts" and experiences reflected through the center "are richly charged and coloured." Moreover, by establishing Laura's consciousness as the tale's "law," James achieves the intensity which is a crucial element of his dramatic objectives.<sup>15</sup> Employing the center as the controlling perspective, James enhances "the suggestiveness of the drama" which he found in the tale's original donnée.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the importance of Laura's function as center, James was to place "A London Life" in the New York Edition volume containing The Spoils of Poynton and "The Chaperon." The characteristic shared by all three tales was that the three heroines--Fleda Vetch, Laura Wing, and Rose Tramore--served as centers to dramatize characters and events:

[The tales] are each--and truly there are more of such to come--"stories about women," very young women, who, affected with a certain high lucidity, thereby become characters; in consequence of which their doings, their sufferings or whatever, take on, I assume, an importance. Laura Wing, in "A London Life," has, like Fleda Vetch, acuteness and intensity, reflexion and passion, has above all a contributive and participant view of her situation; just as Rose Tramore, in "The Chaperon," rejoices, almost to insolence, very much in the same cluster of attributes and advantages.<sup>17</sup>

To emphasize Laura's importance as center, James plays down the international theme of "A London Life." Although originally conceptualized as an "episode in that 'international' series,"<sup>18</sup> "A London Life" reveals the extent to which James has developed as craftsman. In earlier international episodes, international contrasts constitute a major part of the dramatic situation; the conflict of manners and mores provides natural drama.<sup>19</sup> In "A London Life," there is dramatic contrast in Laura's rigidity and the Londoners' moral laxity, but that drama is secondary to the primary one of Laura's consciousness through which the facts are "richly charged and coloured." In short, James's goal in using Laura as center is a direct impression of life, a goal to which the international theme, though present, is subsidiary.

Except for James's "lapse from artistic dignity," the reader sees the drama of Selina's and Lionel's separation through Laura's perception. Crucially, however, the tale focuses not on the Berringtons' marital problems, but rather on Laura's awareness of the impending scandal and her reaction to her own precarious situation. James endows a common situation--a marriage's break-up--with particular intensity because he reflects it through a bewildered and limited observer. Through Laura's consciousness, James vividly captures Selina's petty subterfuges and the emotions seething beneath superficial civilities:

It was a house of telegrams; they crossed each other a dozen times an hour, coming and going, and Selina in particular lived in a cloud of them. Laura had but vague ideas as to what they were all about; once in a while, when they fell under her eyes, she either failed to understand them or judged them to be about horses. These were an immense number of horses, in one way and another, in Mrs Berrington's life. Then

she had so many friends, who were always rushing about like herself and making appointments and pairing them off and wanting to know if she were going to certain places or whether she would go if they did or whether she would come up to town and dine and "do a theatre." There were also a good many theatres in the existence of this busy lady. Laura remembered how fond their poor father had been of telegraphing, but it was never about the theatre: at all events she tried to give her sister the benefit or the excuse of heredity. Selina had her own opinions, which were superior to this: she once remarked to Laura that it was idiotic for a woman to write--to telegraph was the only way not to get into trouble. If doing so sufficed to keep a lady out of it Mrs Berrington's life should have flowed like the rivers of Eden. (pp. 109-10)

Telegrams about horses and trips to the theatre mask Selina's secret assignations. Laura, of course, is eager to give Selina the benefit of a doubt at least at this point. But the reader, less credulous and involved than Laura, recognizes the horses for what they really are--yet James never intrudes to correct Laura's version of the events. Through Laura's perception, James presents Selina's machinations dramatically while exposing Laura's naivete. And the reader, who brings a wider vision to the tale than does Laura, can simultaneously experience Laura's point of view and judge her shortcomings.

Laura presents a peculiar case as center of consciousness because of her extreme moral rigidity. Although Lady Davenant counsels Laura "to live and hold one's head up" (p. 93), the girl exclaims passionately, "'If anything were to happen--publicly--I should die, I should die!'" (p. 96). Laura's primary concern is not for the Berringtons but for the shadow they will cast upon her own reputation. Moreover, Laura's "barbarous probity" (p. 124), blinds her to an important aspect of Selina's situation: although Selina is not blameless, Lionel, who threatens a divorce suit against his wife, stoops

"to the very gutter" (p. 130), Laura believes Lionel's accusations against Selina, but she refuses to hear Selina's case against Lionel: "Where have your eyes been, or your senses, or your powers of observation? You can be clever when it suits you!" Selina derides her sister (pp. 130-1). Mrs. Berrington raises a crucial question against Laura's ability to function as a center of consciousness, because Laura's inflexibility warps her sense of reality. Laura herself questions the validity of her own point of view only once in the course of the tale:

Laura sat up for her sister that night with that nice question to help her torment herself--whether if she was hard and merciless in judging Selina it would be with the bad too that she would associate herself. Was she wrong after all--was she cruel by being too rigid? Was Mrs. Collingwood's attitude the right one and ought she only to propose to herself to "allow" more and more, and to allow ever, and to smooth things down by gentleness, by sympathy, by not looking at them too hard? It was not the first time that the just measure of things seemed to slip from her hands as she became conscious of possible, or rather of very actual, differences of standard and usage. (p. 165)

Although Laura momentarily doubts her ability to judge "differences of standard and usage," she reassumes her "barbarous probity" by accusing Selina of planning to "go away" with Captain Crispin. Laura becomes even more hardened. Selina weeps "extravagantly," but Laura does not soothe or comfort--she takes "slight refreshment" at having affected Selina (p. 169). Laura's concern is not Selina's unhappiness, but that Selina will ruin the family and Laura herself. Laura's motives are eminently selfish, and so she sees Selina's "bolting" at the opera purely in terms of her own reputation:

This image [of Captain Crispin] made her draw back further behind her curtain, because it brought the

blood to her face; and if she coloured for shame she coloured also for anger. Captain Crispin was there-- in the opposite box. . . . Selina was nestling there in safety with him, by their favour, and she had had the baseness to pay an honest girl, the most loyal, the most unselfish of sisters, under contribution to the same end. Laura crimsoned with the sense that she had been, unsuspectingly, part of a scheme, that she was being used as the two women opposite were used, but that she had been outraged into the bargain, inasmuch as she was not, like them, a conscious accomplice and not a person to be given away in that manner before hundreds of people. (p. 180)

Laura is hardly as loyal and unselfish as she makes herself out to be. She sees the Berringtons' affair only in terms of its effect on her; Laura's vision is compromised by her moral inflexibility. J. A. Ward suggests that James's heroine exemplifies the potential evil of an "innocent" person who imposes a narrow creed on others.<sup>20</sup> And going a step further than Ward, John Clair regards Laura as constituting a "substantial evil" and exonerates Selina, who must continue her struggle to keep herself alive for her children.<sup>21</sup> Yet Tony Tanner, who acknowledges Laura's moral blindness, treats her more gently; she is not wrong as to her facts--Selina is having an affair with Crispin--but she is excessive in her response to them.<sup>22</sup> These diverging opinions about Laura indicate the central problem of "A London Life": to what extent is her judgment valid or excessive? Laura is not "a lucid reflector";<sup>23</sup> she is blinded by her moral intransigence, which James typically regards as a considerable flaw. Yet, however Laura's "barbarous probity" may be deplored, the reader must recognize that Lionel, Selina, and the entire society are not blameless. A society which accepts marital infidelities and acts as an accomplice is, Laura Wing notwithstanding, morally lax, and there is something to be said for Laura's judgment of "the loose, mysterious, rather ignoble tolerance



of people like Mrs. Collingwood" who pretend that nothing is amiss or unusual (p. 165). James's use of Laura Wing as center, whose consciousness "richly charge[s] and colour[s]" the facts, results finally in casting an equivocal light upon the tale. Ward rightly notes that James's attitude toward Laura is "necessarily ambiguous" because as center Laura is not inclined to question her conduct;<sup>24</sup> Laura is a Jamesian innocent, but her rigidity is potentially harmful to herself and others around her. But James's ambiguous attitude extends beyond Laura to society's indifference. Because marital infidelity and divorce are commonplace does not make them morally acceptable.

Ultimately, however, it is not James's attitude that dominates the tale. The significant feature of "A London Life" is James's nearly total reliance upon a center of consciousness to dramatize character and event. Laura Wing, the tale's center, poses a particular problem for the reader; Laura's moral inflexibility makes her one of the least likable of James's centers, but more important, that inflexibility warps her perception of character and event. In the words of the tale's Preface, "the facts are richly charged and coloured" by Laura's own experience; her vision of things is vividly dramatized and "saturates" the reader "with the savour of Laura's sense."<sup>25</sup> But this saturation necessarily casts ambiguity upon the tale, for the reader is not given any other frames of reference with which to balance Laura's slanted perspective. Laura's point of view may be problematic, but James's technique is virtually flawless. Limited though Laura's consciousness may be, through it James dramatizes a direct impression of life.

Although "A London Life" is one of the longer tales published during 1888, its concerns--the morality of society and to a lesser

degree international contrasts--do not dominate James's fiction of the late eighties. Rather, James turns repeatedly to the artist as subject and theme during the second half of the decade. In The Princess Casamassima James questions the nature of art, in that the novel's hero, Hyacinth Robinson, uses painting and fiction to mask the realities of London. And although art plays a peripheral role in "Mrs. Temperly" (1887)--the tale's center, Raymond Bestwick, is an aspiring artist, which is a partial reason Mrs. Temperly does not want Raymond to marry her daughter--the tale does not present a particularly positive image of the artist. However, in "The Liar," which ran in Century Magazine, May-June 1888,<sup>26</sup> James is mercilessly critical of the artist, for the tale focuses upon Oliver Lyon, a portrait-painter who ruthlessly probes another's soul. While staying at a country house, Lyon is fascinated by Colonel Capadose, a "liar platonic," who lies "prompted by the love of beauty" or an inner vision of "what ought to be" rather than to injure or mislead (p. 411). But Lyon is horrified to learn that Mrs. Capadose, who is obviously in love with her husband, is the beautiful Everina Brant, who rejected Lyon's marriage proposal when he was a young and struggling artist. Lyon, still wounded by that rejection, resolves to force Mrs. Capadose to confess her shame at having married an incorrigible liar.

To this end, Lyon paints the Colonel's portrait, "determined that [the liar's] character should be perceptible even to the meanest intelligence" (p. 419). Lyon is eminently successful--so successful that when Mrs. Capadose sees the portrait, (Lyon is eavesdropping on the couple), she cries "'It's cruel--oh, it's too cruel!'" (p. 429). With a dagger, the Colonel slashes "the painted betrayal," but Lyon

is satisfied--he has exposed Everina's shame. Lyon is dismayed, however, to discover that when he questions the Capadoses about the portrait, Everina supports the Colonel's lie about the disgruntled model who destroyed the portrait. When Everina is "a party to that final atrocity," Lyon concludes in a fit of disgust that "she was still in love with the Colonel--he had trained her too well" (p. 411).

Oliver Lyon, in spite of the psychological insight which enables him to paint celebrated portraits, is blind to the real truth. Mrs. Capadose has not been corrupted by the liar; she loves her husband. Lyon caricatures the Colonel because he sees only the liar and not "the living man" (p. 49). But Lyon does more. He uses his skills and his talents to violate the secrets of the heart; Lyon's sole purpose in painting the Colonel's portrait is to lay bare the shame Lyon suspects in Mrs. Capadose--the shame that even if it exists, Lyon has no right to see. Lyon is the tale's real liar: he cannot portray an accurate view of reality, because his vision is falsified by his blinding egotism. Ultimately, "The Liar" represents James's most scathing indictment of the artist's limitation, and as such, reflects James's pessimism toward art which permeates The Princess Casamassima.

As in The Princess and "A London Life," the center of consciousness dominates the narration and characterization of "The Liar." Lyon is the tale's center, and James maintains Lyon's integrity as center even more rigorously than he does Laura Wing's. Interestingly, in the notebook entry describing the tale's donnée, dated June 19, 1884, James focuses the tale on the situation of the liar's wife:

One might write a tale (very short) about a woman married to a man of the most amiable character who is a tremendous, though harmless, liar. She is very

intelligent, a fine, quiet, high, pure nature, and she has to sit by and hear him romance--mainly out of vanity, the desire to be interesting, and a peculiar irresistible impulse. He is good, kind, personally very attractive, very handsome, etc.: it is almost his only fault though of course he is increasingly very light. What she suffers--what she goes through--generally she tries to rectify, to remove any bad effect by toning down a little, etc. But there comes a day when he tells a very big lie which she has--for reasons to be related--to adopt, to reinforce. To save him from exposure, in a word, she has to lie herself. The struggle, etc.; she lies--but after that she hates him.<sup>27</sup>

It is a measure of James's increasing sophistication with the center of consciousness that he radically alters his original plan. The Capadoses' drama, while important, becomes secondary to the drama of the observer and center, Oliver Lyon. The tale's subject is not a pure nature corrupted by love, but rather is the artistic nature twisted by selfishness and pride. Consequently, "The Liar" examines the critical issues of perception and the artist's role and responsibilities--issues that lie at the heart of "The Art of Fiction."

To this end, James reflects the whole drama through the artist's consciousness. At the tale's beginning, the reader is catapulted into Lyon's consciousness without prologue or explanation: "The train was half an hour late and the drive to the station longer than he supposed, so that when he reached the house its inmates had dispersed to dress for dinner and he was conducted straight to his room" (p. 383). The pronoun "he" immediately suggests that the reader is experiencing someone's thoughts, but the center remains nameless and vague until the end of a page-long paragraph. Similarly, the center's profession and purpose are revealed only gradually: that Lyon is as Stayes, a country house, to paint Sir David Ashmore's portrait, must be pieced together

from several pages of text. This process of gradual revelation demonstrates the extent to which James tries to reproduce the natural rhythm of thought in his center of consciousness.

