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THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

THE LITERARY REPUTATION OF HENRY JAMES

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

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Approved for the

Department of English

and the Graduate School

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Director of Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of any artist's career there usually are changes in the attitudes towards him. If he is developing, the changes should be a fact, especially if the times are changing also. If the artist does not show any differences during his career, there is little point in his creating after the first product. The more important the artist, the more likely he is to have an effect on his times and on the field of art in which he works. It is possible that the times may change as a result of his work and influence. The times may change more precipitately than he, and he may be left behind. Probably for him to have the maximum influence he should develop much more rapidly than the times, leaving a great deal for future generations to "discover" in his work. This heritage for the future may, of course, prevent his own generation from finding him particularly interesting or worthwhile, and may even cause him not to make a living.

Some critics during his career seemed to have resented their not being able to get inside James' mind to dissect him more easily than they were able to do. One of the greatest causes of grievances against him was their not being able to comprehend him. Critics have responded with abuse, derision, accusations of both too great a morality for realistic writing, and of immorality, and they have also hinted that he was a great deal of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Other critics contemporary with James treated his individuality with more respect than those who found many faults in him. Without

by-passing the tricks of phrases and the obscurities, they willingly gave him credit for using all these characteristics as implements of innovation. They even agreed that the innovation might be valuable.

That there was any sort of gradual building up to his present-day reputation on all phases of his writing does not show in the reviews. From the first some were favorable, and some otherwise, without any particular decline of either type. The things for which he was praised and the ones for which he was taken to task did change during his career. This change, of course, was a reflection of his own technical developments and of the temper of the period's being changed also.

In the early days James' style and manner of writing were often praised, but as time went on, these came in for less favorable comment from various quarters. Many of the critics felt that he was becoming too introverted to communicate effectively with an audience.

The earlier reviews contain phrases such as observations on his "light touch" and on his "economy," which never appear in later notices. These phrases denote changes in James' style, of course, as well as in the critics' opinions of him. One strong characteristic which was observed fairly early in his works and which continued throughout, was his obscurity. The changes in types of comments on this were intensified rather than veering off in any other direction.

One thing that seemed apparent in the reviews, the feeling that critics rarely expressed in so many words but which pervaded their writing, was the impression that James was a writer who could not be dismissed lightly or ignored. His talents might not be comprehended,

but he demanded some sort of reaction. Any of the critics who attempted to show themselves as infinitely superior were the losers by straining at the effort.

Several of the more popular notions about James should be dispelled by this paper. One of them is that James moved to England and found that country more receptive than America. He did find it a better place in which to work, but the critical notices in the two countries show that he was not more fully appreciated in England. The American press was sometimes more harsh than the British, it is true. On the whole, however, reviews in American periodicals were just as perceptive, if not more so, as the English. Further, they took more favorable note of him on many occasions, and their awareness of James' abilities came earlier in some instances than in England.

The average reading person is apt to think of Henry James only in terms of the style of his later years. This style, which is full of layers of meaning and buttressed with heavy words and sentence structure, is undoubtedly the easiest to spot and imitate. But it was not his style in the first part of his career, as can be seen through the eyes of the reviewers in those days. It is hoped that this realization will destroy another misconception about James.

A popular notion about James, that he was a psychological novelist, is one that should not be at all modified by this paper. Through the reactions of the critics who variously berated him for the lack of action in his stories or who were delighted with his probing of the interior life of his characters, it can be seen that this is just what

he was.

An important thing that should be borne in mind is that even though the critics in the periodicals have a great influence in shaping taste, they are not able to foist poor material off on the public, nor are they always able to kill the potential of a good work of art. The most that can be said in a generalizing sort of way is that they are usually a reflection of the thinking of the more thinking people.

The morals of James' stories and the thinking of his critics about them are testimony to the changing times. James was often denounced for his hints of immorality. In the novels of the 1960's, such as works by Faulkner, Steinbeck, or the highly publicized Mrs. Metalious and Mr. Nabakov, immoral goings-on are never merely hinted. They are spelled out, either in sturdy Anglo-Saxon terms or couched in more sophisticated language. Often such elements of "rum, rape, and rebellion" are the only claim the novels have to literary distinction. Publishers have found that they can sell books which are so composed, and the public acceptance bears them out.

There has been of late a movement to dissuade authors from overloading their stories with all varieties of carnage, as in a speech by John Mason Brown before the Richmond (Virginia) Book and Author Dinner in April, 1962, which was strongly critical of novels which bear such a heavy burden of immorality. Whether this movement will spread widely is a matter that cannot be predicted.

To return to more specific matters, Henry James was not an author whose stories were consistently best sellers. He was able to support

himself by his writing, but because of certain characteristics, which were noted by his critics, he did not become a novelist of the common people. What these characteristics were and how the critics felt about them are the foundation for this paper. During his lifetime and since his death a change has taken place in his literary status. The qualities of that change are also a component of this paper.

This study has been an attempt to give a survey of the present state of the literary reputation of Henry James and to trace its development through the years.

The first chapter deals with the critical reviews which appeared about James during his creative career (from 1877 to 1904). Excerpts of these reviews have been quoted and analyzed to some degree. The general purpose has been to try to discover if there have been definite trends in critical thought which have led to the present feeling about him.

The second chapter contains trends in criticism on James during the years since 1943. That year was picked as a starting point because it was the hundredth year since James' birth, 1843. With the notice taken of that fact in the press, some renewed interest in him was stirred. Scholars had not actually been neglecting him during the interim between his death in 1916 and this centennial, but the general public, it seems, had paid him little notice.

In the third chapter are divisions based on some of the more outstanding characteristics James displayed, as they have been commented on by the critics. These comments include observations on his abilities as a literary critic, his qualities as an observer, his morality, his

characterization and plots, his obscurity, and a division of the English and American thinking on James.

This sort of study has involved some digressions on the craft of criticism. To accept everything which has been written about Henry James as absolutely true would be folly. Some sort of assessment of the statements is necessary.

There has been, also, selectivity involved in the criticisms which have been included. Some which have seemed intelligent, or noticeably un-intelligent, significant in pointing out certain qualities, or have had some other point of interest have been chosen over ones which seemed to be bits of hackwork.

Certain questions are bound to arise in the course of any amount of reading about James, especially in reading the current pieces about him. There is a highly defensive tone which is quite apparent in the majority of it. What has led to this feeling? Has it been a tendency which was built up over the years or is it more the product of a literary accident of some sort?

In studying the reviews which were published concerning James' work during his life time, it is evident that his critics then saw quite different qualities in his work than those which present-day evaluators have discovered. The noticeable major qualities which critics then and now have found are the main body of this paper.

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL REACTION TO HENRY JAMES 1877 TO 1904

This chapter deals with reviews of works by Henry James beginning in 1877 and continuing through 1904. The first date was chosen because it is the year of the first review which could be found; the second, because it is the date of the last major novel produced by James. Later works appeared, but they need not be considered significant for this paper.

It should be noted that the reviews of James in the earlier years regarded him largely as a commentator on the international scene, and as time passed, it was felt by many of the reviewers that he was developing some defects of style which interfered with his audience's full appreciation of him. The first chapter does not deal with these defects except as they appear chronologically in the eyes of his critics. These quirks of James' writing are discussed more fully in the third chapter.

This chapter is designed to portray the fiction of Henry James as it was seen by the people who lived in his time and who regarded him not as an historical figure but as a writer whose work was in need of reviewing because it was being published with some frequency. The varying attitudes of the reviewers beyond their realization of the need of James' works for reviewing are shown in the excerpts which have been quoted.

In the great majority of the reviews the articles were unsigned. In such cases, the page, date, and name of the magazine in which the

review appeared are the only pieces of information included in the footnotes.

In one of the earliest available reviews of work by James, the critic was writing about The American in 1877. Though the element of passion was found wanting, the critic was not entirely displeased, for he wrote:

> . . . Apart from this how much there is to admire in the novel! The different threads are managed with rare skill. . . . There is great completeness and skill in these chapters. But the best thing of all, in our opinion, is the delicacy with which Madame de Cintre is drawn, with her shyness and generous delicacy. The success here, attained as it is by that apparent simplicity which is the height of art, gives the novel a place among the best modern studies of society, and makes it an honorable example of Mr. James' serious endeavor to attain excellence only by careful choice of methods.[1]

This critic showed sympathy with James' thinking, and let it be known that he knew something of the author's aims in writing, too. He was no stranger to good criticism, which should have some more stable base for remarks than the reviewer's personal opinions. Though these points enter into the final judgment, they cannot be applied fairly if no conception of the purposes of the author are gained first. This critic knew that James was serious in trying to "attain excellence only by careful choice of methods," and this knowledge enabled the critic to make some decision as to whether that goal had been reached.

One of the characteristic marks of criticism on James is his seriousness about his work. A good number of people appreciated this approach to his profession; others felt that he could have improved had

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[1] The Nation, May 31, 1877, p. 325.

he eased up a bit in his zeal.

In 1878 an English reviewer writing about James' book, French Poets and Novelists, praised him for a work which showed that he could write and think, though the critic admitted to being uncertain about the meaning of some of the words. He wrote:

> There has of late years appeared nothing upon French literature so intelligent as this book . . . acute, full of good sense, free from affectation and pretence. . . .[2]

That this book is praised for its "lack of pretence" might surprise some readers who are more familiar with James' later style, which has been condemned more than once for being altogether too full of pretence, and pretentiousness as well. This may point to a definite developmental trend in James' style.

A facet of his writing which many critics deplored was what they felt was James' lack of moral quality. More specific citations will be made later. However, in 1879, a reviewer criticizing The Madonna of The Future wrote that James was quite similar to Balzac in his studies of relations between the sexes, except that James, he felt, was prohibited from some of Balzac's freedom by his "Angle-Saxon reticence."[3] That this reviewer was English is obvious from his next remarks.

> To say that they are written in an excellent style, with scarcely a trace of what Englishmen are wont to consider Americanisms, and that they abound in charming bits of description and shrewd conceits neatly expressed, is only to say that they are by Mr. James; but it

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[2] The Athenaeum, March 16, 1878, p. 339.

[3] The Athenaeum, November 8, 1879, p. 593.

is to be hoped that he is not yet at the end of his invention. . .[4]

The English perhaps could never forgive James for coming over and writing about them more perceptively than most of their native writers could do. They took, on the whole, a somewhat condescending attitude, such as characterized above by "scarcely a trace. . . of Americanisms." Naturally bits of Americanisms were to be avoided at all costs. Any clear-thinking Englishman knew that. If James could manage to shake off his faintly unsavory background of America, it was so much the better for him.

Another point which naturally comes under consideration in discussing a novelist is his development of the characters in his stories. Are they merely names on the page, or do they have more meaning for the reader than that? In a review of "Daisy Miller" and _The Europeans_, the first a short story and the second a novel which were published in 1878 and 1879, an early critic said that he felt James described street scenes, houses, gardens, and the like, better than people, probably because

> . . . the former are conscientious copies from a model, while his men and women are fictions of the intellect merely, whom he makes known to us by descriptions and assertion instead of by the natural unfolding of their dispositions and characters through the medium of thinkings and sayings and doings. . . . Interesting portraitures . . . but . . . not sufficiently real to rouse our sympathies.[5]

To this critic's mind, James must not have passed the test of breathing

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[4] _Ibid._

[5] _Harper's Weekly_, January, 1879, pp. 309-10.

reality into his people. Whether this is a result of James' methods' being too radical for the critic to fall in line with his thinking or whether the critic simply rejected the characters while understanding their exposition is not known. James at this time was probably not important enough to merit a separate review for each story.