The opening paragraph focuses on Lyon's response to Stayes and his room:

The walls were adorned with old-fashioned lithographs, principally portraits of country gentlemen with high collars and riding gloves: this suggested--and it was encouraging--that the tradition of portraiture was held in esteem. There was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu, for the bedside; the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight. (p. 383)

Notice that James avoids using verbs denoting mental process--wondered, perceived, and thought--and gives Lyon's reaction directly. The reader glimpses actual details of the room--the walls and their adornment--but also Lyon's reaction--"it was encouraging"--which is clearly Lyon's feeling although James does not denote it as such. Physical reality and psychological response are gracefully joined with little suggestion of the author's presence. James uses the center of consciousness so effectively that he does not shatter the reader's illusions of directly experiencing Lyon's impressions.

Oliver Lyon, though center of consciousness, possesses definite limitations which are subtly revealed in his response to the world around him. He exults, for example, in giving up the routine of his London studio for the social life at a country house:

Moreover, there was an exhilaration (he had felt it before) in the rapid change of scene--the jump, in the dusk of the afternoon, from foggy London and his familiar studio to a centre of festivity in the middle of Hertfordshire and a drama half acted, a drama of pretty women and noted men and wonderful orchids in silver jars. (pp. 384-5)

Lyon sees the social festivities as a "drama half acted," but the drama includes women, men, and "wonderful orchids in silver jars"; Lyon equates men and women and orchids. Further, Lyon exposes his addiction to fascinating surfaces when he admits his interest in the "human mask"--watching face after face was an "amusement [that] gave him the greatest pleasure he knew" (p. 386). Lyon loves life's pictorial side, but this love precludes deeper insights into married love and personal integrity. Lyon the artist reduces human beings to brilliant masks eminently paintable. Consequently, Lyon is essentially a liar because he accepts the human mask as the reality of personality. Indeed, when Lyon first meets Colonel Capadose, the artist dwells on the Colonel's appearance and romanticizes about his character:

What was odd in him was a certain mixture of the correct and the extravagant: as if he were an adventurer imitating a gentleman with rare perfection of a gentleman who had taken a fancy to go about with hidden arms. He might have been a dethroned prince or the war-correspondent of a newspaper: he represented both enterprise and tradition, good manners and bad taste. (pp. 386-7)

In fact Lyon, like Hyacinth Robinson, is inclined to see the world in terms of "the art of fiction." Lyon tells a young man about Everina Brant when the artist knew her in Munich:

"She was the child of the first wife and she didn't like her stepmother, but she was charming to her little brothers and sisters. I once made a sketch of her as Werther's Charlotte, cutting bread and butter while they clustered all around her. All the artists in the place were in love with her but she wouldn't look at 'the likes' of us. She was too proud--I grant you that; but she wasn't stuck up nor young ladyish; she was simple and frank and kind about it. She used to remind me of Thackeray's Ethel Newcome." (p. 391)

Lyon's willingness to permit literature to color reality is of a piece with his romanticizing, but it also reveals Lyon's tendency to place an obscuring, even distorting, mirror between himself and a "direct impression of life." Lyon's vision, like Hyacinth's, may be obscured by art, but more important, Lyon is virtually blinded by his own ego. After learning of Mrs. Capadose's devotion to her husband, Lyon can think of only two alternatives to describe her situation: "Did she sit in torment while her husband turned his somersaults, or was she now too perverse that she thought it a fine thing to be striking at the expense of one's honour?" (pp. 408-9). Lyon finally decides that Everina is perverse, corrupted by her husband. Lyon's egotism prevents him from recognizing the love that enables Everina to accept her husband and his limitations; her devotion is to the man, not to the liar.

Oliver Lyon is, like Laura Wing, a morally flawed center. Lyon reduces human beings to interesting objects: because he ignores the essential humanity of his subject, Lyon ultimately paints caricatures rather than genuine portraits. But Lyon's most damning failure is the misuse of his talent, because he employs his artistic ability to lay bare Mrs. Capadose's soul in order to salve his injured pride. Through the character of Oliver Lyon, James looks penetratingly at the artist and his limitations. Indeed, "The Liar's" pessimistic portrayal of the artist is far removed from the celebration of the artist in "The Art of Fiction."

In "The Liar," that pessimism is an essential part of the drama played out on the stage of the inner consciousness. Far from being

"a drama of pretty women and noted men and wonderful orchids," the real play actually focuses upon the larger issues of the artist's responsibility and the nature of his perception. It is appropriate, then, that the artist's vision controls the narrative; the reader is almost totally subjected to Lyon's personal, direct impression of life. However, because James does not intrude to challenge Lyon's integrity or to establish a rival perspective, "The Liar" can be an ambiguous tale, as shown by the widely divergent opinions regarding the tale. West and Stallman, for example, see Lyon as admirable because he strips away Mrs.

Capadose's social mask to reveal her hypocrisy; Lyon is the only honest character in a society of liars.<sup>28</sup> Booth characterizes Lyon as an unreliable narrator,<sup>29</sup> although Martineau splits hairs by noting that Lyon is a center, not a narrator, and therefore cannot be an unreliable narrator.<sup>30</sup> Segal and Powers, in contrast, recognize Lyon's self-deception, and conclude that he is not trustworthy.<sup>31</sup>

Yet Lyon is neither completely unreliable nor totally trustworthy. Clearly, Lyon's evaluation of the Colonel as a "liar platonic" is accurate, while the artist's judgment of Mrs. Capadose as corrupt and perverted may not be dependable because Lyon's self-interest and pride are involved. Talented yet ironically limited, Lyon is essentially ambiguous. Moreover, that ambiguity is effectively dramatized because the reader directly experiences Lyon's point of view, at once sensitive to detail and nuance but also obscured by pride. And, as a result, "The Liar" is technically significant, because James refuses to intercede between center and reader and relies on the reader to judge the center's character.



In "The Liar" James dramatically renders the artist's limitations, for the tale suggests that the artist may be too involved with "the look of things, . . . the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."<sup>32</sup> Oliver Lyon is celebrated because he brilliantly renders surfaces, but he neglects the humanity behind the spectacle. "The Lesson of the Master," first published in the Universal Review, 16 July-15 August, 1888, also focuses upon the artist, specifically upon his need for popular success.<sup>33</sup> James recognized the artist's equivocal position: because of the failure of The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, James was increasingly aware of his inability to write popular novels. In the New York Edition Preface to Volume 12, of which "The Lesson" is the titular story, James acknowledges the distinctly autobiographical elements in his tales of writers:

. . . My hapless friends in the present volume will have been drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind. This, amusingly enough, is what, on the evidence before us, I seem critically, as I say, to father--that the states represented, the embarrassments and predicaments studied, the tragedies and comedies recorded, can be intelligibly fathered but on his own intimate experience.<sup>34</sup>

The central conflict of "The Lesson of the Master"--the artist's need for isolation to create is played against his need for the world and its "false gods"--is drawn from James's "own intimate experience." James himself had an active social life, which he exploited in many données he discovered in dinner party conversation, and he saw financial success--or at least self-sufficiency--as important. Naturally, then, James could sympathize with the "master," Henry St. George, who turns his exceptional talent to mediocre yet popular novels:

However I might have been introduced in fact to Henry St George, of "The Lesson of the Master," or however I might have been deprived of him, my complete possession of him, my active sympathy with him as a known and understood and admired and pitied, in fine as a fully measured, quantity, hangs about the pages still as a vague scent hangs about thick orchard trees.<sup>35</sup>

Although St. George is the tale's "master," "The Lesson of the Master" actually focuses on a young writer, Paul Overt, who functions as the tale's center of consciousness. The two writers meet during a weekend at a country house. Overt idolizes St. George, although the younger man recognizes that of late the master's novels are not of the quality of his masterpiece, Shadowmere. St. George readily acknowledges his "falling off" and attributes it to his need to provide Mrs. St. George with Parisian dresses and a "perfectly appointed brougham" and to send his sons to Harrow, Oxford, and Sandhurst. The master advises Overt to pursue his talent above all else. Describing himself as "'the spectacle of a man meant for better things sunk . . . in such dishonour,'" the master exhorts:

"Look at me well and take my lesson to heart, for it is a lesson. Let that good come of it at least that you shudder with your pitiful impression and this may help to keep you straight in the future. Don't become in your old age what I am in mine--the depressing, the deplorable illustration of the worship of false gods!" (pp. 238-9)

While at the country house, Overt also meets Marion Fancourt, an admirer of the novels of Overt and St. George. Although St. George devotes much of his time to Miss Fancourt--his own wife is ailing--Paul begins to fall in love with Marion. Paul continues to see her in London, and it is there that St. George repeats his "lesson"--the need for the artist's renunciation of the world and its false gods. Paul

exclaims:

"The artist--the artist! Isn't he a man all the same?"

St George hesitated. "Sometimes I really think not. You know as well as I what he has to do: the concentration, the finish, the independence that he must strive for, from the moment that he begins to respect his work. Ah, my young friend, his relation to women, especially in matrimony, is at the mercy of this damning fact--that whereas he can in the nature of things have but one standard, they have about fifty. . . . Fancy an artist with a plurality of standards. . . . To do it--to do it and make it divine is the only thing he has to think about. 'Is it done or not?' is his only question. Not 'Is it done as well as a proper solicitude for my dear little family will allow?' He has nothing to do with the relative, nothing to do with a dear little family!" (pp. 268-9)

With this advice, Paul leaves London, spending two years in Switzerland perfecting a novel more masterly than his last one, Ginistrella. Mrs. St. George dies. Upon returning to London, Overt discovers that the master, rather than renouncing the world as he preached, is to marry Miss Fancourt. Paul feels duped by the master, yet the young writer anxiously awaits St. George's next novel: it will be "mockery indeed if now, on his new foundation [the master's marriage], at the end of a year, St George should put forth something with his early quality--something of the type of Shadowmere and finer than his finest" (p. 284).

The master's lesson is ambiguous. The artist is, despite St. George's avowal to the contrary, a man; yet the artist also needs to be free of the world in order to produce great art. James clearly advocates that need for artistic freedom, but as Barry rightly notes, James does not take sides against life.<sup>36</sup> In the tale, James does not believe that the artist must renounce life, as a simplistic reading of

the tale might suggest; the artist's relation to the world is much more equivocal.

To explore this ambiguous relationship, James choses a center who is at once a sensitive artist and a rather naive young man. Paul Overt is a novelist with a growing reputation, and he writes works of art which do not cater to popular taste. Despite his intimations of genius, Paul is limited by his willingness to accept surface for substance. Paul, for example, is disconcerted when his idol, Henry St. George, does not look like a man of letters:

The young man felt a certain surprise, for the personage before him contradicted a preconception which had been vague only till it was confronted with the reality. As soon as this happened the mental image, retiring with a sigh, became substantial enough to suffer a slight wrong. Overt, who had spent a considerable part of his short life in foreign lands, made now, but not for the first time, the reflection that whereas in those countries he had almost always recognised the artist and the man of letters by personal "type," the mould of his face, the character of his head, the expression of his figure and even the indications of his dress, in England this identification was as little as possible a matter of course, thanks to the greater conformity, the habit of sinking the profession instead of advertising it. . . . His temporary opinion was that St George looked like a lucky stockbroker--a gentleman driving eastward every morning from a sanitary suburb in a smart dog-cart.  
(pp. 221-2)

Paul possesses a romanticized vision of the artist; he expects to identify the man of letters by "the mould of his face" and his shabby coat. St. George looks more like a successful businessman than he does a novelist, but equivocally he is both. Appearances, therefore, are revealing and deceiving: St. George can provide his wife with a "perfectly appointed brougham," but he has also written Shadowmere.

Paul's perception of and response to St. George's appearance establishes the limitations of Paul's consciousness and the tale's essential ambiguity. Although Overt is not an "unreliable narrator" in Booth's strictest sense, the young writer cannot be depended upon to offer a balanced or completely trustworthy view of the tale's events and characters. Indeed, Paul's portrayal of two other important characters, Mrs. St. George and Miss Fancourt, must be subjected to careful scrutiny. Paul regards Mrs. St. George as a "dragon" (p. 231)<sup>37</sup> who prevents her husband from smoking and drinking and who burns St. George's masterpieces: Paul "felt sure on the instant that the burnt book (the way she alluded to it!) was one of her husband's finest things" (p. 219). But Paul does not have the grounds to make that assumption, and the young novelist never forgives the "dragon" for destroying the book. Overt later asks St. George about the book, and the master recalls, "'Oh, yes, it was about myself,'" adding that "'it was rather good'" (p. 267). But perhaps Mrs. St. George judged rightly when she saw St. George's self-indulgent introspection as bad. The book-burning incident shapes Overt's perception of Mrs. St. George, albeit a perception based on tenuous premises. Paul increasingly sees Mrs. St. George as the master's keeper who locks him in the cage of his study. Overt only fleetingly recognizes the artist's freedom in the cage where "the outer world, the world of accident and ugliness was so successfully excluded, and within the rich, protecting square, beneath the patronizing sky, the figures projected for an artistic purpose could hold their particular revel" (p. 260). When the "dragon" dies and St. George genuinely mourns his loss, Paul is bewildered

because the master seems to be contradicting his lesson of renunciation. St. George's eulogy of his wife is actually an argument for the artist's need to marry:

"She took everything off my hands--off my mind. She carried on our life with the greatest art, the rarest devotion, and I was free, as few men can have been, to drive my pen, to shut myself up with my trade. This was a rare service--the highest she could have rendered me." (p. 273)

Mrs. St. George was an artist herself, and devoted her art to her husband. In acknowledging his wife's art, the master seems to retract his lesson of renunciation--that is, if one takes the lesson literally. The artist must renounce certain aspects of the world, but he cannot turn his back on life, as Paul Overt thinks. Previously, the young novelist expected the mask to reflect the individual wearing it, and was disappointed when he could not fit "the lucky stockbroker" into the novelist's "type." Similarly, Overt misreads the master's lesson, admittedly ambiguous, because Paul tends to be too literal.