Another review of "Daisy Miller" in 1879 praised the author and also named the two other writers the critic felt had influenced James:

> He is little more than a beginner, and he already writes with the aplomb of a veteran; he has almost acquired a manner.[6]

The critic continued by saying that he could see the influence of Balzac and Trollope in James and he thought James should take care to avoid becoming merely a reflection of Trollope, who was so easy to follow. It should be noted that another critic had already mentioned the similarities of James and Balzac, in a review of The Madonna of The Future.

In 1880 a critic evidenced some reluctance to discuss James, saying that his novels "are better fitted to be read and enjoyed than to be criticized."[7] This may, perhaps, be attributed to a feeling on the reviewer's part that James was saying more than he was understanding; his remarks are not disparaging in the least, and seem to show that he approved of James' writing:

> . . . as imponderable but yet as delightful to the observer as the tail of Donati's comet . . . that seemingly light but really careful touch of which Mr. James more than any living English

[6] The Athenaeum, March 1, 1879, p. 275.

[7] The Athenaeum, January 3, 1880, p. 16.

writer possesses the secret.[8]

It may be mentioned that this was appearing in an English magazine, rather making the compliments stronger, especially as the reviewer gave James credit for being an Englishman, or if he were not saying that, he placed him above his English contemporaries, which is generous also. The "light touch" mentioned by this reviewer is an interesting phrase. It denotes a quality later critics seemed often to find lacking in James.

How was Henry James as a literary critic? Two opinions of his work, Hawthorne, for the English Men of Letters series, show that he did not appear the same to all his beholders.

From The Athenaeum, an English magazine?

> . . . hardly more than a taskwork, done cleverly no doubt . . . but not especially interesting and not in the least important as throwing new light on its subject.[9]

From Harper's, an American magazine:

> . . . will not suffer in comparison with the best of its predecessors . . . fulfills the design of the series . . . the effect of the whole being to make the reader thoroughly acquainted with all the phases of Hawthorne's life and character . . . admirable faculty of choice and selection . . . artistic disposition and arrangement of materials . . . occasional interjections of sneering disparagements of American literature . . . detract from the other substantial merits of his performance.[10]

That an American reviewer should be more sensitive to "sneering disparagements" of the literature of his country is quite natural.

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[10]Harper's, March, 1880, p. 16.

While the English critic seemed to take no notice of such an attitude, it rose up to cause offense to the American. The fact that the American thought the book would compare favorably with the best of its predecessors does not signify a great deal unless one has studied those predecessors. The others may not themselves have made an important contribution to literary papers.

Probably one of the words most frequently associated with Henry James is "obscure." Was this quality one which flourished early in his career or did it come about after long years of maturing? It was noted in 1881 in a review of Washington Square:

> . . . once or twice the desire to put things smartly had made him obscure.[11]

and though the reviewer commented that it was not a new story, "Mr. James has contrived as he usually does, to throw a new charm over the old story."[12] The attractions of the story were not masked by the obscurity this time. Washington Square has been dramatized many times, sometimes appearing under the name of The Heiress.

The Portrait of a Lady has been another of James' more famous novels. How good was the portrait of the main character and the lesser ones in the eyes of contemporary critics? One of them reacted to the "paintings" of James this way:

> . . . a vivid and lifelike portrait of a woman at different stages of her life . . . other portraits . . . painted in rich but delicate

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[11] The Athenaeum, February 12, 1881, p. 228.

[12] Ibid.

> colors, and are noteworthy for the clearness and definiteness of their outlines, and for their display of emphatic but not violent contrasts.[13]

This critic sensed that James did not deal in "violent contrasts" and consequently did not feel that they were required in order to present descriptions of the personae of his story.

In 1890 the story The Tragic Muse was published. Instead of the somewhat spotty coverage by reviewers of his earlier stories, this received notice in at least four magazines, one English and three American. James was becoming a writer whose name attached to a new book had meaning for a growing public. Instead of seeming to include him only if there were room, the book editors were making sure he got attention. Was this story of an actress universally appealing? Were the more notable Jamesian characteristics becoming apparent to the critics? These excerpts may help one to see how he stood in their respective views.

From The Athenaeum:

> . . . [the book] has a good deal of the ingenuity and careful accomplishment which one expects from him, but little or none of the keenness of perception and discernment, the delicacy and distinction of touch which marked Daisy Miller. . . . James still shows himself fond of working round a situation . . . but always receding without ever carrying away the barrier . . . a good deal about painting . . . about "art for art's sake" point of view, which the British public is struggling to grasp. . . .[14]

Here the critic obviously has some acquaintance with James'

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[13] Harper's, February, 1882, p. 474.

[14] The Athenaeum, July 26, 1890, p. 124.

earlier works, for a comparison is made, not particularly favorable, to The Tragic Muse. This seems to be a favorite gambit of book-reviewers, referring to earlier works as somewhat superior to the one under discussion in the review. It may be a perfectly legitimate and honest attempt to offer comparisons as an effective means of judgment, but it somehow acts to make the critic seem superior to both the writer and the reader of the review.

In the three reviews in American magazines, the story fared as indicated below:

> . . . It is a finer power which discerns the crumbling of the interior defenses of the human citadel and discloses the ruin by glimpses through the fair exterior. Surely the art of the novelist is acquiring a wider range when to the novel of adventure, the novel of dramatic completeness, the novel of character is added the novel which gives us a picture of human life as it passes before the spectator who . . . attempts something like the generalization of the sub order to which it belongs. . . . technique . . . at first . . . seems inconsistent with breadth of handling, but on closer scrutiny proves to be the facile instrument of a master workman who is thinking of the soul of his art . . .[15]

This alone should form some sort of proof that James was not appreciated in England before he found an audience in America. This has been a popular supposition about James. One review is not sufficient to form the conclusion, however. What was being said about this story in the other American magazines?

> The traditional roundup when each character receives his just deserts is honored in the breach here, a novel which makes the farthest departure from the old ideal of the novel. . . . the question never was what they [the characters] were going to do, but what they were. . . . as for literature, what grace, what

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[15] Atlantic Magazine, September, 1890, p. 419.

strength! The style is sweetness on the tongue, a music in the ear. The whole picture of life is a vision of London aspects such as no Englishman has yet been able to give: so broad, so absolute, so freed from all necessities of reserve or falsity.[16]

And from the third source:

By far the most brilliant and faithful representation of the successful modern actress that has ever been achieved in English fiction.[17]

Allowing for the possible intended slur in the last remark about the achievements of English fiction, these two seem to concur with the first from an American magazine. The general notion has been that James did not find an audience in America until well after he had become established in England. If the American audience were tardy, it was at least as enthusiastic, and even more so, than the English.

Two reviews of the Lesson of the Master, a collection of short stories published in 1892, brought forth these two differing comments:

Mr. James often shows at his best in the short story, where space does not allow of circumlocution or prolonged fencing with direct issues. . . . often admirably interpreted as only a keen understanding and a vivid sympathy with such problems may interpret. Yet there lacks something. Is it a want of substance that in some places verges on thinness? . . . rather the echoes of feeling than the feeling itself.[18]

This one had been published in an English magazine in March, and the next comes from an American one in April of 1892:

To stand apart and watch the fight (or even the small scrimmages) and then to tell, neither approving nor condemning--that is the

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[16]Harper's Magazine, September, 1890, p. 639.

[17]The Nation, December 25, 1890, pp. 101-6.

[18]The Athenaeum, March 19, 1892, p. 369.

> lofty and lonely function of the modern artist in fiction. To attain this height he must not become a monster incapable of emotion or sympathy, but he must feel for all the participants in the conflict and not with any.[19]

Again the contrast between the English and American attitudes finds the American more enthusiastic. The English review also brings up a question which has plagued critics of James for years. Was he better at writing short stories or novels? There have been proponents for both sides.

A concurring answer appeared in The Athenaeum in 1893, perhaps by the same reviewer, who wrote that he preferred to read James' short stories and felt James was wise to stick to writing them because it was obvious that "his meagreness of incident and lack of motive are less apparent."[20] Other conclusions on the short-story or novel question will be noted as time passes in criticisms of James' career.

In Pictures and Text James chatted about some of the magazine illustrators of the day. His interest in art was well known; many of his stories concerned artists of various sorts, and his manipulations of the English language were coming to be famous, too.

> Even if he had nothing to say, his perfection of saying it would commend him to the artistic soul. But he sees both with eyes and imagination, and describes with the true art sense.[21]

wrote one reviewer in 1893. The book pleased him on the score of content and method.

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[19] The Nation, April 28, 1892, p. 326.

[20] The Athenaeum, May 13, 1893, p. 601.

[21] Harper's Magazine, June, 1893, p. 3.

Another critic bowed to James' reputation while humorously commenting on his style:

> Of Mr. James's quality as an essayist we need not speak. Even those who do not care for him must admit his painstaking fidelity to his models; and at the worst, he may serve to sharpen the reader's appetite for a bit of downright Anglo-Saxon.[22]

While James remained a stylistic enigma to many throughout his career, he amused others, and bored still others. Experimenters in any field must come to expect that their attempts to change things will not always be welcomed heartily, and James, who claimed that he did not allow reviews to influence him one way or another, should not have been particularly swayed from his course by any such remarks.

While it is obvious from the foregoing quotations that reviewers rarely concur in their opinions of various points in the works of art which they criticize, it may be somewhat less noticeable that they often discuss completely different aspects of the same work. What may interest one in plot determination may be lost on another who studies characterization or dialogue. Of course, some authors have qualities that are so outstanding that the reader's attention is forced on them no matter where his chief interests may lie. Henry James was an exhibitor of certain attention-getting features, some of which have already been mentioned in this paper.

In a review of <u>The Private Life</u> (1893), the critic remarked on some of James' outstanding characteristics and noted some others which

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[22]<u>The Dial</u>, July 16, 1893, p. 47.

struck him, saying that James had a tendency to make his reader feel dull because he cannot discover what the story really was all about. The stories, the reviewer felt, had conversations which had

> . . . all the terseness and actuality which are always associated with Mr. James' representation of modern men and women's conversation.[23]

Laurence Hutton, reviewing the same book, showed that he had been affected similarly to the other critic by some things and took note of some others in which he was interested:

> Henry James is a sure refuge in time of trouble from Problems of Poverty and Socialistic Questions, and all the disturbing interrogations which the daily newspaper and the daily conversation present.[24]

Of course, this, without actually saying so, seemed to be telling James that he was out of date, that there was nothing of contemporary interest in his stories. Hutton was not the first nor the last to insinuate that James was not abreast of his times. The review continues:

> He has an artistic reticence which is admirable, he has habits of observation and thought which are unerring; he has a brilliancy of method which is almost dazzling, and he has an unusual cleverness.[25]

What promised to be a review with rather sly damning by faint praise, or more accurately, reverse praise, proved to have actually more appreciation than many critics seem to have had. The method, the qualities of observation are all mentioned with approval. Without trying for

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[23] The Athenaeum, July 8, 1893, pp. 60-61.

[24] Laurence Hutton, Harper's Magazine, September, 1893, p. 4.

[25] Ibid.

too many special effects of his own, Mr. Hutton managed to give a rather acute summary.

James managed to produce a variety of writings during the same periods of his career. Some essays followed A Private Life very quickly. Two criticisms, one English and the other American, will demonstrate the reaction to these Essays in London and Elsewhere on both sides of the Atlantic.

From the English viewpoint in 1893:

> . . . But the main drawback to the volume is the tortuous English which Mr. James has chosen to write, evidently under the impression that he ought to evolve a style of his own. Some of his bizarre phrases are happy; but usually they are the reverse . . . pitiful affectations.[26]

The stylistic changes again came under fire. That these were not a product solely of his later development is shown from their being noted here. The "bizarre phrases" have caused perhaps as much talk as any other facet of James' writing, particularly among those who have not read a great deal of his work.

From the American side of the ocean and of the literary table:

> No writer of fiction has suffered more from the people who won't or can't understand what he is trying for, while none has more consistently directed his energy toward one issue--the perfection of expression.[27]

This much alone should have given James some thoughts about where he was really appreciated. The American critic has again proved more

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[26]The Athenaeum, July 29, 1893, p. 158.

[27]The Nation, November 30, 1893, p. 416.

sympathetic and receptive to the aims James had set for himself. Had James returned to America to live, however, his creative instincts might have been changed so that he would not have written the same things which he did write, or he may not have written at all.

In the same review, the critic assessed some of the reasons for James' lack of popular appeal:

> . . . [James] failed to apply his exquisite method to subjects well in the range of common experience and that appeal with some passion to intelligence and emotion.[28]

The lack of passion also has been noted in James' fiction. This does not indicate that passion is not hinted at or that the evidences of it do not abound, but that it is rarely described, even in vague terms, by James.

In reviewing The Wheel of Time (1893), a critic slipped in his opinion on whose literary descendant James was. Not Balzac this time, not Hawthorne, nor even Trollope, but a new addition was put on the list, accompanied by reasons. This critic thought that it was Washington Irving, and he quoted a letter of Irving's to Henry Brevoort:

> ". . . I consider a story merely as a frame on which to stretch my materials. It is the play of thought and sentiment and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly but expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life. . . ."[29]

It was the reviewer's idea that James followed along the same lines quite well, and that as Irving had said of himself that he followed

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[28] The Nation, November 30, 1893, p. 417.

[29] Harper's Magazine, October, 1893, pp. 2-3.

his own "school," so did James. However, if the writer of the review had believed that James followed in Irving's footsteps, it seems incongruous that he should also think that James followed his own school. The two theories appear to oppose each other.

Another collection of short stories, The Real Thing, also appeared in 1893, and a critic in writing about this volume helped to give a summary of the picture of James' productions up to that time as viewed by a thoughtful and analytical contemporary:

> His work of today varies from his earlier work, does so through the natural process by which the subtle grows more impenetrable, and the delicacy of shade is divided by still finer discrimination. We confess to liking this author best in his larger books, because with greater space there is more room for his characters, built up out of an infinity of particulars . . . and because we think Mr. James himself therein brings into play powers of composition which scarcely have scope in his shorter stories. . . . Nevertheless, he remains today, in some respects, the consummate artist in miniature story-telling of this generation.[30]

This critic also chalked up a vote in the long-or-short story controversy while discussing the merits of James, which evidently were found to be profuse. Not to be outdone by anyone who might favor the short stories, this writer commends James' skill in that department, too.

In the same review of "The Real Thing," the writer admits a certain amount of bewilderment with good grace. This is notable in the face of some of the criticism of James which displayed degrees of hostility ranging from irritation to wrath.

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[30]The Atlantic, November, 1893, pp. 695-96.

> We [reach an interpretation] boldly, though ten to one the author of the tale could find us a dozen other interpretations of the parable. That is the bewildering and teasing effect of Mr. James' recent fiction. . . . Is it not the result of a steadfast search for the real thing that Mr. James has finally come very near to squaring the circle in fiction?[31]

Here again the critic shows a knowledge of some amount of James' work. In such revelations by those who were writing about him in his own day are the grounds for believing that he had gained an audience, at least among the more literate members of the population.

In 1895 another collection of short stories by James, Terminations, was published. It was becoming even more apparent that James had reached the position of an author whose works commanded attention, and possibly even some study of previous works prior to delivering judgment. The critic thought highly of James' particular talents, saying:

> Scarce any other contemporary man of letters could have brought the same qualities to bear in like degree and proportion, or bestowed the rare and delicate handling he has lavished on this picture of the isolation of two souls. If it at all fail of its full effect, we need not dwell on shortcomings to which the author is himself more keenly alive than we can be.[32]

This is not blind admiration, but it does determinedly refrain from enumerating the "shortcomings." Whether the critic truly admired James as much as he seemed or if it were the author's reputation which drew forth these words would be hard to say. For the reason that critics seem generally only too happy to prick holes in the reputations of writers, it seems safe to assume that this one was sincerely

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[31] Ibid., p. 696.

[32] The Athenaeum, June 15, 1895, p. 769.

enthusiastic about Henry James.

The same review continued, later discussing some of the aspects of the story, and also pointing out some of the characteristics which other critics have found typical of James:

> This submerged and elusive consciousness (that is not exactly sentiment and is certainly not incident) is never suffered to emerge clearly, nor yet to sink completely. The consequence is the reader, and we suspect the writer also, experience a sense cf strain and effort.[33]

Could this be taken as an example of nineteenth century brinksmanship? That a writer could keep his reader so poised and simultaneously trying to decide whether sentiment or incident were the point in question seems a tribute to skills of a sort. The critic continued, noting a quality which is rarely thought of in connection with James' stories:

> With such passages of trenchant wit and sparkling observation, surely in his best manner, Mr. James ought to be as satisfied as his readers cannot fail to be.[34]

It might be well to note that this review came from an English magazine, and does not hold to the line of faint superciliousness which can be detected in many of the criticisms of James by other Englishmen.

In an American magazine of 1895, the critic also showed himself to be acquainted with James' works and style, saying that it was "distinctly his peculiar quality" and that his "touch in studies in the American character is brilliant and secure."[35]

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[33]*Ibid.*, pp. 769-70.

[34]*Ibid.*

[35]*Harper's Weekly*, July 27, 1895, p. 701.

This critic was somewhat less effusive in his discussion, and presented a more reserved opinion:

> . . . wise and sensitive reticence, which sometimes shades into the defect of his virtue, perhaps; I am not sure of this. . . . One quits his company with a sense of life which has been lived, and will be lived again.[36]

Some critics have been unusually afflicted with uncertainty in discussing James' works. Such lack of wishing to commit oneself to any final statement can be seen in the excerpt above. It almost seems as if there were a desire to keep from going out on a limb, especially in the direction of condemning any feature.

During the middle of the 1890's Henry James was possessed of a strong ambition to write for the theatre. Few if any critics had seen dramatic qualities in his other writings, and it was surprising, no doubt, that he should undertake this new medium.

In 1894 he published Theatricals, a collection of plays which, he announced, were written for a certain company of English actors. Such plays accompanied by such an announcement brought forth a torrent of condemnation. An American critic seemed to express the general attitude when he called the fitting of plays to actors or companies of actors "tailoring" which "encourages bad acting," and felt that they were "more likely to meet with judicious appreciation in their present form" than on a stage.[37] While the fact that they were adapted to certain actors

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[36] Ibid.

[37] The Nation, June 28, 1894, p. 517.

and companies attracted the most unfavorable attention, the unsuitability of the plays to the stage was almost universally commented upon.

> . . . [these plays] justify the hope that the author may yet produce a play whose dramatic may be equal to its literary excellence, . . .[38]

wrote the same American critic. He, then, did not despair of James' ability to write something that could be done in the theatre, which implies some sort of confidence in James.

English reaction found that there was

> . . . nothing in them to condemn them, but (if representation were attempted) they would have been regarded as drawing-room entertainments thrust on a stage too big for them. . . . The dialogue is always pleasant and occasionally brilliant. The motives to action are, however, inadequate. . . . Let Mr. James go on writing and publishing plays of this kind. . . . Let him, however, abandon the hope . . . of beholding them on stage till he can inform them with more vigour and life.[39]

It was clear that the general feeling ran strongly against their ever being successfully presented on the stage. James had stated, however, that he did not let the opinions of his contemporaries affect him, and he proved it by publishing a second volume of Theatricals in 1895. His hopes, if he had entertained any, of these being a greater success must have been somewhat dampened by reviews such as this American one of January, 1895:

> . . . James' management of the whole testamentary business is unconvincing . . . inherent feebleness as plays . . . unworthy of Mr. James' reputation and undisputed abilities . . . a shocking

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[38] Ibid.

[39] The Athenaeum, November 17, 1894, p. 621.

> waste of real talent and a terrible encouragement to bad acting . . . nothing more than tailor work.[40]

The critic did acknowledge here that James had talent; he was not trying to intimate otherwise. It was felt that he was simply misdirecting the abilities he possessed. The idea of their being "tailor work" appears here also. Whether this critic was the same as the other who used the same phrase is not known, but it seems a strong possibility.

The English critical reaction was again not as stern, but it was no less firm in its insistence that these "plays" lacked drama. This appeared in January of 1895 also.

> The absence of strain after wit is one of their greatest charms. They have not, however, the slightest claim to be dramatic; the characterization is so weak that it is difficult to be certain who is speaking. . . . We have rarely encountered works the fitting of which to stage production would be more impracticable.[41]

A second English review referred to a play (undoubtedly Guy Domville, which had been produced at St. James Theatre, London, in January, 1895, and which will be discussed later) recently staged by James which had met with resounding failure. In March, 1895, the critic quoted James' comment about ". . . the perverted man of letters freshly trying his hand at an art in which . . . he has if possible even more to unlearn than learn,"[42] and he intimated that James' attitude was perhaps a little too patronizing.

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[40] The Nation, January 3, 1895, p. 18.

[41] The Athenaeum, January 19, 1895, p. 93.

[42] The Dial, March 1, 1895, p. 156.

Also in March, 1895, Lawrence Hutton wrote about both series of <u>Theatricals</u> noting that they were

> . . . excellent reading--bright, sparkling, brilliant, well worth careful study, well worth preserving. But as he reads them he is utterly at a loss to know how they would act. . . . As literature they are, without question, eminently successful and satisfactory experiments, and they are cordially recommended to those who study drama--at home.[43]

It should be obvious that if these pieces of literature were designated as plays and they did not fulfill that title in the eyes of the critics, they should not have received any commendation. If an author does not declare his intentions about the goals for a certain piece, then the critic can only assess it by the external appearances with any degree of certainty. However, if the author does state that this writing is designed to meet such and such a requirement and it does not, in the eyes of the critic, meet those requirements, then it should not be recommended. It is possible here again that the critics may have wished to protect themselves by avoiding complete deprecation of the works in the event that they should prove workable on the stage some day. There is the possibility, also, that there was hesitation in finding too much fault with a writer whose talents were sensed to be of great proportions.

That James was not a born dramatist, however, and that his art was most decidedly not fitted for the theatre of his times seems conclusively proven by this review of <u>Guy Domville</u> which appeared in March,

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[43]Lawrence Hutton, <u>Harper's Magazine</u>, March, 1895, p. 1.

1895. The play had been produced in January of that year. It was reported that the audience were silenced by the first act and after the second had reviled James loudly.

A. B. Walkley, writing what he called "An Appreciation" of Guy said:

> . . . the characters were all of a piece, the passions too subdued, the love-making spiritualized. . . .[44]

and though he admitted that the play was not flawless the second act was weak, for instance he asserted that

> . . . a scrupulous fastidiousness, an emotional frugality, as it were, mark the play as an experiment in what I will take leave to call dramatic quietism. . . . The public, with its almost bloodthirsty clinging to the external and the material casts inward and spiritual things out of the playhouse--and it cast out Mr. Henry James' play. . . .[45]

Walkley went on to say that the play had "rare distinction" and was a "delicate refreshment for the spirit," perhaps placing himself several cuts above the common herd who had attended the performance and hooted the play and its astounded author. The people of the times were definitely not ready for such "refreshments," and they did not hesitate to inform him of it in a positive manner.

The reception the public gave to Guy Domville abated James' enthusiasm for the theatre, and he began to turn to other forms of expression. The next year the story The Other House was published, and it was obvious to many of the critics that his writing for the theatre

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[44] A. B. Walkley, Harper's Weekly, March 2, 1895, p. 199.