Paul's perception of Miss Fancourt also demonstrates his willingness to base assumptions on mere appearance. Both St. George and Overt admire Marion Fancourt, but the younger novelist is particularly taken by her intelligence and aesthetic taste. When Miss Fancourt praises his book, Paul never asks which book she refers to (he has written several)--"that seemed a vulgar detail" (p. 225). For Paul, Marion Fancourt embodies the essence of the literary life: "the young purity and richness of which appeared to imply that real success was to resemble that, to live, to bloom, to represent the perfection of a fine type, not to have hammered out headachy fancies with a bent back at an ink-stained table" (pp. 225-6). Besides representing for Paul

an inspiring Muse, Miss Fancourt is "natural"--that is "indubitable"--despite "her aesthetic drapery, which was conventionally unconventional, suggesting a tortuous spontaneity" (p. 226). Overt makes numerous pre-suppositions about Miss Fancourt's personality which have no basis in reality. Marion Fancourt has all the natural spontaneity of a languid pre-Raphaelite beauty, yet "Overt was sure she liked the taste of life" (p. 226). The cumulative effect of sure, indubitable, and certain in Paul's description of Miss Fancourt casts doubt on Overt's certainty. The reader never sees Marion exhibiting her intelligence and spontaneity. And Miss Fancourt's drawing-room exemplifies her aesthetic sense:

She was in a large, bright, friendly, occupied room, which was painted red all over, draped with the quaint, cheap, florid stuffs that are represented as coming from southern and eastern countries, where they are fabled to serve as the counterpanes of the peasantry, and bedecked with pottery of vivid hues, ranged on casual shelves, and with many water-colour drawings from the hand (as the visitor learned) of the young lady, commemorating, with courage and skill, the sunsets, the mountains, the temples and palaces of India, (p. 249)

Red, cheap, florid, vivid, casual--hardly adjectives to describe a tastefully decorated room. The room's appointments seem counterfeit, suspect, and self-conscious: the fabrics are "represented" as coming from the east, and are "fabled" to be peasants' counterpanes. Indeed, if this rather gaudy drawing-room reflects Miss Fancourt's aesthetic tastes, the reader must wonder what manner of "art" she brings to the master's life.

The limitations of Paul Overt's consciousness are apparent in his response to the surfaces of life. Paul's interpretations of Mrs. St. George and Miss Fancourt reveal his tendency to make erroneous judgments about character. But the real significance of Paul's

performance as center lies not so much in his mistaken assumptions, but in his dramatization of his limitations for the perceptive reader. Paul makes judgments, but provides the reader with enough evidence to question his accuracy--Miss Fancourt's drawing-room being a case in point. And as a result, Overt's limitations cast doubt on his perception of the master and the master's lesson. The master's lesson is ambiguous, but Paul's consciousness only intensifies that ambiguity.<sup>38</sup>

Although James experiments with various narrative techniques during the late eighties, he continues to develop the center of consciousness as a narrating and characterizing method. Three major tales published during 1888--"A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master"--employ centers of consciousness. A comparison of these 1888 tales with those written earlier in the decade--"The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," and "Pandora"--reveals the degree to which James has refined his centers. The authorial narrator's role has been greatly diminished, while the center's point of view increasingly dominates and structures the tale. Thus, the centers of the later tales function more naturally, particularly in the manner in which they release information to the reader. Details are revealed gradually, even haphazardly. And in the absence of the authorial narrator, who in the earlier tales summarizes and organizes the narrative, the reader must piece together characters' biographies and other necessary information.

More importantly, however, the centers of "A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master" are essentially different from the centers of tales published during the early eighties. James's later centers of consciousness are limited: Laura Wing is morally



inflexible, Oliver Lyon is proud and self-centered, and Paul Overt is naive and credulous. These various limitations influence the centers' perceptions and their interpretations of character. These centers dramatize views of the world which are "richly charged and coloured" by their consciousness. Granted, James's earlier centers were not without blemish: Rupert Waterville, Jackson Lemon, and Count Vogelstein are biased. The crucial difference with the later centers is that their limitations more radically affect their perception of things; indeed, the integrity of individual perception constitutes a substantial issue within each of the 1888 tales. Consequently, because these tales question the very nature of perception itself, ambiguity permeates each tale, an ambiguity which ultimately deepens and enriches James's fiction.

"A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master" are essentially dramatic. In them James continues to pursue the dramatic ideal of permitting "situations to speak for themselves," an ideal James praised in his master, Turgenev.<sup>39</sup> When James's centers of consciousness speak for themselves, James achieves dramatic immediacy and intensity. His centers offer a considerably limited view of reality: they do not merely reflect their world; they shape it. And although such centers frequently commit the Jamesian sins of pride and rigidity, James could still appreciate his "children of fancy"<sup>40</sup> for their unique perception of reality. As he wrote to the Deerfield summer school in 1889: "Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life."<sup>41</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1911), p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 101, 208.

<sup>4</sup> Henry James, "Guy de Maupassant," in Partial Portraits, p. 286.

<sup>5</sup> James, "Guy de Maupassant," pp. 249-50.

<sup>6</sup> James, "Guy de Maupassant," p. 250.

<sup>7</sup> James, "Guy de Maupassant," pp. 251-2.

<sup>8</sup> James, "Guy de Maupassant," pp. 245-6.

<sup>9</sup> James, "Guy de Maupassant," p. 247.

<sup>10</sup> Of these tales, four of them--"Louisa Pallant" (1888), "The Aspern Papers" (1888), "The Patagonia" (1888), and "The Solution" (1889)--employ first-person narration. James's use of that point of view also reflects his interest in capturing direct impressions of life. Because first-person narration eliminates the need for an authorial commentator, James can present his characters dramatically and economically. The narrator, who supplants the intrusive author, must necessarily focus on the visible, tangible aspects of the characters. Moreover, as a character within the narrative, the narrator cannot examine the motives or inner life of the other characters except as a matter of speculation. And because the immediacy of the narrator's voice is of paramount importance, characters are presented and developed directly and simply, without large, static blocks of description.

<sup>11</sup> Henry James, "A London Life," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), VII, pp. 87-212; hereafter cited in text.

<sup>12</sup> Henry James, Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 136.

- 13 James, Preface, p. 136.
- 14 James, Preface, pp. 137-8.
- 15 Joseph Weisenfarth, in Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1963), isolates three qualities--intensity, economy, and objectivity--as the vital elements of James's dramatic novel (pp. xii, 5-6).
- 16 F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds. The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 77.
- 17 James, Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," p. 130.
- 18 Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 77. In the Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," James discounts "A London Life's" international theme--"I fail to make out to-day why I need have conceived my three principal persons as sharers in that particular bewilderment [of Americanism]" (p. 133). But Philip Grover, in Henry James and the French Novel: A Study in Inspiration (London: Elek Books, Ltd., 1973), argues that it is important for Laura to be American to enhance her position as a candid outsider and her awareness of a simpler social order (pp. 36-7).
- 19 In the Preface to "Lady Barbarina," for example, James notes that "the dramatic side of humans situations subsists of course on contrast" and sees that contrast arising from "emphasised internationalism" (p. 199).
- 20 J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 25.
- 21 John A. Clair, The Ironic Dimension in the Fiction of Henry James (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), p. 127. Clair's position frequently leads him to ignore crucial evidence and to make some unusual interpretations. For example, in the coincidental meeting between Laura, Wendover, Crispin, and Selina, Clair sees Selina and her "agent" there to eavesdrop on Laura and gather information that will destroy her credibility as Lionel's witness (pp. 119-20). Similarly, for Clair, Selina's bolting to Belgium is a successful ruse to make Laura leave London (p. 127).
- 22 Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 272.

23 The term is Ora Segal's, who uses it in his The Lucid Reflector: The Observer in Henry James's Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

24 Ward, p. 24.

25 James, Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," pp. 137-8.

26 James, "The Liar," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), VI, pp. 383-441; hereafter cited in text. It is unclear when James actually wrote the tale, because he first refers to the tale's donnée on June 19, 1884, attributing the tale's germ to Daudet's Numa Roumestan. James revised the tale for the New York Edition, but in the Preface he mentions having met a "most unbridled colloquial romancer" at a dinner-party, and forgets Daudet's original inspiration (Preface to "The Aspern Papers," The Art of the Novel, p. 178). Without further evidence, it is difficult to date the tale, but the tale's subject and theme do seem to proceed out of James's pessimism toward art apparent in The Princess Casamassima.

27 Matthiessen and Murdock, pp. 61-2.

28 Ray B. West, Jr. and R. W. Stallman, The Art of Modern Fiction (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1949), p. 210.

29 Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 352.

30 Barbara Martineau, "Portraits are Murdered in the Short Fiction of Henry James," Journal of Narrative Technique, 2 (1972), 21. Martineau sees the tale as suggesting that the roles of man and artist are interdependent and ruled by "monstrous egotism" (p. 22).

31 Segal, The Lucid Reflector, p. 93 and "The Liar: A Lesson in Devotion," Review of English Studies, 16 (1965), 272-81; Lyall H. Powers, "Henry James and the Ethics of the Artist: 'The Real Thing' and 'The Liar,'" Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 3 (1961), 362. Other critics who discuss the tale link it to Hawthorne. Robert J. Kane sees the artist in Hawthorne and James as an unsparing analyst of the soul ("Hawthorne's 'The Prophetic Pictures' and James's 'The Liar,'" Modern Language Notes, 65 (1950), 257-8). And Edward H. Rosenberry, in "James's Use of Hawthorne in 'The Liar,'" Modern Language Notes, 76 (1961), 234-8, believes that Hawthorne's and James's artists commit the unpardonable sin of laying bare the human heart.

32 James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 390.

33 James, "The Lesson of the Master," in The Complete Tales, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), VII, pp. 213-284; hereafter cited in text.

34 James, Preface to "The Lesson of the Master" in The Art of the Novel, p. 221.

35 James, Preface, p. 225.

36 Peter Barry, "In Fairness to the Master's Wife: A Re-Interpretation of 'The Lesson of the Master,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 15 (1978), 389.

37 Adeline Tintner sees the tale as depending on the legend of St. George and the dragon. For her, the tale is about the perils of the artist, and she regards St. George as James's spokesman. Tintner focuses on the dragon and color (particularly red) imagery, and concludes that Miss Fancourt will be as much of a "dragon" as the first Mrs. St. George. See Adeline R. Tintner, "Iconic Analogy in 'The Lesson of the Master': Henry James's Legend of St. George and the Dragon," Journal of Narrative Technique, 5 (1975), 116-27.

38 It is interesting to note that while most criticism has focused on the ambiguity of "The Lesson," the tale's techniques have been overlooked. In The Notebooks of Henry James, Matthiessen and Murdock deplore the ambiguity of the tale's ending (p. 87). Segal, in The Lucid Reflector, regards the tale's ambiguity more positively, but does not consider the limitations of Overt's consciousness; Segal sees St. George and Overt representing "two opposite and irreconcilable views" (p. 135)—a view which seems to lessen the ambiguity. And G. Van Cromphout, in "Artist and Society in Henry James," English Studies, 49 (1968), 132-40, ignores the tale's equivocal lesson; he argues that in this tale James sees an unbridgeable chasm separating the dedicated artist from the public (pp. 133-4).

39 James, "Ivan Turgenieff" in French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), p. 231.

40 James, Preface to "The Aspern Papers," in The Art of the Novel, p. 178.

41 James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 258.

## CHAPTER VII

### One Must Go One's Way

As one of Henry James's perennial defenders, William Dean Howells could rejoice in 1882 that "the art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray" because of James's "very great literary genius."<sup>1</sup> Howell's support for James continued throughout the decade; although for Howells The Princess Casamassima represented a departure from the "genius" of The Portrait, he lauded the 1886 novel as "incomparably the greatest novel of the year in our language."<sup>2</sup> In the October 1888 issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Howells continued in this confident strain when he singled out James's "impulse to experiment":

There never was much 'prentice faltering in him; the danger was rather that in one so secure of his literary method from the first, a mere literary method might content to the end; but with a widening if not a deepening hold on life (all must admit that his hold has widened, whoever denies that it has deepened) this has not contented him.<sup>3</sup>

Howells was reviewing two volumes of James's tales, The Aspern Papers (1888) and A London Life (1889). In the latter collection, which included "The Liar," Howells praises James's mastery in capturing his characters' psychological nuances. In "A London Life," Howells notes the "depths under depths in the subtle penetrations of this story"; in the same breath he remarks upon James's "brilliant performance" in "The Liar," a tale in which Howells sees "astonishing divination, and a clutch upon the unconscious motives which are

scarcely more than impulses, instincts."<sup>4</sup>

Howell's review implicitly acknowledges James's command of the center of consciousness, the technique which allows James the "subtle penetrations" of his characters. With the center of consciousness James could portray and individualize his characters--an achievement duly noted by Howells when he defends James against contemporary critics' accusations that his characters are caricatures: "They are really not caricatures: a caricature of any sort would be impossible to his delicate art: they are exact portraits, and not the less perfectly realized because they seem so pitiless."<sup>5</sup>

James's use of the center enables him, as Howells notes, to create "exact portraits," with particular attention to the characters' psychological motivations. By focusing on a character who functions as the center, James renders an accurate, detailed, and sensitive portrait. But with the center James can move beyond mere portrait--which suggests a fixed though insightful composition--to create a character who develops dynamically and dramatically. One need only compare the portraits of Isabel Archer and Oliver Lyon to see James's transition from painting Isabel to permitting Lyon to reveal himself gradually. Isabel's portrait is static and inclusive, and the painter himself obtrudes. Lyon's "portrait," in contrast, is generated by the character himself throughout the tale's course, without the author's intrusion.

The tales of the late eighties represent James's proficiency with the center of consciousness. Yet with this technical confidence, a troubled note enters James's fiction, particularly in those tales about writers and artists. As a result of the failure of the two

novels of the mid-eighties, The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, James questions the artist's relationship to the world and his art. Tales such as "The Lesson of the Master" and "The Liar," which focus on that relationship, are essentially ambiguous. While James firmly believed that the artist must pursue his individual art regardless of the world's approbation, he also knew that an artist needs to make a living. James convinced himself that by venturing into playwriting he could make an adequate income<sup>6</sup> and still apply himself to his own particular art.