[45] Ibid.

had affected his other fiction.

An English critic wrote that the story contained

> . . . dramatic situations, but is a play in all save name and externals . . . a very notable and distinguished piece of work . . . though a feeling of artificiality is present in the repartee. . . .[46]

Another critic, Edith Baker Brown, betrayed no profound feeling in favor of James and did not seem to find the dramatic qualities of The Other House a meritorious attribute. She felt that his works had shown a steady decline in their "retreat from life," and continued:

> Merely in point of construction The Other House is as artificial as the stage. . . . Its general failure in emotion has spoiled a conception which might have been poetic, and made it artistically unpleasurable.[47]

At least this female reviewer was quite unafraid of giving vent to her disapproval of Mr. James. Whether she was actually being vindictive, attempting to be different by her vituperative remarks, or if indeed she was sincere in her expressed ideas, she presents quite a contrast to the general tenor of articles written about James during the period.

An American review was written in a less negative mood:

> Here things happen, and they may, indeed, even arrive at a dim consciousness of a fascination about certain roads that lead nowhere. . . . Technical devices are so skilful, that things appear to arrange themselves without direction or supervision . . . revealed in dialogue--light, neat, pointed talk.[48]

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[46] The Athenaeum, October 31, 1896, p. 203.

[47] Edith Baker Brown, The Bookman, December, 1896, pp. 359-60.

[48] The Nation, January 28, 1897, p. 71.

Another English review contained observations on the dramatic feeling of the story:

> The obvious thing about the book is its dramatic structure . . . the reader is always conscious that the connective tissue of the story--the passages of description and analysis have for their sole purpose the production of those impressions that the playgoer gets through the medium of eyesight. . . .[49]

Most of the critics found no fault with the elements of a play which were so apparent in the story. They did not seem to hold his theatrical infatuation against him, with the noted exception of Miss Brown, but on the other hand, they did not seem to feel that his stories were necessarily improved by it.

By 1897 this "theatrical" phase seemed to have passed. James had grown into a creator whose name attached to a book prevented any sort of ordinary criticism. Each reviewer was affected in a rather powerful way, though not similarly. The variety of reactions to The Spoils of Poynton will offer ample demonstration of this.

In May, 1897, an English reviewer, pointing out that things would have turned out well in a "well-regulated novel," made it plain that The Spoils of Poynton had some merit, but that it was not wholly to his liking:

> The struggle is well-balanced, the characters Owen Gereth and Mona are concrete enough if not very interesting. . . . Mrs. Gereth is decidedly more of an abstraction . . . the only fault in the construction of the book is the fire at the end. A catastrophe of that kind has no business in a novel unless it be either cause or effect.[50]

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[49] The Dial, January 1, 1897, p. 22.

[50] The Athenaeum, March 6, 1897, pp. 308-9.

Another critic had boundless praise for the novel:

> Each situation is a miniature, each sentence a piece of thread lace. With what delicate incisions he approximates to his meaning! The analyst must ever be open to the accusation of other-worldliness. This, because he keeps both eyes on the object, and does not drop his tools now and then to tickle his readers between the ribs.[51]

It is hard to realize that these two reviews are about the same novel. That one object can appear so different to two people is some testimony both to its own diverse elements and the tastes of the two critics involved. Where one found abstractions not very interesting, another revelled in the delicacy.

In an American magazine in July, 1897, a review of The Spoils of Poynton held the view that the characters were not very human, somewhat as stated by the review on the preceding page, and yet it did not matter that Fleda Vetch and Mrs. Gereth were far from natural, because

> The fancy is fine enough and the phrases are good enough to afford a rare pleasure, of a kind which the author alone is able to give us in perfection.[52]

Some critics, it can be seen here, are quite willing to suspend their view of the real world in deference to the world of fiction they enter in a novel. Others insist upon a more strict adherence to reality. Enjoyment of a Jacobite[53] world is dependent upon the reader's submitting to all the circumstances of that rarefied atmosphere.

More contrasting reactions of James' novels are shown by what has

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[51] The Bookman, May, 1897, p. 259.

[52] The Nation, July 1, 1897, p. 18.

[53] A Jacobite is a supporter, originally, of King James, now applied to any supporter of a person named James.

been written about What Maisie Knew. One critic had thought The Spoils of Poynton had a situation which was not real enough. In November, 1897, this appeared about Maisie, ". . . situation may be too real . . ."[54] Had James been trying to please the critics, he might have thrown up his hands in despair. This review continued:

> Mr. James knows so very well what he about that we are probably in error in holding the belief that the mother must for her own sake have occasionally made some slight attempt to what is called draw a veil.[55]

It seems that what shows here is the feeling on the part of the critic that he is not quite capable of divining all that James has to say and that he is being apologetic in suggesting what the author meant by anything he wrote.

In February, 1898, an American critic found the same story "unusually brilliant" in phrase and construction but thought that Maisie was

> . . . an arbitrary, artificial construction, and the author, fascinated by the experiment, did not realize he was being beaten. . . . a tale, not only without a moral, but without morals.[56]

In the last part of the above quotation is a sign of the growing feeling on the part of some of the critics that James was not taking the firm stand on the side of right which an author should take if he is to be considered worthwhile. This feeling will be mentioned several times more in the course of the paper.

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[54] The Athenaeum, November 6, 1897, p. 629.

[55] Ibid.

[56] The Nation, February 17, 1898, p. 135.

To the eyes of another critic the story looked entirely different:

> . . . full to overflowing of eager tenderness in it. . . . Mr. James keeps his sense of fun, for he knows his little heroine, intelligent, uncorrupted, valiant, eager for life, will come through with an unbroken and gentle spirit.[57]

In July of 1899 William Morton Paine wrote about The Awkward Age in somewhat of a complaining mood. He felt that James' slice of life was too narrow, as it consisted so largely of drawing room scenes. Yet he made a very revealing statement:

> . . . we worry through it from a sense of duty rather than for satisfaction with its message.[58]

By acknowledging his "sense of duty" to the book he was perhaps paying unconscious tribute to James. In his thinking James evidently was in the position to command this sort of respect, a place of eminence. If he were not, there would have been no sense of duty exacted.

Paine did find laudable qualities in the book, too, saying:

> There is no other living writer who could have written the book, who could so patiently and delicately labour to make a fine point, who could deal so sensitively with fine shades, who could analyse the slight so subtly, so wittily.[59]

Without a doubt, the critics in general recognized the peculiar powers which James wielded. They found elements which were faulty, but when being completely honest, they also were sure to mention the qualities in which he surpassed. The foregoing excerpt demonstrates this vividly.

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[57]The Bookman, February, 1898, p. 562.

[58]The Dial, July, 1899, p. 21.

[59]Ibid., pp. 472-73.

With the appearance of The Sacred Fount in 1901, reviewers found even meatier substance on which to test their teeth. Predicting that the story would have "more purchasers than readers," one critic grudgingly admitted:

> The truth is, Mr. James has done nearly everything that we condemn in other writers, not stupidly but gracefully, with the audacity of a man who challenges every standard of excellence that does not conform to his own.[60]

Since it is usually the critics who set the standards, it is also they who are likely to carp most about the failure to meet the standards. In consequence, even half-hearted praise such as this for ignoring the criteria is notable on the part of a critic. It is another tribute to the growth of the reputation of Henry James, justified or not. The critics seemed to feel that he could get away wich such behavior because of his position.

The same critic was vexed with James' being

> absorbed in working out his own theory with the little pin point of his genius. He leaves his stumbling reader to follow as best he can. . . . after the way we have enjoyed the confidences of such as Scott and Bulwer-Lytton, and of recent writers even, this refusal to recognize us on the part of Mr. James is mortifying.[61]

The attempt on the part of the critic to be superior to James shows when he uses the term "pin point of his genius." This is certainly a phrase calculated to belittle the object.

An English critic dismissed the whole business with a sneer:

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[60] The Critic, August, 1899, p. 754.

[61] The Independent, March 14, 1901, p. 619.

> The whole book is an example of hypochondriacal subtlety run mad . . . absurd attempt to read into [the characters] subtle conditions of soul of which they are totally incapable.[62]

This critic did not conceive the idea that James' characters might have been more capable of conditions of the soul than he was able to understand.

Sounding another note in criticism of James, Cornelia Atwood Pratt, in an article published in April, 1901, was struck with the sense of the author's being too involved with his story. The fact was not pleasing to her:

> . . . blows an immense, brilliantly variegated brain-bubble and represents it to himself as a world of truth which he has put together. . . . it is fairly easy to keep up at first but it becomes a nightmare before the end. . .[63]

An even more severe condemnation of James on moral grounds came from another critic whose article appeared in July, 1901:

> Henry James is beyond all question in a bad way. He became morbid and decadent (in _What Maisie Knew_ and _In the Cage_) . . . but even so . . . one could read him through . . . he really seems to be sinking into a chronic state of periphrastic perversity. . . . the endless talk, the innumerable little innuendoes and hints and uncompleted sentences . . . analysis of analysis.[64]

This critic could not accept the conditions of James' world and consequently was not able to have sympathetic feelings about the people in it, nor to understand the situations they encountered. The moral question raised by James' stories but seemingly left unanswered in them

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[62] _The Athenaeum_, March 2, 1901, p. 272.

[63] Cornelia Atwood Pratt, _The Critic_, April, 1901, pp. 368-70.

[64] _The Bookman_, July, 1901, p. 442.

is to be discussed more fully in the chapter following.

Frank Moore Colby wrote an article entitled "The Queerness of Henry James" in June, 1902. He felt, along with some other critics, that perhaps James was getting away with too many hints of immorality. His attitude, however, was less grumbling than the one just cited, and he seemed in a more generous frame of mind.

> And, indeed it has been a long time since the public knew what Henry James was up to behind that verbal hedge of his . . . a style like that seemed just the place for guilty secrets. He is the only writer of the day whose moral notions do not seem to matter. . . . His dissolute and complicated muse may say just what she chooses.[65]

Mr. Colby goes on to say that James' apparent failure to take up the cause of righteousness might lie in the obscurity of his stories. Though the right does not seem to prevail, one cannot be too sure because the full ramifications of any of the stories are hard to see.

In any case, James' literary stature had increased to the point of his being recognized in literary circles in America and in England as a major figure. Various characteristics were being taken for granted by the reviewers; they assumed that their readers knew about his subtlety, for instance, whether they had actually read him or not. Such attributes were common knowledge among the greater part of the reading community on both sides of the Atlantic, were the target of some criticism as well as praise, and were the butt of many jokes. This last is perhaps the greatest proof of his having become something of a household word.

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[65] Frank Moore Colby, The Bookman, June, 1902, pp. 396-97.

Students of James now often regard the period beginning in 1902 and ending in 1904 as the time of his richest production, not in the number of works he wrote, but in the fullness of each one. The novels which he wrote during the time are The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904). Often critics have quite different views in retrospect than they had contemporaneously, however. How did these novels appear to the reviewers who had to deliver judgment on them at the time they were published?

An English review of The Wings of the Dove in September, 1902, stated that the English in it was "extraordinarily lucid," but that the motive was "hardly intelligible."[66] There was the definite feeling that obscurity clouded much of the story in some respects but that something was accomplished by the effort:

> In the midst of the darkness which he creates there is hardly a page in which he does not throw a flashlight upon human nature.[67]

This rather ambiguous effect on the reviewers is typical of James. The critic quoted above was not alone in experiencing trouble in extricating the meaning from the story, for similar reports came from other quarters:

> . . . he has now successfully lost himself in the ultimate azure of himself. . . . subtlety that surpasses our comprehension.[68]

It can be seen that various critics were searching for ways to express

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[66] The Athenaeum, September 13, 1902, p. 346.

[67] Ibid.

[68] The Critic, November, 1902, pp. 109-10.

the trouble James caused his readers.

Frank Moore Colby, in another cleverly titled essay, "In Darkest James," which appeared in November, 1902, seemed to have less difficulty in deciding what James was trying to do:

> With James analysis is the end in itself. . . . He writes a staccato chronicle of things both great and small, like a constitutional history half made up of the measures that never passed.[69]

James' obscurity gave some critics a great deal of irritation, and even prompted some of them to accuse him of contributing to delinquency of a sort. In November, 1902, one of them wrote:

> . . . nothing so prone to depravity as unrelieved speculation. . . . because it has no issue, it tends to become utterly dissolute and irresponsible.[70]

Such accusations today might tend to increase the sales of a book rather than cause people not to read it.

In an American periodical, Harriet Waters Preston came to the rather singular conclusion that "Roderick Hudson was the highest achievement" of Henry James.[71] She also felt that his heroine, Milly Theale, was

> so much more strong than her creator that he can only explain her to us in broken phrases. . .[72]

To her the later novels did not offer as much as his earliest, it seems.

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[69]Frank Moore Colby, The Bookman, November, 1902, p. 259.

[70]The Independent, November 13, 1902, p. 2711.

[71]Harriet Waters Preston, The Atlantic, January, 1903, p. 81.

[72]Ibid.

William Dean Howells, a friend of James for many years, wrote an essay published in January, 1903, which contained many illuminating remarks on James. It can be fairly safely assumed that Howells knew more of what he wrote about than the average critic of the times. He wrote that James

> . . . does not analyze [the characters] for you; rather he synthetizes them, and carefully hands them over to you in a sort of integrity very uncommon in the characters of fiction.[73]

Howells also stated that he could see no particular reason why motives should always be assigned in fiction, for they weren't in real life, nor were reasons. Therefore, why ask "more from the imitator than we get from the Creator?"[74] Howells was displaying a good deal of common sense along with his familiarity with James' policies and techniques. Other critics, wanting James to conform more to familiar patterns, did not grant him the freedom which Howells was willing to accord him. They would have preferred having the characters analyzed and categorized more fully.

James often wrote of artists, and one of his critics responded as if to a painting in another essay published in 1903. This critic was full of appreciation for James' work and noted that he was concerned primarily with effect, to which end he would often subordinate his material. He felt that James achieved

> . . . an intimacy in association which gives his work a freshness

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[73]William Dean Howells, North American Review, January, 1903, pp. 131-32.

[74]Ibid., p. 135.

of color like that of a canvas painted in the open air . . . not freshness of color, but an effect of atmosphere.[75]

This same critic gave his reasons for the lack of general popularity which was James':

The chief preventive to such a popularity [with the general public] is a delicate and exquisite style, which, because it tried to achieve an actuality to which they were unaccustomed, the critics called artificial.[76]

By virtually calling the disapproving critics dull, this one was placing himself in the circle of those favored with enlightenment who were capable of penetrating into the recesses of such a fairy grotto. It is undoubtedly beneficial to the ego to find oneself in the group of people who have a rare quality, even if one has put one's self there.

In a review printed in an English magazine in November, 1903, a critic discussed _William Wetmore Story and His Friends_, a biography of an American painter who had expatriated himself to Europe. The appreciation here is quite apparent:

He touches in his wonderful subtle style, every nuance, exhibiting every refinement of thought, in dealing with the precursors, that is, the pioneers who opened Europe to the American.[77]

This biography was not in the mainline of fiction which James was writing at the time, but the excerpt was included to show how James' peculiar style permeated even his strictly non-fiction works.

In 1904, when James was 61, the critics evidently felt that his

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[75] _Living Age_, March 7, 1903, pp. 577-78.

[76] _Ibid._, p. 585.

[77] _The Athenaeum_, November 7, 1903, p. 605.

creativity might be ending at any time. This may account for the number of "summing up" type of essays which appeared during this period. One of them was written by Oliver Elton, an English critic, in January, 1904. He found that there were in James many influences of Tourgenieff, but that there was a certain "recoil from Balzac and Flaubert." Elton also said:

> . . . the later stories are more enigmatical, sometimes murkier stories, which the critics either let off with general empty praise, or handle with suspicion like some strange fruit that might appear on a familiar tree. It is really the same fruit enriched by new graftings.[78]

Elton's tone showed an easy familiarity with his subject which indicated a wholesome respect for James without bending too far in the direction of idolatry. His sensible attitude in combination with a sensitive appreciation is the sort of thing valuable in any study of the author.

Claude Bragdon, in another 1904 essay entitled "The Figure in Mr. James' Carpet," could not resist saying that though "James was too great to be ignored, he was too ignored to be great." It is probably as close to being accurate as such aphorisms can be. In spite of striking such a note of dilletantism in some of his statements, Bragdon accomplished some worthwhile statements of insight into James. For instance, he stated that

> what James has lost in popularity he has gained in power. Far from prostituting his great talent, he has put it to increasingly finer uses, and his style, though seemingly difficult and obscure, is

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[78] Oliver Elton, Living Age, January 2, 1904, p. 1.

> nevertheless an adequate vehicle for the impression which he desires to convey.[79]

In the same year a reviewer decided that The Ambassadors was a retelling of Don Juan and proceeded to relate each character to a counterpart in the older tale. Strether, for instance, was the ghost, because he had never lived; Chad was Don Juan; and Madame de Vionnet, perhaps because she did not fit too easily into the shoes of any one particular female in Don Juan, was one of many of the type catalogued by Leoprello. This critic must surely have been in a mood of some levity when he had to get the piece off to the press, or else was pressed so for time that he forced out anything that would come to mind. The feebleness of such a theory is self-evident.

The third novel of this period, The Golden Bowl, was reviewed thus in January, 1905:

> If it be true, as Schopenhauer affirms, that a novel will be of a high and noble order the more it represents of inner, and the less it represents of outer, life, this latest novel of Henry James must be given a high place. . . . The chronicle is accomplished with an art beyond all praise.[80]

Though The Ambassadors may have been beyond the grasp of some of the contemporary critics, The Golden Bowl was not entirely wasted. The Wings of the Dove met with some opposition to its form, but there were those who understood, or thought they understood, its message. The critics who lived and wrote at the time these novels were being published

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[79]Claude Bragdon, The Critic, February, 1904, p. 147.

[80]The Critic, January, 1905, p. 22.

did not seem to have the time necessary to absorb all the refined qualities which later students of the novels have found in them. An artist often dies unappreciated completely, and he may not be "discovered" until generations later. Henry James did not die totally unappreciated, to be sure, but it has taken a good deal of time and effort for the critics to discover what they think to be his full meanings.

During the time of Henry James' writing and publishing his works, there are few discernible trends in the comments of the critics. Most of them seem to have been frank to admit to varying degrees of mystification by his writing, though some of them showed more resentment than others. Few of the reviewers really tried to classify him as a minor talent, even from the first.

The major qualities which critics found in James are to be discussed in Chapter III. These seem to amount to the nearest thing to a developmental trend observed in his writing by his critics. Definite instances of awareness of his appearance on the scene as a major power are lacking. It must be assumed that this did not happen at once but came about by imperceptible degrees. It has remained for critics who came after him to divide his works into periods relating to various phases of his interest.

A certain tenor in the reviews concerning Henry James is strikingly different from that of the critical studies which were published after his death. To compare the general feeling apparent in the reaction of the critics contemporary with James with the feeling about him since his death is to witness a remarkable occurrence. The attitude of

the critics from 1943 to 1962 is a thing which seems to have emerged almost full-blown, with no normal transition period. Chapter II is concerned with this more recent general attitude.

CHAPTER II

A SURVEY OF THE PROGRESS OF JAMES' REPUTATION 1943-1962

Since the death of Henry James in 1916, there has grown around his name a quantity of material representing thoughts on single works, periods of his development, and on the sum total of all his writing. The passage of time has allowed appraisals and re-appraisals, statements and rebuttals to pile up thick as swarming bees and often quite as full of sting.

What are the reasons for this welter of critical studies, and when did they seem to begin? The second part of the question is easier to answer. With the centennial year of James' birth, 1943, a renewed interest seemed to be taken in Henry James and his works. As his writings' effect on readers seems to be a highly diverse one, controversies were begun at the drop of an opinion. No sooner did critic A set down his considered and wise opinion than critic B would find that critic A was so wrong in many respects that it would be necessary to publish a piece setting the critical and reading world to rights. Since 1943, then, James has been subjected to a large share of critical scrutiny. Just what the critics seem to have decided about him, if there are any really final decisions, is the province of this chapter.

George Stevens, writing in March, 1945, took note of the relationship of James and his readers:

> The relation of James to his audience is unusual; it tends to become highly personal, at least on the reader's side. Although the relationship is individual for every reader, the admirers of

> James somehow become quasi-guardians of his reputation, creating some of the conditions of a cult, which naturally discourages the general public.[1]

Other critics have commented on the situation of James and his public, this one of the earlier observations recognizing any sort of "cult" which may have come into being. Whatever the reasons for such a group of guardians of his reputation, whether some genuinely were inspired to fierce devotion, or whether, perhaps, some were sufficiently acquainted with his writing to realize the cloudiness of it and by defending elevate themselves to the circle of those who could understand him, there is a distinct tone of defensiveness in much of the writing of critics on James.

The motives for defense are hard to discover and would probably not be admitted by the various writers, were it possible to interview each one. Such qualities can be noted and discussed on other topics, however.

The Spring issue of _Hound and Horn_ in 1934 had been devoted entirely to articles on James. Some of the articles had evidently been adverse in tone, and in an editorial for April 14 of the same year Henry Seidel Canby, editor of the _Saturday Review of Literature_, discussed the English magazine and some of the statements made in it:

> The epitaph writers see Henry James as a symbol of the typical frustrated American of his time, who repeatedly stated but never had the courage to solve, the American's problem of finding a tradition.[2]

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[1] _Saturday Review of Literature_, March 3, 1945, 1945, p. 7.

[2] _Ibid._, April 14, 1934, p. 628.

It can be noted here that there is a faint tinge of British superiority in mentioning what they felt to be a lack of tradition in America and assuming that Americans would emulate the British and try to have one. It seems almost absurd that it should be expected that someone should, or could, find a tradition. How does one "find" a tradition, particularly if there really isn't one? Is a tradition not something which is built up over many years? If James were writing about the lack of one, he surely could not have had the idea that he should seek one, though it may possibly have occurred to him that he was founding one.

Continuing the editorial, Canby wrote on the "paradoxical position" he felt that James held:

> . . . it is that of an author whom "no one reads," but still has violent partisans and violent opponents, and who represents different symbols to both camps; truly a Woodrow Wilson among novelists.[3]

The varying opinions to which Canby was referring were undoubtedly very largely oral, the sort of talk literate people make when congregated. The unfavorable brand of comments have found small outlet for publication since James' death. The favorable type appear in far greater profusion. The bulk of material concerning him has been written by definite "partisans."

Not a great deal of attention was given James in the press from a few years after his death until the year of the centennial of his birth,

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[3] Ibid.

1943. Some articles would appear occasionally, but for the most part his name was missing from the critical literary scene. When there was general realization that the centennial of his birth had arrived, interest in his works was renewed. An edition of some of his works of fiction was issued and re-appraisals seemed in order. Of course, this was during World War II, and the paper as well as the manpower shortage held down the amount of material that could be printed about him at that time.

In 1948 Henry Seidel Canby again wrote about James. In January an article by him stated that he felt there was a definite James "revival," which had stemmed from the notice taken of James during the centennial year. Canby felt, he said, that James was not any longer "too difficult for us,"[4] and that he was much easier to understand than modern poetry, for instance. This theory continues in the vein of thought that James was ahead of his time. Canby went on to say that he thought the old ideas of James' difficulty for his own time lay in his use of psychology in his novels, and that twentieth century people had been educated to psychology.