As a consequence, James sees The Tragic Muse,<sup>7</sup> which ran in Atlantic Monthly January 1889 to May 1890, as his "last long novel."<sup>8</sup> This description suggests that the novel closes a period in his development. Lyall Powers, stressing the words "last" and "novel," sees The Tragic Muse as James's valedictory to the novel and his declaration to devote himself to the theatre.<sup>9</sup> Oscar Cargill, in contrast, is convinced the emphasis is on "long,"<sup>10</sup> an emphasis borne out by James's own comments to Robert Louis Stevenson on March 21, 1890:

I have lately finished the longest and most careful novel I have ever written (it has gone sixteen months in a periodical!) and the last, in that form, I shall ever do--it will come out as a book in May.<sup>11</sup>

Admittedly, James's "that form" is ambiguous, because it could refer to "the longest and most careful novel" or to serialization, with which James was increasingly frustrated. James's letters, however, reveal him to be preoccupied with the novel's length. To Frederick Macmillan James describes The Tragic Muse as "longish"; in the letters to William, the novel begins as "the long thing" and grows to "my interminable novel"; and to Robert Louis Stevenson James writes



of his "fearfully long-winded but very highly-finished novel,"<sup>12</sup> In his notebook, James confesses that "for fear of making it [The Muse's, subject] too small I have made it too big" and invokes Maupassant because "variety and concision must be my formula."<sup>13</sup> These comments suggest that James is more concerned with achieving concision than with abandoning the novel itself.

And in fact, James reveals his preoccupation with concision to Robert Louis Stevenson on July 31, 1888:

I have just begun a novel which is to run through the Atlantic from January 1st and which I aspire to finish by the end of this year. In reality I suppose I shall not be fully delivered of it before the middle of next. After that, with God's help, I propose for a longish period, to do nothing but short lengths. I want to leave a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible and going in for number as well as quality, so that the number may constitute a total having certain value as observation and testimony.<sup>14</sup>

James is concerned with brevity; he is not necessarily abandoning the novel. Indeed, it is in the midst of writing The Tragic Muse that James celebrates "the great art and the great form" of the novel in his letter to the Deerfield summer school in 1889. In that letter, which contains distinct echoes of "The Art of Fiction," James equates the novel with "life": "it is infinitely large, various and comprehensive."<sup>15</sup>

The Tragic Muse itself answers James's description of the novel as "large, various and comprehensive." The Muse is James's attempt to reconcile, on a grand scale, diverse and even contradictory elements. With its large cast of characters, multiple plots, and omniscient narrator, the novel is distinctly Victorian.<sup>16</sup> Despite this dependence upon nineteenth century conventions, The Tragic Muse is also a highly

experimental work. James is boldly innovative in his use of two centers of consciousness, an objectively treated center, and his intensive focus on the "psychological reason." Moreover, in The Muse James blends his major avocations, painting and drama; the two arts comprise the novel's dual subject. More importantly, however, painting and drama influence James's technique; in this novel James fuses the painter's craft with that of the dramatist.

The Tragic Muse is the large and detailed treatment of James's concern with "the conflict between art and 'the world'"--which James sees as "one of the half-dozen great primary motives"<sup>17</sup> but a motive apparent in many of his tales of the late eighties. The conflict between the artist and the world is embodied in Nick Dormer, who resigns his seat in Parliament for an uncertain career as portrait-painter, and thus sacrifices a marriage and a fortune and destroys his mother's hopes for a comfortable old age. Paralleling Nick Dormer, James's "political case," is Miriam Rooth, a crude but determined actress who aspires to be the "English Rachel" and who by the novel's end is achieving success. James's incarnation of the "Tragic Muse" ruthlessly sacrifices intimate love and private life in her pursuit of art and excellence. Miriam's "theatrical case" receives its special poignancy by being reflected through Peter Sherringham, who falls in love with Miriam, but who is unable to give up his own ambitions as a diplomat. Because Miriam is the focus of Peter's and Nick's attention, she is the novel's "objective center"<sup>18</sup> and James's most triumphant representation of utter devotion to art. Miriam's influence permeates and dominates the novel. And although painting, as both subject and technique, constitutes a significant portion of the novel, it is the

dramatic art that stamps The Tragic Muse as unique in the Jamesian canon. In no other novel has James so accurately rendered the essence of drama, nor does he raise that art to the glory of a "subject" as he has in The Tragic Muse.

Even as The Tragic Muse's subject encompasses the arts of painting and the stage, so too do its techniques range from traditional forms of narration to the more innovative center of consciousness. Although in the 1888 tales James limits or suppresses the intrusive omniscient narrator, in The Tragic Muse the narrator constitutes an important element. The narrator functions in a distinctly painterly manner. At the novel's beginning, for example, the narrator exhibits portraits of the characters, of which Lady Agnes's, Nick's mother, is representative:

The eldest of the three ladies had indeed a face of a fine austere mould, which would have been moved to gaiety only by some force more insidious than any she was likely to recognize in Paris. Cold, still and considerably worn, it was neither stupid nor hard, but it was firm, narrow and sharp. This competent matron, acquainted evidently with grief, but not weakened by it, had a high forehead, to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish--it glittered even when seen at a distance; a nose which achieved a high, free curve, and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person. If you had seen her walk you would have perceived that she trod the earth in a manner suggesting that in a world where she had long since discovered that one couldn't have one's own way, one could never tell what annoying aggression might take place, so that it was well, from hour to hour, to save what one could. (p. 8)

The narrator paints Lady Agnes's portrait. Although the narrator is intrusive, he slyly avoids omniscience even while he gives the illusion of omniscience. He portrays Lady Agnes in such a way that her features reflect both her personality and her past. Lady Agnes's face

is "cold, still and worn" revealing that she is "acquainted with grief, but not weakened by it." And the narrator's description of the manner in which Nick's mother carries herself is elaborately metaphoric, fusing physical description and characterization. Yet while the narrator is firmly in control of his characters, he also draws the reader into the narrative; the direct reference "you" indicates that the narrator manipulates his audience as well as his characters.

In the novel's opening chapters, the narrator is a portrait-painter, proudly exhibiting his gallery of characters while they tour the Parisian salon and the Palais de l'Industrie. In fact, as the narrator introduces more characters, he deliberately connects his characters' visages with painted portraits. In contrast to Lady Agnes, whose description though concrete is primarily suggestive, Peter Sherringham's portrait is composed of specific details which convey a vivid picture of one of the novel's more important characters. The narrator introduces Peter as an eye-catching picture--"he remains so conspicuous our eyes may rest on him briefly":

He was middling high and was visibly a representative of the nervous rather than of the phlegmatic branch of his race. He had an oval face, fine, firm features and a complexion that tended to the brown. Brown were his eyes, and women thought them soft; dark brown his hair, in which the same critics sometimes regretted the absence of a little undulation. It was perhaps to conceal this plainness that he wore it very short. His teeth were white; his moustache was pointed, and so was the small beard that adorned the extremity of his chin. (p. 38)

The narrator approaches Peter as a painter might begin a portrait; a quick roughing in of Peter's overall person--"he was middling high"--then carefully detailing features--eyes, teeth, hair. Yet the

narrator adds another dimension to the portrait by including judgment--not his own, or the reader's, but that of anonymous "critics." These critics--the women around Peter--enhance the illusion of the narrator as painter, for portraits on exhibit usually attract critics. Moreover, these "critics" contribute an "air of reality" to the novel; they people the world James creates in The Tragic Muse, and they provide the narrator with means to judge without himself seeming to do so.

The narrator refines his initial sketch of Peter by examining Peter's physiognomy in order to discover his character. The narrator notes, for example, that Peter "cultivated the mask of an alien, an Italian or a Spaniard; of an alien in time, even--one of the wonderful ubiquitous, diplomatic agents of the sixteenth century" (p. 38). In true painterly fashion, the narrator studies facial features to expose the person beneath the face. Thus Peter's "mask" reveals his cosmopolitanism and his ambitions as a diplomat. But the narrator goes further by adding an ornate, allusive frame to this intricate portrait. He tells the reader that Biddy Dormer, Nick's sister who is very much in love with Peter, admires the hue of Peter's cheek "for its olive richness and his moustache and beard for their resemblance to those of Charles I" though she thinks that he also "looked like a Titian" (p. 38). Mere physical details are amplified with associations and allusions, creating a portrait that is as complex and richly resonant as the human personality itself. James's narrator is a master of portraiture, who in his painting combines description and characterization, and who distills the essence of personality.

In casting the narrator as a painter of suggestive and revealing portraits, James discovers a strategy which obviates the need for the

lengthy biography typically introducing the novel's characters, and which reduces the necessity for narratorial omniscience. Nevertheless, The Muse's narrator is essentially omniscient, and assumes many of the roles associated with that type of narrator. Noting Nick Dormer's nervous excitement and speculating that it is occasioned by his being in Paris, the narrator tempts the reader into the narrative:

Certainly, to persons not deeply knowing, or at any rate not deeply curious in relation to the young man's history, the explanation might have seemed to beg the question, consisting as it did of the simplest formula that he had at last come to a crisis. Why a crisis--what was it, and why had he not come to it before? The reader shall learn these things in time, if he cares enough for them. (p. 19)

Here the narrator, unashamedly obvious, goes behind Nick and hints at the novel's subject. Moreover, by explicitly referring to "the reader," the narrator destroys the novel's illusion of life, implicitly acknowledging that the novel is a deliberate work of artifice, whose course the narrator alone is privy to.

The narrator's structuring hand is evident in varying degrees throughout The Tragic Muse. Although Nick and Peter function as centers, the narrator rarely declines to explain or expand emotional subtleties. In this role, he can be coy--"I ought possibly to hesitate to say how much Sherringham felt the discomfort, for him, of the advantage that Miriam had of him" (p. 214)--yet he can also be supremely confident:

Sherringham, I may add, had no desire that she should indulge a different preference: it was foreign to him to compute the probabilities of a young lady's misbehaving for his advantage (that seemed to him definitely base), and he would have thought himself a blackguard if, professing a tenderness for Miriam, he had not wished the thing that was best for her. (p. 215)

And perhaps even more curiously, the narrator alternates between allowing the novel's characters freedom and confessing his own editorial control--in a single sentence:

I am afraid moreover that I have no better excuse for Nick than the one he had touched on in the momentous conversation with his mother which I have thought it useful to reproduce in full. (p. 176)

The narrator admits a certain helplessness in explaining ideas and feelings, yet he also boldly tells the reader that he exercises selectivity by "reproducing" significant events "in full." In many respects, The Tragic Muse's narrator is akin to that of The Bostonians, particularly in his capricious advancing and withdrawing of information. And there are moments when The Muse's narrator is equally slippery. In discussing Julia Dallow's love for Nick, the narrator unblushingly confides:

If she liked Nick Dormer extremely (and it may without further delay be communicated to the reader that she did), her liking was of a kind that opposed no difficulty whatever to her not liking (in the case of such a complication) a person attached or otherwise belonging to him. It was not in her nature to extend tolerances to others for the sake of an individual she loved: the tolerance was usually consumed in the loving; there was nothing left over. (p. 103)

The narrator begins with a conditional statement--a speculation perhaps based on observation--but then parenthetically asserts his certainty, and proceeds to define Julia's innermost feelings, inaccessible to observation. Undoubtedly, the narrator's expansiveness is justified by Julia's characteristic reticence; nevertheless, The Tragic Muse's narrator is hardly distinguishable from other nineteenth-century narrators. Yet that narrator takes on a peculiar dimension when James uses him to insist upon "the indirect vision"--the center of

consciousness--as the novel's controlling point of view:

As to whether Miriam had the same bright, still sense of co-operation to a definite end, the sense of the distinctively technical nature of the answer to every question to which the occasion might give birth, that mystery would be cleared up only if it were open to us to regard this young lady through some other medium than the mind of her friends. We have chosen, as it happens, for some of the advantages it carries with it, the indirect vision; and it fails as yet to tell us (what Nick of course wondered about before he ceased to care, as indeed he intimated to his visitor) why a young person crowned with success should have taken it into her head that there was something for her in so blighted a spot. (pp. 276-7)

In effect, the omniscient narrator, who usually refers to himself as "I" but here assumes the editorial "we," acquiesces to "the minds of her friends"--the centers of consciousness--in order to maintain Miriam's place as the novel's objective center. The narrator implies that different laws govern different characters, so that he may go behind the reserved Julia according to the dictates of the plot, but must back off from Miriam who is developed through James's "indirect vision." Again, the narrator destroys the novel's illusion of life by acknowledging the laws under which the story is to be told,<sup>19</sup> and in so doing emphasizes the "art" and artifice of fiction.

Indeed, the passage quoted above has misled some critics to believe that the "indirect vision" virtually suppresses the omniscient narrator's presence. Bellringer calls this passage "the technical crux for the interpretation of the novel."<sup>20</sup> And although Powers admits that James employs a "hypothetical authority" in the novel's opening chapter, he asserts that "virtually all of the novel--narration, description, dialogue--is presented from the point of view of one or other of the characters."<sup>21</sup> In comparing The Tragic Muse with its



predecessors The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, Kimmey confesses to "rare intrusions" in a novel where scenes and characters are predominantly dramatized.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Stone is one of the few critics of The Tragic Muse who recognizes the pervasive presence of James's narrator.<sup>23</sup>

That narrator, who vacillates between omniscience and reticence, is more assured in his other functions as a typical nineteenth-century narrator. He, for example, will judge some characters for the reader. After depicting Gabriel Nash expounding on the question of Nick's devoting himself to "the practice of pictorial art," the narrator turns to the reader:

This may strike many of my readers as a limited and even trivial inquiry, with little of the heroic or romantic in it; but it was none the less carried to a very fine point by our clever young men. (p. 267)

In one breath the narrator defends and patronizes "our clever young men" while he pokes fun at the reader's "heroic" or "romantic" expectations. James's narrator treads a narrow course between instruction and criticism--criticism that is not always limited to the novel's characters.