James, Canby thought, "felt the most interesting thing about a man or woman was a reaction to a moral problem. The whole man morally is involved."[5] Early critics, contemporary with James, who had reviewed his novels as they were published, often remarked on the lack of morality in his stories, and on endings in which all the characters were not

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[4] Saturday Review of Literature, January 24, 1948, p. 9.

[5] Ibid.

properly repaid for whatever behavior they had committed during the story. That time helped in understanding this sort of finish seems to be borne out here. Canby could see more clearly what James was trying to accomplish from his vantage point of some years. That lookout on times past has given many authors a revival which might have surprised their contemporaries.

Leon Edel, one of the most thoroughly grounded of James scholars, brought out an edition of James' plays in 1949. This was reviewed in November of that year by Edwin Clark, who drew this conclusion:

> . . . the technical virtuosity of his later work is derived from his experience in the theatre . . . his plays improved over his earlier efforts. He was still short of the knack to compress and extract the essence of his ideas.[6]

This idea might also surprise James' contemporaries, for they were only too aware of James' penchant for writing for the stage and his failure to produce any popular plays. The general public derided his work and the critics were hardly more kind, only more subtle in their thrusts. This reaction of the critics was discussed in the first chapter.

Another literary scholar, F. W. Dupee, who edited James' autobiography, reviewed the plays, also. He felt that some of the difficulty with James was caused by his having lived in a time of transition from one literary age to another. He thought that the plays had "technical resources" but lacked "maturity of substance."[7] Further reviews

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[6] Edwin Clark, Saturday Review of Literature, November 12, 1949, p. 16.

[7] F. W. Dupee, The Nation, July 8, 1950, pp. 41-42.

of the plays have not turned up, and it may be assumed that they did not achieve a great popularity on their second appearance before the public. Perhaps they must await further advancements in the dramatic field before they can be appreciated.

During the 1950's the feeling about Henry James has been more intensified. Those in both camps have tightened their ranks and honed their weapons. Those who would find fault with the master will discover how quickly retaliation will follow any untoward remarks. The general substance of defenses of James seems to be an admission that the man was human, after all, and capable of mistakes, but they are either regarded as so minor as not to be troublesome or else so gargantuan that they are really only an addition to his charm. Usually, though, it is asserted that what someone has pointed out as a flaw is not that at all; it is the fault of that someone for being so dull as not to understand what James meant. The supposed mistakes are categorically demonstrated to be actually subtleties within the grasp of only the more refined minds.

Whether it is because of more people writing pro-Jacobite[8] articles or fewer publishers' accepting anti-Jacobite ones, it is difficult to find unfavorable things printed about James in the past two decades. Why, then, the defensive tone of the articles about James? It is one of the aims of this paper to discover the cause, if possible.

In The Virginia Quarterly Review for July, 1951, Charles Firebaugh wrote an article entitled "The Pragmatism of Henry James," linking

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[8] Jacobite: a person with strong sympathies towards James, originally, King James.

the philosophy of his brother William James to the author. Firebaugh stated that he believed that James was capable of portraying human passion and that he understood it. This was obviously in answer to the sort of criticism which insinuated that James' characters were generally of the bloodless type. The old question of whether the form or the content was more important in James was answered by this writer, too. He asserted that "content could not be ignored without hypocrisy in studying James."[9] Other critics have felt that they had answered this question also, but have given different answers. In the first statement, it is not clear to whom Firebaugh is replying that he felt James could portray passion, but it may not have been to any recent writer. It could easily have been some critic who turned out a review eighty or ninety years ago.

Canby, who can be considered a true James partisan, or Jacobite, from his comments previously quoted, assessed in 1951 the reasons for the failure of The Bostonians (published in 1886). He believed it lay in a combination of things.

> James' ruthless analysis of the pride of Olive and the innocent vanity of Verena was not in the mood of the day . . . his exchange of a tough reactionary for a romantic southerner [the type then popular in fiction] . . . the mixture of underlying sexual motives with social ideas was something Americans were not yet ready to accept . . . at least a quarter century ahead of his time. . . .[10]

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[9] Charles Firebaugh, "The Pragmatism of Henry James," The Virginia Quarterly Review, July, 1951, p. 431.

[10] Saturday Review of Literature, November 10, 1951, pp. 34-35.

As Canby saw it, the trouble resulted from the times not having caught up with James, an idea the editor had expressed before. The concept itself is not new. The same sort of thing has been said about many writers, Shakespeare, for instance, who seem to have spoken more significantly to future times than to their own. Many of the other writers, however, did not fare as well financially as did James while awaiting the vindication of time.

Again in the Saturday Review of Literature, a review of Henry James: The Untried Years, by Leon Edel, stated in 1953:

> The current scholarly and popular interest in James is far more than a passing literary fashion for, as many younger critics have pointed out, it was James who first in our time organized the esthetic sensibility as a defense against the moral dilemmas of modern man. The vigorous worldliness . . . of so many major American writers--the tempestuous Melville, the brawny Whitman, the daemonic Wolfe--is an inevitable by-product of American conditions, but the reaction to this mood is also American, even though it has been manifest only now and then in our literary history.[11]

While explaining what earlier critics may have felt was un-American in James' attitude--his reaction to the sort of America he left behind, this statement takes in the matter of James' literary nationality. This critic felt that his tone was not alien to the country of his birth, even though it may be a less frequently encountered attitude. The fact that he reflected the feeling of reaction may relate to the statement by F. W. Dupee quoted above that James was living in an age of literary transition. The fact that other writers living at the same time were not similarly affected proves little. Their personalities were not like

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[11]Leon Edel, Saturday Review of Literature, May 9, 1953, p. 13.

James', and they should not have been expected to be moved as he was by many circumstances.

F. O. Matthiessen, an important literary scholar who has done several studies of James, wrote in connection with the fact of James' highly individual reaction to his times:

> For at this very same time, in the early eighteen-fifties, an incipient American poet had also been drinking in the sights of this same street /Broadway/. But Whitman was to make his poetry out of passionate identification with everything he saw, not out of detachment. James, on the other hand, came to believe that "the only form of riot or revel" his temperament would ever know would be that "of the visiting mind," and that he could attain the longed for "otherness" of the world outside himself only by imaginative projection which, by framing his vision, could give it permanence.[12]

This contrast of the qualities of Whitman and James serves to explain their disparate visions of life and its meaning. It also helps to put James in relation to other writers of his day who may have been more like Whitman than James. A writer who desires "passionate identification" is never going to sound the same way as one who is "detached" in his observation of the human drama.

Some of the scholarship concerning James has been spent in trying to decide the matter of whose pattern he followed when he first began writing. T. S. Eliot had declared that as James was a continuation of what Eliot felt was the typical genius of New England, he had been affected by Hawthorne, but probably no more by him than by others of the same genre. He stated that "James was, at a certain period, more moved

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[12]F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 31.

by Balzac. . ."[13] than by Hawthorne or any of the New England group. As this essay falls well before the span of time covered by this particular chapter, only this brief excerpt from it will be included.

Had a decision been reached by the 1940's in reference to the question of who was James' literary ancestor? It had not; at least, there was not an agreement on the correct answer. In Clifton Fadiman's introduction to the Modern Library edition of The Short Stories of Henry James, he made so bold as to put in writing, "James began as a mediocre imitator of Hawthorne,"[14] which statement was not really in character with the rest of his essay, for it was admiring.

The statement drew rapid fire from F. O. Matthiessen, even though it were surrounded by more favorable comments. He felt that calling James an imitator of Hawthorne, mediocre or otherwise, was a grave error. In December, 1945, he set the reading public straight in case they had been misinformed by Mr. Fadiman's introduction. He said that James began as an emulator of Balzac.[15] Did this settle the question so that all future students might turn their attention to equally weighty matters? It would be absurd to think that it did.

Only three years later, as though he had never had the privilege of being enlightened by Matthiessen, Henry Seidel Canby wrote, "Hawthorne

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[13] T. S. Eliot, The Shock of Recognition (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1955), p. 860.

[14] Clifton Fadiman, The Short Stories of Henry James (New York: Modern Library, 1945), p. x.

[15] F. O. Matthiessen, New Republic, December 3, 1945, p. 766.

was James' father in art."[16] Such disputes could probably continue into eternity, or at least until all the interested parties could have the opportunity of consulting the provocateur of the controversy, which might amount to the same length of time.

Probably any writer of English will exhibit some characteristics of previous writers, particularly those whom they have read with pleasure. Since James had a great interest in French literature as well as in English, it is natural that some of the qualities of that would be absorbed into his consciousness, too. The more thoughtful of the critics seem to agree that one of his main purposes in writing was to set down as great a quantity of the workings and surroundings of the consciousness as possible. As a well-read person, James was almost bound to have included his interpretation of the various forms of literature which had impressed him favorably.

The realization that James was interested in recording as much as possible of conscious occurrence has come to more than one critic of the past two decades. Osborn Andreas, a scholar-businessman from the western part of this country, wrote a study entitled _Henry James and the Expanding Horizon_ and had it published by his alma mater, The University of Washington, in 1948. His theory, or part of it, was that

> The fiction of Henry James is an attempt to define the most conscious man. James believed that, since the contents of the consciousness are the behavior of man, certain kinds of behavior enhance the vividness of life, while others depress the

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[16] Henry Seidel Canby, _The Saturday Review of Literature_, January 24, 1948, p. 10.

action and impair the limpidity of mind.[17]

This study, a remarkable monument to a change in the attitude, has many interesting contributions to make, some of them valid and well based. Andreas displays a good deal of perception and study in his analysis, and a devotion to Henry James as well. Though some of his conclusions might bear closer investigation, the fact that he bothered to make the study and write it up is cause for rejoicing.

Mr. Andreas felt that aside from a few incidental themes James' stories

> . . . have some bearing on, and exist in some relation to, the central subject of his work: accession or depletion of consciousness.[18]

This matter of accession and depletion of consciousness Andreas felt constituted the progress of the story; the "villains" were those who depleted the consciousness of the others by what Andreas termed "emotional cannibalism." This intriguing phrase is discussed as follows:

> What James principally saw in life was the harm which people inflict--not only on others but on themselves--by deeds of emotional cannibalism. . . . Not only does intervention in the lives of others fail to allay the appetite of the intervener, it also--and this is its chief deadliness-poisons the sources of feeling.[19]

Naturally if the sources of feeling are poisoned, consciousness can no longer operate; awareness is cut off, and the creative function

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[17] Osborn Andreas, Henry James and the Expanding Horizon (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1948), p. 2.

[18] Ibid., p. 19.

[19] Ibid., p. 3.

fed by it is stultified. In story after story of James', Mr. Andreas analyzes the happenings and finds the same answer.

This thesis seems to provide legitimate resolution until Andreas begins discussing the love elements in James, and comes to the conclusion stated in the title of Chapter Three: "Love: the Deterrent to the Full Life." He briefly sketches some twenty stories to prove his point that James did regard love as a deterrent. This assumption seems to be somewhat faulty, for in most of the stories he mentions, love comes into the picture merely as a natural consequence of human relations. The frustration of a happy or even a satisfactory ending is, often, provided by the human element itself, the inability of one to understand another or the lack of awareness of another's situation.