But like many nineteenth-century narrators, The Tragic Muse's narrator has firm footing at the novel's conclusion where he ties up all of the plots' loose ends. The major characters are conveniently gathered together at Miriam's premiere as Juliet, and are discussing Peter Sherringham's discovery of Miriam's marriage to Basil Dashwood. Their discussion abruptly stops as the curtain rises on the play's "tragic climax." But at this point the narrator steps on stage and disposes of the characters one by one. He marries Biddy Dormer to

Peter, and suggests some form of a reconciliation between Nick and Julia by having Mrs. Dalloway sit to Nick for a portrait which will attract "general attention." And in the novel's final paragraph, the narrator breaks away from dealing out fates to bridge the gap between his deliberately created world and the reader's world:

These matters are highly recent however, as I say; so that glancing about the little circle of interests I have tried to evoke I am suddenly warned by a sharp sense of modernness. This renders it difficult for me, for example, in taking leave of our wonderful Miriam, to do much more than allude to the general impression that her remarkable career is even yet only in its early prime. Basil Dashwood has got his theatre, and his wife (people know now that she is his wife) has added three or four new parts to her repertory; but every one is agreed that both in public and in private she has a great deal more to show. This is equally true of Nick Dormer, in regard to whom I may finally say that his friend Nash's predictions about his reunion with Mrs Dalloway have not up to this time been justified. On the other hand, I must not omit to add, this lady has not, at the latest accounts, married Mr Macgeorge. It is very true there has been a rumour that Mr Macgeorge is worried about her--has even ceased to believe in her. (pp. 529-30)

Although the narrator professes that "the little circle of interests" is contrived, he continues to treat his creations as if they were real. He proposes futures for the novel's characters: Miriam steadfastly pursues her "remarkable career" and cites "the latest accounts" concerning Nick's and Julia's relationship. And the narrator further invests his imaginary circle with "a sharp sense of modernness" by taking leave of characters and reader with prose redolent of the gossip column's presumptive intimacy, or as Bellringer casts it, "extravagantly journalistic" language."<sup>24</sup>

James's use of the narrator in The Tragic Muse is very much in keeping with his old conception of the novel as picture, exemplified

in The Portrait of a Lady. The narrators of the 1882 and the 1890 novels are essentially similar, except that The Muse's narrator is a more skillful portrait-painter, and frequently bears evidence of James's uneasiness with this narrative device. In many important respects, The Tragic Muse is a painterly novel, with particular focus on the art of portraiture. Throughout the eighties, James fondly rendered literary portraits--first in The Portrait of a Lady, and continued in Partial Portraits (1888), Portraits of Places (1883), and in the 1889 tale of a portrait-artist, "The Liar." Indeed, James finds his inspiration for his 1890 novel's title in Reynold's portrait, "Mrs. Siddons as The Tragic Muse," which hung in Grosvenor House during the 1880s. Robert Falk notes an interesting relationship between the Reynolds portrait and James's novel. In the portrait, Mrs. Siddons occupies a lofty throne, flanked on either side by shadowy figures. For Falk, the "symbolic" portrait serves as a model for the structural technique of The Tragic Muse--Miriam occupying the novel's objective center, flanked by Peter and Nick.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Nick, who ultimately paints Miriam as The Tragic Muse, is himself a portrait-painter, who resigns representing the constituents at Harsh so that he may represent them on canvas.

Yet as James's narrator reveals, the concept of painting in general and portraiture in particular permeates the novel's structure. The novel's large canvas is crowded with minor characters whose portraits are brilliantly rendered. Mrs. Gresham, Julia's sometime companion, is painted in a single paragraph:

Mrs Gresham was a married woman who was usually taken for a widow; mainly because she was perpetually

"sent for" by her friends, and her friends never sent for Mr Gresham. She came in every case and had the air of being répandue at the expense of dingier belongings. Her figure was admired--that it was sometimes mentioned--and she dressed as if it was expected of her to be smart, like a young woman in a shop or a servant much in view. (p. 175)

There are only general indications of what Mrs. Gresham looks like, yet her personality is deftly rendered in a few strokes. James himself regarded portraiture as the greatest art; in his 1887 essay on John Singer Sargent James proclaims that "there is no greater work of art than a great portrait."<sup>26</sup> The portrait is great precisely because it has the ability to capture the essence of personality. When in 1888 Theodore E. Child sent James a photograph of Gustave Flaubert, James wistfully noted, "How strangely it is in the power of a good portrait to revive, recreate what is buried and finished."<sup>27</sup> And in The Tragic Muse, Gabriel Nash expatiates on

the possible greatness of the art of the portraitist--its reach, its range, the magnificent examples it had left us in the past: windows open into history, into psychology, things that were among the most precious possessions of the human race. He insisted, above all, on the interest, the richness arising from this great peculiarity of it: that unlike most other forms, it was a revelation of two realities, the man whom it was the artist's conscious effort to reveal and the man (the interpreter) expressed in the very quality and temper of that effort. It offered a double vision, the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of art that life could give. (p. 282)

The portrait thus reveals its subject and its creator. Moreover, in James's view,<sup>28</sup> the portrait represents the closest juncture between art and life: "the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of art that life could give."

Yet, for all its "life," the portrait also destroys; and as the novel progresses, the recognition that portraiture is essentially destructive increasingly dominates. James appropriately has Miriam Rooth, who creates character through her own person, define that nature of the portrait. She advises Nick to paint Gabriel Nash:

'It will be a good way to get rid of him. Paint Mrs Dallow too,' Miriam went on as she passed out of the door which Nick had opened for her--'paint Mrs Dallow if you wish to eradicate the last possibility of a throb.' (p. 503)

Nick does paint Gabriel Nash and Miriam; both disappear, leaving Nick with two unfinished portraits (p. 511). Although Nick successfully paints Julia Dallow, the novel's ending is such that the reader never discovers whether the portrait represents the destruction of Nick's artistic integrity (as Gabriel prophesies) or the eradication of "the last possibility of a throb" as Miriam suggests. Art exploits; the artist must ruthlessly probe his sitter's personality in order to create great portraits. In rendering the surface and substance of life, the artist exposes and freezes life. James could praise Daumier in 1890, but he cast Daumier's art in ambiguous terms: "Art is an embalmer, a magician, whom we can never speak too fair . . . It prolongs, it preserves, it consecrates, it raises from the dead. It conciliates, charms, bribes posterity. . . ." <sup>29</sup> Although art consecrates, it also embalms, charms, and bribes; rather than being "a direct impression of life," art composes life into the illusion of life. Art fixes human beings into place, just as Nick Dormer sees the woman he loves, Julia Dallow, as "a composed picture" (p. 179).

Consequently, even though James founds The Tragic Muse on elements essentially painterly, this novel is James's valedictory to

painting as a fruitful analogy for the "art of fiction." James, it is true, explains in the novel's Preface that he discovered the solution to fusing his "theatrical case" and his "political case" in "certain sublime Tintoretto's at Venice, a measureless Crucifixion in especial, which showed without loss of authority half a dozen actions separately taking place."<sup>30</sup> In other words, a commanding, compositional center would effect a "mighty pictorial fusion."<sup>31</sup> In the novel, that center is the Tragic Muse herself, Miriam Rooth, who is the focus of the novel's two centers of consciousness. But although Miriam is James's means of "pictorial fusion," she is treated objectively, that is dramatically. James rigorously refrains from "going behind" her, and instead develops her through the different perspectives of Nick Dormer and Peter Sherringham, and through the other characters' perceptions. The reader, for example, first sees Miriam through the eyes of Bidy Dormer, Nick's sister:

The other person was very much younger--she might have been a daughter--and had a pale face, a low forehead and thick, dark hair. What she chiefly had, however, Bidy rapidly discovered, was a pair of largely-gazing eyes. Our young friend was helped to the discovery by the accident of their resting at this moment, for a little while--it struck Bidy as very long--on her own. (p. 21)

Miriam's physical features are established through Bidy Dormer, who--treated omnisciently--registers those features as one might pick out the distinctive characteristics of an actress seen on stage. Unlike the narrator's character descriptions, portraits which reveal and fix characters through suggestive detail, Bidy Dormer perceives Miriam's physical traits--traits which do not fix personality into a "composed picture." Miriam develops gradually over the novel's course,

and because she is reflected through several points of view she dynamically and dramatically acquires depth and fulness of character. Peter Sherringham also records Miriam's physical features, but in his capacity as center he possesses the sensitivity to see the person behind the mask:

It was the element of outline and attitude, the way she stood, the way she turned her eyes, her head, and moved her limbs. These things held the attention; they had a natural felicity and, in spite of their suggesting too much the school-girl in the tableau-vivant, a sort of grandeur. Her face, moreover, grew as he watched it; something delicate dawned in it, a dim promise of variety and a touching plea for patience, as if it were conscious of being able to show in time more expressions than the simple and striking gloom which, as yet, had mainly graced it. (p. 92)

Although Peter portrays Miriam, this "portrait" differs considerably from those presented by the narrator. In contrast to the narrator's painted--and static--portraits, Peter's rendering of Miriam focuses on her dynamic qualities. His view of Miriam suggests future promise and development, whereas the narrator's depiction of Lady Agnes, for example, results in a fixed image and a recapitulation of the character's past. True, Miriam's potential for growth is a function of James's purpose--"a study of a certain particular nature d'actrice"<sup>32</sup>--and it is appropriate that a secondary character such as Lady Agnes would not radically change. Significantly, however, James renders the character who constitutes the novel's centerpiece through centers of consciousness--a dramatic technique--while relegating minor characters to more traditional and more static methods of representation.

Peter, in fact, does more than simply record Miriam's promising and impressionable surfaces; he analyzes Miriam's character, and thus

stands in for the narrator as interpreter of the hidden personality. When attending Miriam's first London performance, Peter reflects upon the Tragic Muse's nature:

He had seen Miriam now; he had never seen her before; he had never seen her till he saw her in her conditions. Oh, her conditions--there were paltry enough as yet, inferior, inadequate, obstructive, as compared with the right full, finished setting of such a talent; but the essence of them was now irremovably in Sherringham's eye, the vision of how the uplifted stage and listening host had transformed her. That idea of her having no character of her own came back to him with a force that made him laugh in the empty street: this was a disadvantage she was so exempt from that he appeared to himself not to have known her till tonight. Her character was simply to hold you by the particular spell; any other--the goodness of home, the practice of virtues or industries or vices--was not worth speaking of. These things were the fictions and shadows; the representation was the deep substance. (p. 235)

Peter becomes a vehicle through which James can expose Miriam's character without violating his objective treatment of her. As an interpreter of Miriam, Peter is qualified and trustworthy; he himself is a sensitive and educated observer of the dramatic art, and although he is in love with her, he continues to respect the integrity of her talent.<sup>33</sup> Peter is the near-perfect medium through which Miriam can be reflected.

James's treatment of Miriam is his most triumphant and assured dramatization of a character in his fiction of the eighties. Not only does James conscientiously maintain his objective development of Miriam; James adds considerable depth and complexity in her characterization, despite his objectivity, by reflecting her through several characters. All of the novel's characters react to the Tragic Muse, but Nick in his capacities as portrait-painter and as center of



consciousness provides insight into her character:

It was success, Nick felt, that had made Miriam finer--the full possession of her talent and the sense of the recognition of it. There was an intimation in her presence (if he had given his mind to it) that for him too the same cause would produce the same effect--that it would show him that there is nothing like being launched in the practice of an art to learn what it may do for one. . . . Handsome as she had been the year before, she had suggested provincial lodgings, bread-and-butter, heavy tragedy and tears; and if then she was an ill-dressed girl with thick hair who wanted to be an actress, she was already in a few weeks an actress who could act even at not acting. She showed what a light hand she could have, forbore to startle and looked as well for unprofessional life as Julia; which was only the perfection of her professional character. (p. 279)

In contrast to Peter, who focuses on Miriam's potentiality, Nick blends vivid details with a sense of past and present to create a dramatization of Miriam, a dynamic characterization which transcends the narrator's static portraiture. And as a consequence of James's decision to develop his Tragic Muse through two centers of consciousness, Miriam demonstrates the intensity of characterization possible with the "indirect vision." When Peter Sherringham reacts to Miriam's performance, he defines the nature of the dramatic art:

He floated in the sense of the felicity of [Miriam's performance], in the general encouragement of a thing perfectly done, in the almost aggressive bravery of still larger claims for an art which could so triumphantly, so exquisitely render life. 'Render it?' Peter said to himself. 'Create it and reveal it, rather; give us something new and large and of the first order!' (p. 325)

In describing the essence of Miriam's talent--to create and reveal life, not render it--Peter actually describes the true "technical crux" of The Tragic Muse. The painterly method merely renders and "embalms" life, while the indirect vision creates life. The painter

records on a dead canvas; the actor or actress, a living, breathing human being, reveals character.

Miriam Rooth, the Tragic Muse, is created through the novel's two centers, Nick Dormer and Peter Sherringham. Yet these centers present their own particular problems within the novel's context. James himself, for example, later admitted Nick's weakness as a character, even though he represents a significant subject of the novel:

It strikes me, alas, that he is not quite so interesting as he was fondly intended to be, and this in spite of the multiplication, within the picture, of his pains and penalties. . . .<sup>34</sup>

James excuses his failure to make Nick interesting through Nick's nature as subject:

Any representation of the artist in triumph must be flat in proportion as it really sticks to its subject--it can only smuggle in relief and variety. For, to put the matter in an image, all we then--in his triumph--see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work. 'His' triumph, decently, is but the triumph of what he produces, and that is another affair. . . . The privilege of the hero--that is of the martyr or of the interesting and appealing and comparatively floundering person--places him in quite a different category, belongs to him only as to the artist deluded, diverted, frustrated or vanquished; when the 'amateur' in him gains, for our admiration or compassion or whatever, all that the expert has to do without.<sup>35</sup>

Nick's particular "triumph," James explains, prevents him from assuming the hero's traditional role. Nevertheless, James's reasons for Nick's failure as character beg the question--an evasion perhaps apparent to James for he tersely admits that the "better part of [Nick] is locked too much away from us, and the part we see has to pass for--well, what it passes for, so lamentedly, among his friends and relatives."<sup>36</sup> Nick's "better part" is precisely what constitutes

his interest as James's political case--Nick's struggle for artistic dignity amid the demands and expectations of his friends and relatives.

Critical opinion regarding Nick takes its cue from James's confession in the novel's Preface. Some critics elaborate on James's own criticism: Edgar sees the novel's main flaw as Nick's failure to engage the reader's sympathy.<sup>37</sup> Winner elaborates in a similar strain when she notes that Nick's character lacks vitality because his alternatives do not provide "genuine conflict or the challenge of complex moral choice"--his choices offer only the "most abstract of gratifications."<sup>38</sup> Suggesting that James makes Nick too much like himself, Stone comments that James endangers Nick's credibility by burdening him with excessive sensibility.<sup>39</sup>

Yet others feel compelled to defend Nick against James's criticism. Krook finds Nick more interesting than James admits, while Graham praises Nick's "inner drama" of sterile constriction and creative release.<sup>40</sup> And Falk feels that James's discussion of Nick in the Preface presents a lapse in critical judgment. Falk acknowledges that Nick is less interesting than Miriam, but rightly so because Nick is not the main character.<sup>41</sup> The fact remains, however, that Nick is weak, as a character and more crucially as a center, because he is "locked too much away." He is a most reticent center, and regardless of James's excuses, Nick may represent the author's own inability to portray or dramatize the artist's private struggle between his art and the world.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, James's treatment of Nick lacks the confidence apparent in other centers. Despite his function as a center of consciousness, Nick is frequently interpreted by the novel's omniscient narrator. On many occasions, the narrator introduces Nick, then

retreats as Nick's consciousness assumes the narrative:

Nick himself was surprised at the airs he could play; and often when the last thing at night he shut the door of his room he mentally exclaimed that he had had no idea he was such a mountebank.

I must add that if this reflection did not occupy him long, and if no meditation, after his return from Paris, held him for many moments, there was a reason better even than that he was tired or busy or excited by the agreeable combination of hits and hurrahs. The reason was simply Mrs Dallow, who had suddenly become a still larger fact in his consciousness than active politics. She was, indeed, active politics; that is, if the politics were his, how little soever, the activity was hers. She had ways of showing she was a clever woman that were better than saying clever things, which only prove at the most that one would be clever if one could. (p. 178)

The narrator summarizes Nick's thoughts omnisciently--he portrays Nick as "mentally exclaim[ing]" and then "adds" in first-person commentary about Nick's reflections. Then, subtly, the passage shifts to Nick's functioning as center, particularly in the discussion of Julia, until finally the reader sees Julia, painted by Nick into a "composed picture":

It was as if she had been too near for him to see her separate from himself; but none the less, when he now drew breath and looked back, what had happened met his eyes as a composed picture--a picture of which the subject was inveterately Julia and her ponies: Julia wonderfully fair and fine, holding her head more than ever in the manner characteristic of her, brilliant, benignant, waving her whip, cleaving the crowd, thanking people with her smile, carrying him beside her, carrying him to his doom. (p. 179)

With Nick as center, James combines painting and drama: Nick fixes Julia into a "composed picture" while he exposes his own character, weak, malleable, permitting himself to be carried "to his doom." Although Nick clearly functions as a center of consciousness in depicting Julia, the narrator, serving in an omniscient capacity, must first

lead the reader into Nick's consciousness.

As the novel progresses, James abandons the narratorial preparation and allows Nick full responsibility as center. Accordingly, Nick's perceptions become less pictorial and static, and more dynamic in representing character. The emotionally-charged scene in which Nick tells his mother of his resignation is reflected entirely through Nick's consciousness. Nick vividly dramatizes Lady Agnes:

Lady Agnes challenged him upon this low prospect exactly as if he embraced it with the malignant purpose of making Julia's return impossible. She contradicted her premises and lost her way in wrath. What had made him suddenly turn round if he had been in good faith before? 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--they never had been--and he had been anything but honest to lead her on, to lead them all on, to think he would do something: the fall and the shame would have been less for them if they had come earlier. Moreover, what need under heaven had he to tell Charles Carteret of his 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 so delighted to confer. No wonder the old man would keep his money for his heirs, if that was the way Nick proposed to repay him; but where was the common sense, where was the common charity, where was the common decency, of tormenting him with such vile news in his last hours? Was he trying what he could invent that would break her heart, that would send her in sorrow down to her grave? Weren't they all miserable enough, and hadn't he a ray of pity for his wretched sisters? (p. 367)

Nick captures the very rhythm of Lady Agnes's voice and the very texture of her character. She is angry, grieved, and irrational; she scolds him as a vulgar, daubing fool, she piles question upon question as the crescendo of her wrath builds and breaks. Here Lady Agnes is not the fixed portrait painted by the narrator at the novel's opening. Instead, she is a moving, breathing, and intensely human character

because she is registered through Nick's consciousness. Moreover, James's strategy in reflecting this emotional scene through Nick is effective in developing Nick's character. Lady Agnes's impact on Nick is intensified by guilt--after all, Nick himself is the cause of his mother's anger. Nick's vivid, even painful reflection of Lady Agnes literally comes from a guilty conscience.

Nick can function as a legitimate center of consciousness, as exemplified in his dramatizing the scene between himself and Lady Agnes. James, however, does not always permit Nick to act freely; instead, James all too frequently uses the narrator to paint and examine Nick's character. James's lack of consistency in his treatment of Nick weakens Nick's character and by extension the novel's whole "political case." The constant shifting between two narrative methods--the intrusive, omniscient narrator and the center of consciousness--exposes James's own inability to make Nick's struggle concrete and real--regardless of the author's somewhat facile excuses in the New York Edition Preface. In The Princess Casamassima, James turns his "not knowing" to his thematic purpose. In The Tragic Muse, however, that "not knowing," thinly masked by narrative shifts, vitiates a potentially interesting character and a considerable portion of the novel.

Nick's conflict between art and the world is, of course, only a single though important facet of The Tragic Muse's subject. A similar conflict preoccupies the novel's other center of consciousness, Peter Sherringham. Critical opinion has not been kind to Peter. Edgar calls him "an amiable mediocrity" "spun out too long and beaten too thin" while both Robson and Stone condemn his "profound

conventionality."<sup>43</sup> Stone denigrates Peter by regarding him as a "walking essay" on the drama, whose role is that of mechanical necessity.<sup>44</sup> Krook is slightly less harsh when she describes Peter's "poor divided passion" as shabby when compared to Miriam's "splendid integrity."<sup>45</sup> Yet not all of Peter's critics dismiss him. Graham, for example, admits that Peter is less interesting than Miriam, but insists that the drama of "his perpetual switches of position and of mood" create "a dazzling proliferation of sustained ironic analyses."<sup>46</sup> And Bellringer recognizes Peter's worth as a "human subject" and as the novel's gravamen: Peter credibly represents the personal stress of the conflict between art and the world, and thus embodies the novel's "most absorbing psychological interest."<sup>47</sup> Peter Sherringham functions as the novel's most sustained center of consciousness. He is, moreover, vital to the novel not only because he represents a high standard of critical judgment, but also because he provides the poignancy of human emotions in a novel Edel calls preachy.<sup>48</sup>

Peter, in fact, is more successful than Nick as character and center of consciousness. Peter's struggle between love and ambition is naturally more accessible to the reader than Nick's triumph as artist. But that James treats Peter with more assurance and consistency undoubtedly contributes to Peter's success. The narrator introduces and describes Peter, but has little else to do with him. James generally steps back so that Peter may dramatize his own dilemma;

There was only one thing in life that his mind had been very much made up to, but on this question he had never wavered: he would get on to the utmost in his profession. It was a point on which it was perfectly lawful to be unamiable to others--to be vigilant, eager, suspicious, selfish. He had not in fact,

been unamiable to others, for his affairs had not required it: he had got on well enough without hardening his heart. Fortune had been kind to him and he had passed by so many competitors on the way that he could forswear jealousy and be generous. But he had always flattered himself that his hand would not falter on the day he should find it necessary to drop bitterness into his cup. This day would be sure to dawn, for no career was all clear water to the end; and then the sacrifice would find him ready. His mind was familiar with the thought of a sacrifice: it is true that nothing could be plain in advance about the occasion, the object, the victim. All that was tolerably definite was that the propitiatory offering would have to be some cherished enjoyment. (pp. 210-11)

Peter's perceptions dominate this passage. It is true that the narrator hovers closely in the background, with reference to Peter's mind as well as, a few sentences later, a summation: "At any rate it never occurred to Sherringham that he himself might be the sacrifice" (p. 211). The narrator presents a possibility as yet unfathomable to Peter, but that possibility is couched in language that does not interrupt the smooth flow of Peter's thoughts--the narrator does not stand self-consciously aside to comment.

For the most part, however, James suppresses or mitigates the narrator's voice and permits Peter to perform as center. Although James intersperses third-person references within Peter's direct observation, the cumulative effect is the dramatization of Peter's conflict through his consciousness. As the novel progresses, the narrator recedes even further into the background, and Peter assumes all responsibility for the narrative. For example, Peter recognizes he must choose his career over his love for Miriam, occasioned by Miriam's asking Nick to accompany her in her carriage.

Peter Sherringham would not for a moment have admitted that he was jealous of Nick Dormer, but he would almost have liked to be accused of it; for



this would have given him an opportunity to declare with plausibility that so uncomfortable a passion had no application to his case. How could a man be jealous when he was not a suitor? how could he pretend to guard a property which was neither his own nor destined to become his own? There could be no question of loss when one had nothing at stake and no question of envy when the responsibility of possession was exactly what one prayed to be delivered from. (pp. 389-90)

Peter's consciousness is directly experienced by the reader. As a result, Peter is intrinsically more vivid a character than Nick. Peter never turns his back to the reader, as does Nick; Peter is more accessible and thus more real. Interestingly, Stone implies that Peter's openness works disadvantageously when he calls Peter a "fixed portrait" who never has freedom of choice, in contrast to Nick, who "is allowed to break out of the frame."<sup>49</sup> Peter has no "freedom" because the reader knows that Peter's ambition is paramount. But Peter is the wiser for having made his choice. Moreover, Peter's intense personal struggle between art and the world, love and career, is the novel's most palpable psychological drama--far greater and far more tangible than Nick's struggle. Peter's final choice is hardly surprising, yet Peter is not a "fixed portrait" in the strict sense that Isabel Archer is. By the end of The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel can hardly be said to have chosen her fate since she chose while blinded by idealism; more crucially, she remains blind. Peter, indeed, measures the distance James has come in developing the center of consciousness and the drama of consciousness. As James admitted in The . . . Portrait's Preface, Isabel's interest lies in what she will do--her consciousness is secondary in that it determines her external actions. But Peter's interest as a character arises primarily from his thought

processes--Peter's action is that of the consciousness perceiving, organizing, and deciding, and not what Peter actually does. Peter's development as a character is genuinely a drama of the consciousness in a manner in which Isabel's portrayal can never be. In Peter, who functions as center and as subject, James achieves a virtually seamless fusion of form and content.

James relies on the dramatic presentation of the center of consciousness in developing the novel's major characters, but he uses dramatic elements throughout the novel itself. Much of the novel's dialogue, for example, is rendered as an actor's script, complete with stage directions and stripped of the editorial "he said" or "she said." Frequently, too, the characters are paired off and presented "on stage" at critical turns of the plot. Indeed, the novel depends on memorable theatrical scenes: Lady Agnes's begging Nick to marry Julia; Nick's proposal to Julia; Nick's telling the dying Mr. Carteret of his resignation; Peter's final proposal to Miriam fresh from her London triumph. That scene between Peter and Miriam in Chapter 46 demonstrates the extent to which James incorporates dramatic--even melodramatic--effects into The Tragic Muse. The scene is carefully orchestrated to build suspense: Peter awaits Miriam, who emerges from "the little dusky garden" into the brightly-lit drawing room. When Miriam is in the spotlight, Peter asks her to renounce the stage to become his "ambas-sadress." Miriam passionately defends her artistry, and Peter tries to woo her. While the two argue, there is a sound of a cab off-stage. The discussion continues but Peter makes out a "hovering shape" which materializes into Mrs. Rooth, who eventually enters the drawing room.

Miriam, rejecting Peter, flounces into the darkness, leaving Peter and Mrs. Rooth on the illuminated stage. Such scenes, with their dramatic lighting, recall the melodramatic chiaroscuro of The Portrait of a Lady, yet those scenes do not have the portrait's static nature. The scenes of The Tragic Muse are essentially dynamic, with entrances and exits, characters lurking in shadows, and stagey gestures. In this novel, there is a sense of emotionally charged and purposeful movement, of conscious staging only dimly present in the previous novels and tales of the eighties.

James himself later recognized The Tragic Muse's close ties with the elements of drama when he composed the novel's New York Edition Preface. Although the first half of the Preface examines the novel's pictorial analogy--especially as a means of fusing the two plots--the second half focuses on the novel's dramatic elements. James casts the whole novel as theatre and performance, and from that standpoint passes judgment on The Muse:

If the art of the drama, as a great French master of it has said, is above all the art of preparation, that is true only to a less extent of the art of the novel, and true exactly in the degree in which the art of the particular novel comes near that of the drama. The first half of a fiction insists ever on figuring to me as the stage or theatre for the second half, and I have in general given so much space to making the theatre propitious that my halves have too often proved strangely unequal.<sup>50</sup>

James ultimately conceptualizes the novel not as a pictorial composition gradually revealed, but as a stage upon which the characters perform. That James accuses himself of spending too much space on the stage's preparation indicates his sustained interest in pictorial composition--but only as it is related to drama. According to

James's principle of alternation, "picture" is important because it prepares for scene, the characters' acting.<sup>51</sup> Dramatic method, however, increasingly shapes the novel as the painterly influence wanes. Dramatization becomes a means by which James meets "the challenge of economic representation":

Therein lies the secret of the appeal, to his mind, of the successfully foreshortened thing, where representation is arrived at, as I have already elsewhere had occasion to urge, not by the addition of items (a light that has for its attendant shadow a possible dryness) but by the art of figuring synthetically, a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick, as into the rich density of wedding-cake.<sup>52</sup>

James sees fictional representation arising not from pictorial elements--"the addition of elements"--but as generated by the character itself, "synthetically."