An example of what seems to be Andreas' mistaken idea that James felt love to be a deterrent, which is the conclusion he draws from a story such as "The Bench of Desolation," is that Herbert Dodd has misjudged Kate Cookham's feeling for him. During their engagement he had thought her possessed of a "frightening psychological avidity for him." He had, consequently, broken off their engagement and married someone else. Kate had extracted his fortune from him for breach of promise, and his wife and family had suffered deprivations because of so little money. Ten years later, his wife and children dead, he comes into contact with Kate again. It turns out that she had taken the money and invested it so wisely that she is many times wealthier than before. After she deposits the money in his name, he gradually becomes aware that his diagnosis had been wrong, for she had merely felt fiercely

protective about him. The clue to the story's not having run smoothly here is not that love had stepped in and caused their lives to be less full; it is that Herbert was not completely conscious of Kate's true feelings. A lack of full consciousness had been the seat of the trouble. Obviously if he had been deeply in love with her, he would have pursued another course than to spurn her. His love did not deter the full life; it was more that his love was not complete and his consciousness was faulty.

In the matter of James' much-discussed "sense of the past," Andreas comes to what seems a more balanced conclusion. He says that James used

> the presence of the past to enrich the present moment . . . not a translation into the past, to evade the present. . . .[20]

This conclusion would seem to concur with the remarks of Owen Wister about the layers of impression that he felt James tried to communicate all at once.[21] By using the roots of the past, James could make the present more meaningful.

It is somehow surprising to find that Owen Wister was an admirer of James. Another surprising James enthusiast was James Thurber, who wrote an article entitled "The Wings of Henry James," for the November 7, 1959, New Yorker. It was he who quoted Wister on the subject of layers of impressions. Wister's thought was that, in the manner of a painter,

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[21] James Thurber, quoting Owen Wister, *The New Yorker*, November 7, 1959, p. 168.

James sought to achieve

> a number of superimposed, simultaneous impressions. He would like to put several sentences on top of each other so that you could read them all at once, and get all at once the various shadings and complexities, instead of getting them separately as the mechanical nature of his medium compels.[22]

Another observation along this line was made by Matthiessen. He noted that James liked English houses for their "accumulations of expression," and further felt that James dwelt very little in the past. "His impressions and his reading were preponderantly, almost oppressively, contemporary."[23]

In Matthiessen's comments may be sensed the defensive attitude of many of the Jacobites, which has swollen with the passing of time until it has become difficult to find any considerable amount of material which makes responsible but unfavorable charges concerning James. There is, of course, always the harshly critical writing which is often rather irresponsible.

Stephen Spender, a British poet and critic, published a book of criticism, The Destructive Element, in which he gives a certain amount of attention to Henry James. In the light of the Socialist-Marxist tendencies of Spender, it is not surprising that he should dwell on the class-consciousness of James. While Spender did not deny that he felt James was a snob, he thought that James' "vulgarity" did not stem from his snobbism. He thought that James thoroughly understood the class

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 40.

about which he wrote, and all that he did write about it was "crushing indictment."[24]

Another theme upon which Spender struck several variations was that of James' attitude "to the body and the sexual act."[25] While seeming to try to discount the story that James had suffered castration, either physical or psychological, in an accident near the outbreak of the War Between the States, Spender manages to insinuate it into his readers' thoughts many times. He repeatedly exhibits the superior feeling he seems to have when he thinks of James' attitude toward sex, which, he says, changed as he matured from

> tastelessness of what is artificial when a comparison is forced with what is natural, to . . . when sex seems to have taken refuge in fantasy . . . to really amazing forms.[26]

Spender seems to discount entirely, by never referring to it, the possibility that James may not have felt the need to discuss the body and the sex act in blatant terms. It was certainly not the vogue to do so in his day, and to go very strongly against the mores might have cost him a large audience, even larger than the one he forsook by writing in the style which he chose.

In discussing various characters in James' stories, Spender was careless enough to refer to Merton Densher of _The Wings of the Dove_ as

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[24]Stephen Spender, _The Destructive Element_ (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1953), p. 29.

[25]_Ibid._, p. 31.

[26]_Ibid._, pp. 34-35.

"Martin" Densher.[27] Had this happened only once, it might have been attributable to a printer's error; it happens in every instance in which Spender refers to Densher. Perhaps Mr. Spender did not find the name Merton a euphonious one, for he seems to use every excuse to call Merton's name and always miscalls it. This would seem to be somewhat more permissible in the case of an adaptation of the story (such as that of its being made into an opera recently. Merton Densher translated into Miles Dunster) but such a mistake in identity causes doubts to arise concerning the thoroughness of Spender's studies and evaluations.

At one point Spender discussed Lambert Strether, in The Ambassadors, the middle-aged New England gentleman who had gone to Paris to fetch home his friend's son, Chad Newsome. He felt that the revelation of the story was that Strether, rather than Chad, had done the living, and that he (Strether) realizes "that the life of Wollett and of advertising is not life at all, but death."[28] Previously, however, Spender had written that Strether had merely supposed that what the Parisians and other Europeans in general were doing was living, but that he was mistaken, for he was drawing his ideas of life from the boulevards and squares and had not gone to the proper sources, the people themselves.[29]

Matthiessen, on the other hand, felt that Strether was the kind of man who received "an amount of experience out of any proportion to his

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[27] Ibid., pp. 68 ff.

[28] Ibid., p. 78.

[29] Ibid., p. 80.

adventures,"[30] showing that he thought Strether's consciousness was perhaps in keen working order, so that he did not need actual adventures. He was able to build upon actuality within his brain.

In another instance, as Spender discussed The Wings of the Dove, he says that Kate Croy and "Martin" Densher are like vultures who swoop down on the heroine, Milly Theale. However, he does not think that James was damning Kate and "Martin," but society, of which they were exceptionally conscious members. Other less conscious members of their society often behave as they have done, and do not see that they are morally dead.[31] The realization of their moral disintegration becomes apparent to Densher before it does to Kate. If this view of Spender's is valid, could it not follow that James may have thought himself the instrument of some enlightenment, and that by his writing he could show the way to this decadent European society?

It is apparent from reading more recent criticisms of James that time has allowed for discovery of more complexities than were noticed by his contemporary critics, while attempts have been made to unravel the mysteries which had been taken into account earlier. Matthiessen spends some trouble on the imagery in Henry James.

"The whole bent of his later descriptions," Matthiessen wrote, "was to make them more visually complete."[32] And again,

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[30]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 38.

[31]Spender, op. cit., p. 72.

[32]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 61.

> By the time of his full development James had discovered the secret of even more elaborate devices, particularly that he could bind together his imaginative effects by subtly recurrent images of a thematic kind.[33]

There is little or no discussion of imagery in the reviews and other criticism which appeared during James' lifetime. This seems to be a product more of scholarly study than of the reviewer's craft. The use of symbols, however, may well be the sort of thing which lies very much in the eye of the beholder. What has meaning for one student will not for another, and the same symbol may have different connotations for various readers. This may be so elementary that there is no need for it to be said.

There is a point which strikes a note that is slightly sour. It is the change which a symbol may undergo, in one story, in the eyes of one observer. Matthiessen, in discussing _The Golden Bowl_, declares first of all that the golden bowl bought by Maggie Verver and from which the story takes its name, represents the Prince, Maggie's husband, whom her father has actually bought for her. When the bowl is later discovered to have a flaw, then Matthiessen feels that this represents the flaw in the relationship between Maggie and her Prince.[34] Why should this not mean that there is a flaw in the Prince himself? There certainly is, and to change the representation of the bowl seems to destroy its meaning completely in both cases.

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[33] _Ibid._, p. 83.

[34] _Ibid._

To show that symbols can have meanings as various as are readers, the following quotation from Spender will serve as an illustration. "The golden bowl with its flaw represents, of course, the flaw in the order of their lives."[35] Spender would be more likely to see the situation from the sociological point of view.

Some critics have worked themselves into a lather in attempts to read meaning and shades of meaning into James' stories. Typical of this is the book The Comic Sense of Henry James, by Richard Poirier. It is, to say the least, not customary to think of James in the comic tradition. Just what is meant by "comic" in Mr. Poirier's study may be something other than that sort of material that causes people to smile and laugh, however. Here is a sample statement of part of his theory:

> The question is felt on every page--who is exploiting the life of another human being? Or, to phrase it more relevantly within the problem [of James' comic sense], "Am I guilty," James seems always to be asking, "of violating the dramatic freedom of this character in order to place him in some system of meaning?"[36]

Into what "system of meaning" does Mr. Poirier fit his theory? We must read on for some pages before any help is offered to dullards who cannot absorb the sense of it all at once. Before a lifeline is tossed, many may experience a certain amount of floundering about. Some thirty-six pages later, Mr. Poirier eventually explains, for those who have persevered that far:

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[35] Spender, op. cit., p. 88.

[36] Richard Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 9.

> Comedy exposes and evaluates the difference between "free" and "fixed" characters, while melodrama results from the self-assertions of would-be "free" characters.[37]

Some fourteen pages later he adds to the explanation, showing that he believes the theory must be taken a bit at a time:

> Comedy is thereby a means of temporarily suspending our desire to make moral generalizations.[38]

This takes a bit of readjusting of thought, but if one can accept the premise, it does seem to explain the apparent lack in James of dispensing proper justice to his various characters. It seems ridiculous, however, at first, to think of this quality of James in the vein of comedy.

One further quotation from this book may serve to exploit Mr. Poirier's thinking:

> Thus it is that his comic sense lays bare the urgency of his deeply personal commitment to the practice of his art. It is his best weapon in defence of a kind of freedom which, if defenceless in life, might, he fondly hoped, find an existence this side of death in the fictive world of his novels.[39]

If Henry James were using his comic sense in such a way, he managed to keep it from all searchers until Mr. Poirier came upon it. That he was deeply committed to his art is not questioned. That his "comic sense" or any other device dreamed up by a critic actually laid any of his ideas bare is extremely difficult to swallow. To be asked to believe

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[37] _Ibid._, p. 45.

[38] _Ibid._, p. 59.

[39] _Ibid._, p. 60.

that there was really any urgency about his commitment is almost as hard to accept. James was not of a nature nor were his writings so designed as to lead to such a conclusion.

That people can spend too long delving into any particular subject is demonstrated by the foregoing excerpts and by some to follow, from a book of essays by Robert W. Stallman, The Houses that James Built. Mr. Stallman took his title from the lead essay, which he wrote on Portrait of a Lady. He began writing the essay by refuting a previous essay by a William Troy, who had stated that all the important crises in the story under discussion had taken place in gardens!

Mr. Stallman says that, on the contrary, the crucial events took place in houses. He also see the various situations as houses of different types. The place where the action occurs governs the type of action as well as the characters' emotions. For instance:

> Whereas at St. Pater's she is still free to move through great spaces and in light (it is the only edifice in Book I that is lighted), at the opera house she is boxed in. It is a secondary theatre, a large, bare, ill-lighted house, and Isabel and her friends sit in one of the largest boxes.[40]

This quotation sounds as if Stallman were harking back to the ancient "pathetic fallacy" theory; however, there may be something to it. As has been said, one can spend too much time on one subject, and the inclination is to believe this monumental struggle between Stallman and Troy over the site of the climaxes in a novel is a graphic result of such lingering in the mining shafts after the ore has been carried away.

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[40]Robert W. Stallman, The Houses that James Built and Other Literary Studies (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1961), p. 33.

Stallman's general theory runs that James was a novelist of society and the activities which he liked to describe were the sort which took place in enclosed places, not in open spaces such as gardens. Also, as James was a chronicler of events of the mind, the crises were not external happenings but mental ones, so that Troy's idea about climactic things taking place in gardens was wrong on two counts. Thus do the academicians wrestle with the problems of great pith and moment.