Indeed, it is in the "light" of alternation, the shifting from picture to scene, that James reconciles the arts of the painter and the arts of the dramatist. Nevertheless, though the pictorial elements figure importantly, they essentially arise from the novelistic tradition--hence James associates the pictorial primarily with an omniscient narrator. Tintoretto's Crucifixion may suggest a strategy for unifying two plots, but James depends on the stage to justify the presence of the two centers of consciousness:

No character in a play (any play not a mere monologue) has, for the right expression of the thing, a usurping consciousness; the consciousness of others is exhibited exactly in the same way as that of the "hero"; the prodigious consciousness of Hamlet, the most capacious and most crowded, the moral presence the most asserted, in the whole range of fiction, only takes its turn with that of the other agents of the story, no matter how occasional these may be.<sup>53</sup>

The drama ultimately dominates The Tragic Muse. James's 1890 novel is paradoxically his most conventional and his most innovative to date. And as an experimental novel, The Tragic Muse in its subject and technique, maps the course James will pursue in transforming the novel in the twentieth century.

Despite The Muse's crucial place in James's development, critical opinion has been largely negative. Krook and Graham, to be sure, praise James's maturity and mastery in handling varied material,<sup>54</sup> but many critics support Edel's description of the novel as cold and discursive.<sup>55</sup> Anderson faults the novel's conception as "curiously mechanical" and its execution "curiously loose," and Hall, even more bluntly, calls the novel a thematic and technical failure.<sup>56</sup> Damning with faint praise, Edgar points out that James dexterously paints over the seams in his large canvas.<sup>57</sup> Others see, as does Edmund Wilson, a falling-off at the novel's midpoint.<sup>58</sup> Stewart, for example, finds The Tragic Muse initially vigorous, but in the end it is "strangely inert."<sup>59</sup> Stone, more explicitly, recognizes the novel's subject as promising, yet suggests that halfway through the novel the subject is resolved and the choices are made, thus agreeing with Robson that the second half is a "lamentable tailing-off of a distinguished novel."<sup>60</sup>

In focusing on the novel's shortcomings, the critics miss the novel's significance as experiment. That the novel is essentially experimental was recognized by James's earliest critics: Howells characterizes The Muse as marking "the farthest departure from the old ideal of the novel."<sup>61</sup> And in 1903, an anonymous reviewer perceptively recognizes the novel as inaugurating the new era of later

Jamesian fiction.<sup>62</sup> James himself knew that The Tragic Muse was a turning point in his career. The Muse is James's final attempt to write a Victorian novel, but more importantly, it also testifies to James's awareness that he must devote himself to his particular art in spite of the world. As he explains to his brother William on July 23, 1890,

I have no illusions of any kind about [The Tragic Muse], and least of all about its circulation and "popularity." From these things I am quite divorced and never was happier than since the dissolution has been consecrated by (what seems to me) the highest authorities. One must go one's way and know what one's about and have a general plan and a private religion--in short have made up one's mind as to ce qui en est with a public the dragging after which simply leads one in the gutter. One has always a "public" enough if one has an audible vibration--even if it should only come from one's self. I shall never make my fortune--nor anything like it, but--I know what I shall do, and it won't be bad.<sup>63</sup>

"Experiments of form" have their own intrinsic validity. James's way would take him through a disappointing experience with play-writing, and increasing distance from the general public, but in persevering James irrevocably altered the art of fiction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> William Dean Howells, "Henry James, Jr.," Century Magazine, November, 1882; reprinted by Albert Mordell in Discovery of a Genius: William Dean Howells and Henry James (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), pp. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup> Howells, "The Princess Casamassima," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, April, 1887; reprinted in Discovery of a Genius, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Howells, "Stories Reprinted in The Aspern Papers and A London Life," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, October, 1888; reprinted in Discovery of a Genius, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Howells, "Stories Reprinted," p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> Howells, "A London Life," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, August, 1889; reprinted in Discovery of a Genius, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years, 1882-1895 (1962; rpt. New York: Avon Books, 1978), pp. 265-7.

<sup>7</sup> Henry James, The Tragic Muse (1890; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1978); hereafter cited in text.

<sup>8</sup> Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Lyall H. Powers, "James's The Tragic Muse: Ave Atque Vale," PMLA, 73 (1958), 270-4.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Cargill, "Gabriel Nash--Somewhat Less Than an Angel," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 14 (1959), 232.

<sup>11</sup> Henry James, Letters, 1883-1895, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 273.

<sup>12</sup> James, Letters, 1883-1895, pp. 238, 243, 300, and 279.

<sup>13</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 92.

- 14 James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 240.
- 15 James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 257.
- 16 Walter Isle, for example, regards The Tragic Muse as James's "last Victorian novel, as we use the term" [Experiments in Form; Henry James's Novels, 1896-1901 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 5]. Although Donald David Stone claims that Isle, in making this statement, confuses style with theme, Stone discusses in detail The Muse's Victorian conventions, though allowing that the novel's theme, which celebrates artistic self-assertion, is essentially subversive to the Victorian novel [Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James, and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880's (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972) pp. 308-9, 324-5].
- 17 Henry James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse," in The Art of the Novel, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 79.
- 18 James, Preface, p. 89.
- 19 James, Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton," in The Art of the Novel, p. 136.
- 20 Alan W. Bellringer, "The Tragic Muse: 'The Objective Centre'," Journal of American Studies, 4 (1970), 82.
- 21 Lyall H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1972), pp. 144-5.
- 22 John L. Kimmey, "The Tragic Muse and Its Forerunners," American Literature, 41 (1970), 522.
- 23 Stone, pp. 324-5.
- 24 Bellringer, 85.
- 25 Robert Falk, "The Tragic Muse: Henry James's Loosest, Baggiest Monster?" in Themes and Directions in American Literature, Essays in Honor of Leon Howard, Ray B. Browne and Donald Pizer, eds. (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1969), p. 152.
- 26 Henry James, "John Singer Sargent," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 75 (1887), 691.



27 James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 227.

28 This is not to suggest, however, that Gabriel Nash is James's spokesman. In fact, Nash intrigues the novel's critics, who have identified him with an assortment of people and ideas. Oscar Cargill sees Nash as a portrait of Oscar Wilde ("Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 12 (1957), 177-87); Quentin Anderson calls him an affectionate portrait of Henry James Senior [The American Henry James (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 101]. Lyall H. Powers ("Mr. James's Aesthetic Mr. Nash--Again," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 13 (1959), 341-9) and Leon Edel [introd., The Tragic Muse (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. xiv] do see him as James's spokesman. Krook argues that Nash is modelled on John La Farge [The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 83].

William F. Hall, however, notes that criticism has focused on who, not what Gabriel Nash is, and suggests that he is James's representation of the ideal consciousness ("Gabriel Nash: 'Famous Centre' of The Tragic Muse," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 21 (1966), 167-84). Pelham Edgar finds Nash less a person than a point of view [Henry James: Man and Author (1927; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 287], while Bellringer calls him a caricature of Paterism and a choric fool ("The Tragic Muse: 'The Objective Centre,'" 75). And Ronald Wallace compares Nash to Meredith's Comic Spirit (described in the preface to The Egoist), noting that Nash is a "prime mover" who creates relationships among the characters ("Gabriel Nash: Henry James's Comic Spirit," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 28 (1973), 220-4). James himself provides the best analysis of Nash in Chapter 23 of The Muse: Nash is an "ambiguous being" but an "excellent touchstone" (p. 264).

29 James, "Daumier, Caricaturist," Century Magazine, 17, (1890), p. 409.

30 James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse," p. 84.

31 James, Preface, p. 84.

32 Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 63.

33 Peter is not only a trustworthy interpreter of Miriam; as Stone notes, Peter demonstrates the reality of Nick's talent. Because Peter's taste is sensitive and educated, his opinion of Nick's portrait of the Tragic Muse is a reliable indicator of Nick's ability (p. 314).

34 James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse," p. 96.

35 James, Preface, pp. 96-7.

- 36 James, Preface, p. 97.
- 37 Edgar, Henry James: Man and Author, p. 285.
- 38 Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 126.
- 39 Stone, p. 316.
- 40 Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, p. 81; Kenneth Graham, Henry James: The Drama of Fulfillment: An Approach to the Novels (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 85.
- 41 Falk, pp. 158-60.
- 42 Winner notes that James fails "to draw a convincing particularized picture of a painter in conflict with the world" (p. 126).
- 43 Edgar, p. 295; W. W. Robson, "The Tragic Muse," in Critical Essays (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 226; Stone, p. 313.
- 44 Stone, p. 313.
- 45 Krook, p. 98.
- 46 Graham, p. 108.
- 47 Bellringer, 89, 84.
- 48 Leon Edel, introd., The Tragic Muse, p. xiv.
- 49 Stone, p. 315.
- 50 James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse," p. 86.
- 51 In the Preface to The Tragic Muse James notes that the novel most closely approaches the dramatic "in the light of alternation" (p. 90). He explains alternation in the Preface to The Ambassadors as the movement between picture--"the parts that prepare, that tend in fact to over-prepare, for scenes" and scene--"logical start, logical turn, and logical finish" (pp. 322-3).
- 52 James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse," pp. 87-8.

- 53 James, Preface, p. 90.
- 54 Krook, p. 64; Graham, p. 79.
- 55 Leon Edel, Review of Lyall H. Powers's Henry James and the Naturalist Movement, Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 26 (1971-2), p. 499.
- 56 Quentin Anderson, The American Henry James, p. 102; William F. Hall, "Gabriel Nash: 'Famous Centre' of The Tragic Muse," 183.
- 57 Edgar, p. 298.
- 58 Edmund Wilson, The Triple Thinkers: Twelve Essays on Literary Subjects (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 107.
- 59 J. I. M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 98.
- 60 Stone, p. 328; Robson, p. 226.
- 61 William Dean Howells, "The Tragic Muse," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, (September, 1890); reprinted in Mordell, Discovery of a Genius, p. 166.
- 62 "Mr. Henry James," Edinburgh Review, 197 (January, 1903) reprinted in Henry James: The Critical Heritage, Roger Gard, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 346.
- 63 James, Letters, 1883-1895, p. 300.



## CONCLUSION

The Tragic Muse is the capstone of a decade of technical and thematic experimentation. At James's "last long novel," The Muse marks a turning point in James's development. After a decade of attempting to appeal to public tastes James recognizes he must renounce popularity and that "one must go one's way"; as his 1890 letter to William clearly indicates, James accepts the reality that he must pursue his private muse even if it means that his public consists of himself alone. James's declaration to his brother, muted though it may be, is still an affirmation of the artist's liberty James claimed in his landmark essay, "The Art of Fiction."

Even though The Tragic Muse is, as Lyall Powers characterizes it, valedictory,<sup>1</sup> the novel is distinctly triumphant because it is James's reconciliation, on a grand scale, of seeming opposites. This sense of reconciliation permeates both theme and technique. James's characters, for example, eventually harmonize their private desires with the demands of a public life, whether that life entails the sphere of politics or of art. The major characters--Nick Dormer, Miriam Rooth, and Peter Sherringham--arrive at different resolutions to the conflict between private and public life. James himself does not, in the novel, posit easy answers to this conflict. In fact, the novel's lack of a single resolution is a measure of James's increasing sophistication. The conflict between the public and private life is a central issue of James's fiction of the eighties, and in earlier novels, The Bostonians

and The Princess Casamassima, James saw no compromise. Basil abducts Verena, forcibly preventing her public debut; Hyacinth is torn between his private sensibilities and his sense of social injustice, and so commits suicide. In contrast, the characters of The Tragic Muse have the ability to achieve satisfactory, if not always happy, harmony among their contradictory needs. The Tragic Muse, then, fittingly concludes a decade of work in which James searches for a balance between the pressures of the world and the requirements of the inner life, particularly the artist's.

Indeed, the artist and art constitutes an important subject in The Tragic Muse and another facet of James's intent to unite seemingly disparate elements, showing that "all art is but one." The novel, because it traces the careers of Nick Dormer, a portrait painter, and Miriam Rooth, an actress, is a study of the nature of art and the artist. Yet James's blending of painting and drama occurs on another level of the novel--that of technique, which comprises a significant portion of the reconciliation that characterizes The Tragic Muse. Portraiture, a pervasive Jamesian interest throughout the eighties, influences this novel. In the main, portraiture is allied with an omniscient narrator, who paints the characters, especially the minor ones, as a means of introducing them. James links novelistic painting with a traditional mode of narration, thereby implicitly suggesting the limitations of the portrait and painting as narrative strategies. Portraiture is limiting because it is essentially static: a portrait may reveal, albeit gradually, character, but it cannot show a character changing. The Portrait of a Lady, in which James painted a masterpiece of fiction, clearly displays James's skill at portraiture,

but the novel also demonstrates the constraints portraiture imposes on the novelist. Specifically, the painter-narrator is palpably present throughout The Portrait as he sketches and defines Isabel Archer, and predicts what she will do. In The Portrait of a Lady, James raises portraiture to its finest development, combining it as the novel's form and content: Isabel is confined within the portrait's frame just as she is "the prisoner of her constituted self."<sup>2</sup>

But the frame and the painter destroy the novel's "air of reality"--hence James's search throughout the decade for other narrating and characterizing methods. As shown by his essay in French Poets and Novelists, James found inspiration in the work of his "master," Ivan Turgenev. James particularly valued Turgenev's willingness to let "situations speak for themselves"<sup>3</sup>--a concept James regarded as dramatic because it circumvented the omniscient narrator who winks and nods behind the scenes.<sup>4</sup> For James, the Turgenevian ideal increasingly took the shape of the center of consciousness. The center, through which James could project character and register events, obviates the need for James or his narrator to "go behind" character. With the center, narration and characterization are fully integrated within the novel, because the center is a character--both an actor and observer--who creates the narrative as his own "direct impression of life." Moreover, the novel can better partake of the "air of reality," for the center apprehends character gradually, as an accretion of often conflicting details. Characters are developed in a natural fashion, mimicking life itself.

Characterization achieved through the center of consciousness is thus dynamic. A character so developed continues to change and grow

throughout the narrative, in contrast to a character like Isabel Archer, whose end is implicit in James's first description of her. In The Tragic Muse, James relinquishes the major narrative burden to two centers, Nick Dormer and Peter Sherringham, who together develop the Tragic Muse herself, Miriam Rooth. The actress is a triumph of the "indirect vision," as James defines the center of consciousness technique in the 1890 novel; Miriam is dramatized through the novel's centers, and consequently assumes immense vitality and intensity of character.

In its use of centers of consciousness, The Tragic Muse is a stunning culmination of James's "experiments of form" which influence the novels and tales of the eighties. Again, a brief comparison of The Muse with The Portrait measures the extent to which James develops his use of the center in this decade. In The Portrait of a Lady, James also used two centers--Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett. By employing his heroine and the heroine's observer as center, James reveals his insecurity about the technique's capacity to reveal character. Moreover, by having the novel's objective center, Isabel, function as center of consciousness, James comes very close to appearing to treat Isabel omnisciently; there are, as a matter of fact, few passages in which Isabel's consciousness is untouched by authorial intrusion.

The Muse employs two centers of consciousness, but these centers remain outside of the novel's objective center, Miriam Rooth. Miriam is presented dramatically, and even though she is never gone behind by the author, Miriam is richly developed throughout the novel's course. Nick and Peter, the two centers, provide complementary and personal impressions of the actress. With Miriam, James fully exploits



the possibilities of the "indirect vision." James boldly refuses to go behind his heroine, confidently relying instead on the novel's centers of consciousness to characterize the Tragic Muse.

Yet even while The Tragic Muse caps a decade of "experiments of form," the novel remains firmly rooted in James's past work, because The Muse incorporates methods of painting which counterpoint more dramatic techniques. James still depends on a traditional narrator to paint portraits and set scenes. In the New York Edition Prefaces, he justifies the necessity for painting in a dramatic novel as the complementary alternation between picture and scene.<sup>5</sup> However, in The Tragic Muse picture, the setting of the stage in preparation for the dramatic scene, is the province of a traditional narrator, who functions obtrusively. As a result, The Tragic Muse is paradoxically traditional and innovative, Victorian and modern.

In fact, the paradox of old and new governs the fiction, particularly the novels, of this period. Experimentation in both content and form characterize James's work of the eighties, making it his most traditional. James himself sets the tone for the eighties fiction when he indicates his commitment to experiment in "The Art of Fiction." In this essay, James insistently calls for the novelist's freedom to create the appropriate form for his "direct impressions of life." The only constraint James imposes is that the novelist be someone on whom nothing is lost, since the writer's subject and method was experience, "an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue."<sup>6</sup> Thus, while "The Art of

Fiction" is a manifesto for artistic liberty, it is no less an indication of James's technical development during the 1880s. James declares his intention to focus on the consciousness as subject and method; the center of consciousness embodies James's own concept of a "direct impression of life," his benchmark of the essence of fiction's art.

In the 1884 essay, James envisions painting as a useful analogy for fiction, and argues cogently for the kinship between the artist and the novelist. For James, "a psychological reason is . . . an object adorably pictorial" which might "inspire one to Titianesque efforts."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless painting, or more specifically, portraiture, is an essentially static technique: a portrait reveals, but does not develop. Significantly, then, although James applauds Turgenev's skill at portraiture, he reserves his warmest praise for the Russian's ability to dramatize character, event, and mood through selective and compressed detail. Character and situation thus speak for themselves--and speaking is more dynamic than being exhibited by the painter-novelist.

James's striving for the Turgenevian dramatic ideal necessitates that James abandon portraiture as his primary narrative method--a method that betrays too much the hand of the painter. The center of consciousness becomes, then, a strategy to circumvent narratorial intrusion and to project character and event dramatically. Consequently, the novels and tales of the eighties are marked by James's movement away from painting as analogy and technique and his increasing dependence on drama, which finds its clearest expression in the center of consciousness. The tales of the decade, "The Siege of London," "Lady Barberina," "Pandora," "A London Life," "The Liar," and "The Lesson of the Master," are remarkable not only for their exploration of new and



old themes. These tales are James's purest experiments with the center of consciousness where the narrator is successfully eliminated or suppressed. In contrast, the novels of the period--The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, and The Tragic Muse--rely to varying degrees on traditional narration, although they display James's growing confidence with the center of consciousness in the novel's larger compass.

The center of consciousness clearly demands a new analogy for the art of fiction. James naturally turns to drama, an art which holds as much fascination for him as does painting. By relinquishing narration and characterization to the center, who is himself a character in the narrative, James could approximate the kind of direct communication that occurs between the actor on stage and the audience. Such was James's interest in drama that in 1890 he fulfilled an enduring ambition to write for the stage once The Tragic Muse was completed. Part of his ambition was fueled by his hope to make a comfortable income playwriting. More important, James turned to writing for the stage because of his love for the pièce bien faite and the rigorous demands that form would impose on his talent. James's career as a playwright ended abruptly, however, when in 1895 he was booed by the audience on the opening night of Guy Domville.

With the failure of his dramatic venture, James takes up "the pen of all [his] old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles," and returns to the novel.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, James had not completely abandoned fiction during his dramatic years; between 1890 and 1895 he continued to write tales for magazine publication. James's debacle with Guy Domville had exposed his inability to write the English pièce bien

faite and appeal to the public, yet James was determined to salvage skills acquired during his dramatic experience and apply them to the art of fiction. Thus it is that when James begins to plan The Spoils of Poynton, he envisions "the thing in three chapters, like three little acts," although the novel grows beyond three divisions to achieve "the completeness of the drama-quality."<sup>9</sup> James's experience in the theater had a profound effect on the manner in which he conceptualized the novel. James ultimately came to see that the principle of scenario--"the adequate and regular practice of some such economy of clear summarization" and "the sacred mystery of structure" was the real fruit of his "long tribulation" in the theater."<sup>10</sup>

James's remarks in his notebooks and in the New York Edition Prefaces have focused critical attention on the dramatic elements of the fiction following the dramatic years. Walter Isle, in Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels 1896-1901, and Joseph Wiesenfarth, in Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy, for example, have conducted detailed studies tracing James's incorporation of his "theatrical experiment" into his later fiction. And although such studies have unquestionable value, they have unfortunately fostered the neglect of the dramatic qualities pervading the novels and tales of the eighties. At the most, the experimental nature of this fiction is given a perfunctory nod before being dismissed.

Indeed, the central purpose of this thesis is to argue that James is steadily concerned with "experiments of form" throughout the eighties, and that those experiments increasingly focus on the dramatic possibilities of the center of consciousness. James did not invent the

technique, nor is the technique absent in his earlier fiction. Rather, the value of James's technical experiments of this decade lie in his strategies with the center as a means of avoiding intrusive narrators and coalescing the novel's shape and subject, form and content. The tales and novels of the eighties do bear the influence of James's early painterly approach, and depend on traditional modes of narration. Nevertheless, the fiction of these years reveals James's gradual refinement of and confidence with the center of consciousness. The center becomes the means by which James transmutes the art of fiction into the drama of consciousness.

The fiction of the eighties is important. It is considerably useful in understanding the total James canon: the eighties fiction is essentially transitional, and thus provides a bridge between the early phase and the major phase. These "experiments of form" shed light on the techniques and subjects of James's later masterpieces, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, especially in that the eighties fiction is concerned with the nature of perception and the perceiver.

Yet while the novels and tales of the eighties illuminate James's later masterpieces, it would be wrong to relegate the work of this decade to the shadows of the major phase. The fiction James produced between 1882 and 1890 possesses intrinsic value. In many respects, the work of these years is among James's most accessible, humorous, and contemporary. The eighties fiction shows James at his most various and versatile: his subjects encompass the International Theme, social issues, the nature of art, and the artist's relationship with the world; his tone ranges from satire to despair, expansiveness to



detachment. The novels and tales of the eighties are, taken together as a cohesive body of work, a provocative synthesis of painting and drama, and tradition and innovation. Indeed, James's experiments from 1882 to 1890, together and individually, are valuable as intriguing examples of the James's practice of his art--and drama--of fiction.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lyall H. Powers, "James's The Tragic Muse: Ave Atque Vale," PMLA, 73 (1958), 270-74.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Edel, introd., The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1963), p. xx.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, "Ivan Turgenieff" in French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> James, "Anthony Trollope" in Partial Portraits (1888; rpt. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1911), pp. 116-7.

<sup>5</sup> James, Preface to "The Tragic Muse" in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction" in Partial Portraits, p. 388.

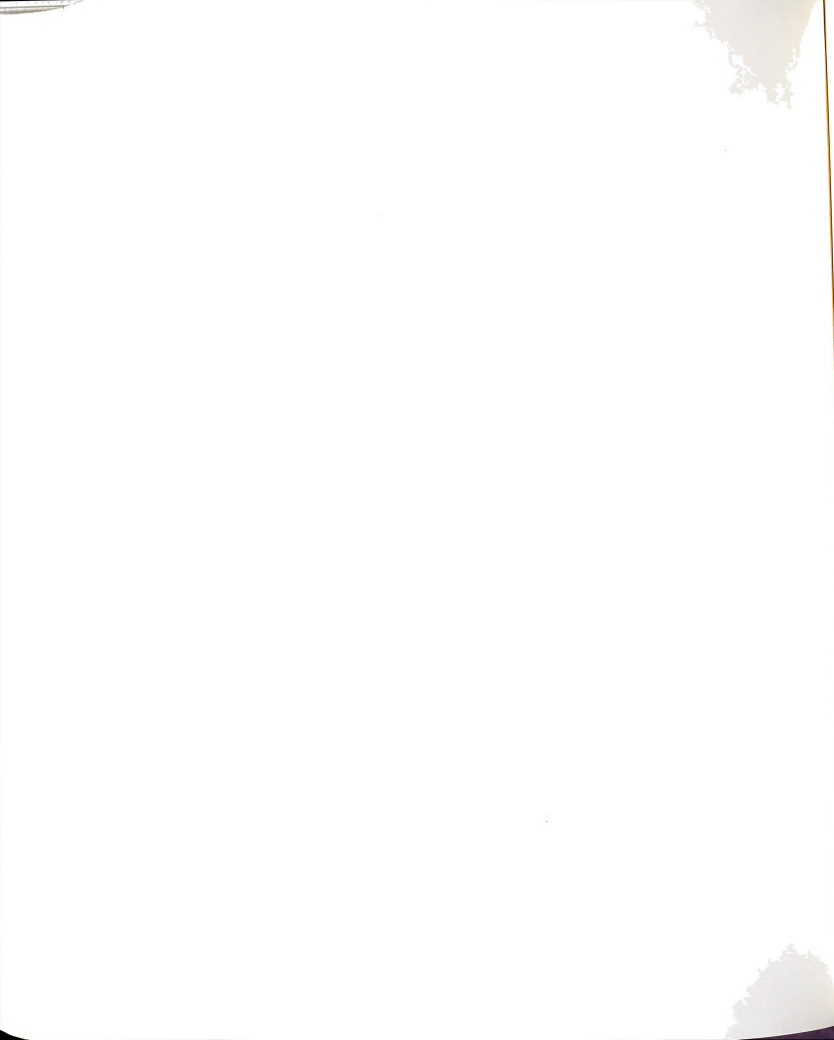
<sup>7</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 402.

<sup>8</sup> F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 198.

<sup>10</sup> Matthiessen and Murdock, p. 208.

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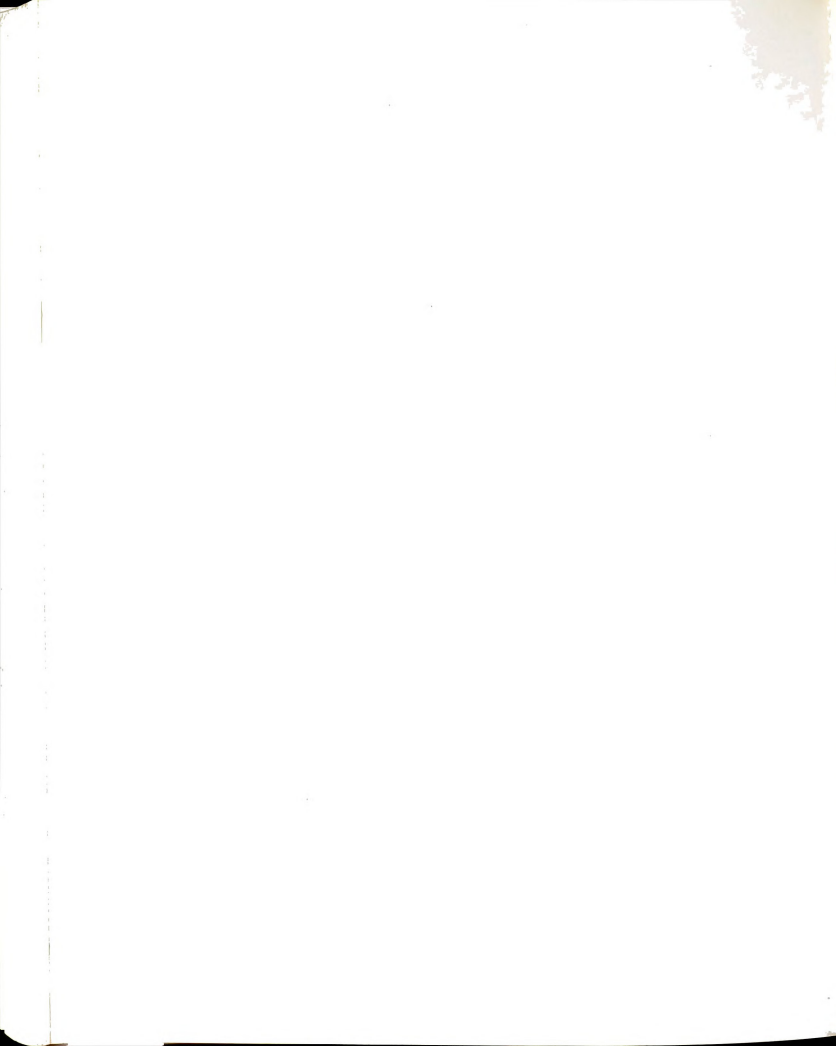
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