In a second essay, on The Ambassadors, Stallman advances the theory that "the Wollett product" in the manufacture of which Strether had been engaged in Massachusetts and about which Miss Gostrey had asked him several times, was clocks, or perhaps watches. For, he reasons,

> If the article were something unimportant, such as button hooks, there wouldn't be any purpose in having Strether so reluctant to name it. Why, then, does James make such a mystery about it? His deliberate intention not to name it was, as I see it, solely for artistic purposes. That he uses it as a riddle, that in itself hints at its importance, its thematic importance . . . it correlates with the time-theme, promotes it, manifests it.[41]

These samples show what can be done with a fairly small particle of material. It can be expanded and re-developed countless times until there is little resemblance to the original substance. This is something like the process which soap powders undergo when water is added. There is multiplication beyond belief of the original volume, and the theories which emerge from watered grains such as the stories of James are similar to the bubbles. Light and fragile, they hold a good deal of hot air, and may seem substantial until they are touched.

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[41] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

This age has been termed an age of criticism, rather than one of any large amount of creativity. Some of the critics seem to have taken this matter to heart and to have outdone themselves in elaborating the business of criticism practically to death. Once it became the literary vogue to "do" Henry James, it seems that there were many critics searching for a subject. They descended upon him full force, and where there seemed little for them to dissect, they were content to work by the expansion-of-tiny-particles method, creating fields for themselves to work in and perhaps to make themselves experts in.

In the beginning of the period, at the instance of the James centennial, there was the attitude of vindicating James to the infidels; it seems to have turned into a matter of making infidels out of the other critics who may have tried to publish conflicting theories.

Probably the most remarkable thing about the present stage of criticism on James is the quality of protectiveness which most writers take. Each of them seems to be defending James against attackers, but it is virtually impossible to find writings by these assailants. The impression is given that those who are defending James are simply fencing with shadows. This does have the effect of making the cultists look brave and highly intelligent--if one does not search too diligently for the real people casting the shadows.

CHAPTER III

CLASSIFICATIONS OF CRITICISM ON JAMES

Throughout the years in writings about James there have been apparent various trends of thought which have occurred to the many critics. These are, upon study, capable of being placed into certain categories. Of course, there have been those which have been unique in thought and with respect to the slant at which they examine the subject, but these are not of concern here. Certain of James' qualities have impressed themselves more upon the critics, and these are to be discussed.

The critical abilities of Henry James have been of interest to some of his critics. Another of his qualities is that of an observer. This quality has been apparent to many of the writers about his works. The stand a writer takes on morals is of interest to many people, and the attitude that the critics felt that James took will be indicated. His style is, of course, important, and his techniques of characterization and plot as well. These classifications will be followed by a discussion of one of the most notable of James' characteristics, his obscurity, and by observations on the English and American attitudes toward James. The various critical attitudes mentioned above are to serve as headings for this chapter on classifications of the critical material on Henry James. These sections will cut across chronological divisions and may often refer to material which has already been quoted in the paper. In such cases, of course, to avoid duplication of

material, page numbers will be used to indicate where the excerpts may be found.

I. JAMES' LITERARY CRITICISM

In an early review of James' work, the reviewer called James a critic who could write and think but mentions his uncertainty about ". . . the meaning of some of the words."[1] Henry James, almost from the first, confounded his beholders in one way or another. The book in this case was French Poets and Novelists, and the reviewer disagrees on some points with James' conclusions but says, "there has of late years appeared nothing upon French literature so intelligent as this book . . . acute, full of good sense, free from affectation and pretence."[2] The reviewer continued with his commendation of the book, saying that it had common sense, for which he seemed most grateful, for it replaced the "indiscriminating laudation" formerly given French literature. It would appear that there had been a surfeit of laudation and that James was something of a radical in being a trend-breaker.

James was evidently unawed by the literature of France, the country in which he had thought first of making his home after expatriating himself from America. His judgments seem to have been balanced enough to merit the praise of his reviewer, who, naturally, regarded him merely as another young writer, not as the literary figure he was to become in

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[1] The Athenaeum, March 16, 1878, p. 339.

[2] Ibid.

the future. This balance of judgment is an important key to his fiction as well as to his criticism.

Two years later, 1880, in another review of a book of James' criticism, a book on Hawthorne for the English Men of Letters Series, a reviewer said that it was ". . . hardly more than taskwork, done cleverly no doubt . . . but not especially interesting and not in the least important as throwing new light on its subject."[3]

Another critic, however, noted the author's

> admirable faculty of choice and selection . . . the artistic disposition and arrangement of materials . . .[4]

though he felt that

> Mr. James' criticisms . . . are frequently overdone to the extent of being hypocritical rather than critical.[5]

T. S. Eliot, writing an essay on James in 1918, two years after James' death, expressed the opinion that

> James was emphatically not a successful literary critic. His criticism of books and writers is feeble.[6]

It is all too easy to discover that two or more critics rarely agree on any particular work, or even on any of its points. With this inevitable divergence of opinions comes the balance of vision which helps things to be viewed more accurately.

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[3]The Athenaeum, January 3, 1880, pp. 14-15.

[4]Harper's Magazine, March, 1880, pp. 14-15.

[5]Ibid.

[6]T. S. Eliot, "Henry James," from The Shock of Recognition, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1955). p. 78.

II. CRITICAL LOOKS AT JAMES AS AN OBSERVER

The qualities in James' writing which went into making him an observer and recorder of his impressions were in their turn observed and recorded by his critics. Here, too, is evident the diverse reactions of critics to Jacobite methods.

One of those secondary observers wrote that the attitude of dispassionate observer which James took caused him to be a

> spectacle of pure intellect and artistic sensibility dominating commoner if not inferior qualities. For all who enjoy this interesting and singular spectacle, Mr. James' book will be a source of pure delight.[7]

This is from a review of The Lesson of the Master in 1892. There are certainly those who would take exception to what this writer has said about the function of the "modern artist in fiction," and even if his premise is accepted, there would still be those who did not find James' book delightful. This critic was a thinker in the same stream as Henry James, and he could therefore find delight in reading him.

All critics, however, did not enjoy the "interesting and singular spectacle." Another, reviewing The Awkward Age in 1899, said:

> If drawing rooms were the world, and those who have their being in them the whole of mankind, one could have no reasonable ground for dissatisfaction with the novels of Henry James.[8]

This writer did not think that drawing-room types were wholly satisfactory, and neither could he enjoy the resolving of the action of

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[7]The Nation, April 28, 1892, p. 326.

[8]The Dial, July, 1899, p. 21.

the story, for he concluded disdainfully:

> The outcome is naught, as far as we are able to discern, and not one acquaintance has been made with whom we would desire further commerce.[9]

The question of whether this particular critic's powers of discernment were as keen as they might have been will be left untouched. His general feeling, however, was similar to that expressed by others who felt that there was not enough of the common touch, or of low life, as it is lived among the less favored classes. That James' stories contained allusions to low life did not seem to help much. The "low life" was not lived by common folk, but by James' usual aristocrats and wealthy people. This sort of critic demanded more in the way of crises and vitality, of coming to grips with raw, stark situations.

A review, which has been quoted on page 9 (footnote 15), described the finer power James displayed in discerning "the crumbling of the interior defenses of the human citadel," and in doing so the reviewer seemed to discern himself what sort of thing James was trying to do. The reviewer seems to have interpreted James' mission, if that word may be used, as a writer, accurately. It was not late in James' career that this review was written, yet perhaps because the reviewer could look at his work with eyes unclouded by the critical dust storms that were to come, he was able to comprehend more easily.

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[9] Ibid.

III. MORAL CRITICISM OF JAMES

The problem of Henry James' morality, as manifest in his writing, has been batted about the critical forum for some time. The critics have, one or another of them, found him to be moral, immoral, a Puritan, a non-Puritan. Often these conclusions are arrived at with the same evidence.

One thorn in the side of some readers is the frustration of their desire to see virtue and evil receive appropriate rewards. This, they believe, is a prerequisite to a satisfactory piece of fiction.

An early review noted that the traditional round-up where each character received his just deserts was honored in the breach by James in The Tragic Muse, and the reviewer called it, "a novel which marks the farthest departure from the old idea of a novel."[10] The reviewer went on to explain this departure, saying ". . . the question never was what they [the characters] were going to do, but what they were."[11] He mentioned this development in novel form without praise or condemnation. Perhaps he was awaiting further developments in this trend before making any decisions about it.

Another was less hesitant about stating his opinions of Jamesian morals; the quotation, which has been written out on page 30 (footnote 64), states that James had become morbid, decadent, and unreadable. This critic seemed to feel that there was nothing of value to be found in James.

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[10] Harper's Magazine, September, 1890, p. 639.

[11] Ibid.

To still another, James showed the other side of the coin, for this critic felt that in his later novels he was

> hampered in his judgment and misled in his observations . . . by his mystical inheritance . . . deeply overlaid with Puritanism.[12]

It was common practice among a good many of the critics to trace James' roots back to New England, though he had little acquaintance with the section, and then to relate morals in his stories to what they considered carry-overs from the Puritan trends which they felt were typical of that part of the country.

Were the critics reading things into James' stories, or was he actually expressing varied moral stands in his different stories? Both these points have been affirmed by different critics. One, in 1903, said that "some of his stories have hush-hush and fie-fie methods," while others were "as full of the covert suggestion of foulness as the worst French novel of the last forty years."[13] That surely was putting James in a definite spot, by comparing him, unfavorably at that, to French novels! Still, though, it was admitted that the suggestions of foulness were covert. All the immoral activity takes place off-stage in James' novels, no matter how frequently it occurs or seems to occur.

Another critic wrote in 1903 that James'

> refusal to balance the ledger against extravagance or depravity puts the British audience against him because that audience seeks instructions with its amusement.[14]

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[12] The Atlantic, January, 1903, p. 77.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Living Age, March, 1903, p. 586.

This was probably a sharp insight into the matter, for the notion of being dosed with instruction while being entertained is a hangover from the very earliest days of fiction. It was felt then that books, which were expensive to produce, should be as worthwhile as possible. Some moral or ethical lesson would be prominent through the story. Concomitant punishment for wrongdoing and rewards for good were necessary to impress upon little minds, children's or adults', that wrongdoing will get you nowhere.

Later, the proportion of entertainment was increased, in order to make the mixture more palatable. The necessity of meting out justice is an idea which has persisted, however, and even today the general fiction directed at the masses has this feature. There is certainly no reason to encourage their baser instincts, is there?

On the whole, the rewards-of-virtue doctrine is probably not harmful, but it is thought by many to lead the impressionable to expect some tangible payment for all their good behavior, even if it consists only in not being actively bad. It does not prepare the readers adequately for a world which may punish the wrong-doer, or may even allow the culprit to go free. Reality too often finds that its stories are not rounded off as neatly as those of fiction.

Another critic interpreted James' moral theories thus:

> . . . he has shown an increasing disposition to deal with the amorous predicaments of people belonging to the most idle and depraved society of the land of his adoption in a style so ambiguous, so over-laden with half-hints and qualifications of every sort that among several possible meanings one feels at liberty to choose the worst, and usually does so with the uncomfortable

afterthought that evil is who evil thinks.[15]

This is humorous honesty, and it serves as a possible reason for some of the denunciations of James on moral grounds. The critics wanted to have the right, the straight and narrow, pointed out to them, or even hammered out. When the choice was left to them, they may not have felt that they were equal to the task of making it.

As a critic wrote in 1913:

> It is the proper business of Mr. James not to affirm sensation or any experience--he could not do it with sincerity--but to question sensation, to question emotion and sentiment; it is his proper business to examine experience with the amused, searching gaze of one who expects the unexpected.[16]

This critic was thinking somewhat differently from those who condemned James' lack of morality; he did not feel the need for the old questions to be answered another tiresome time. He recognized James' right to raise them in his own peculiar way, without providing answers which might be found in any Sunday School pamphlet. If the author lived up to his bargain artistically, it was not necessary for him to fit the mould of all other writers.

In March, 1916, a month after James' death, an article appeared in which it was stated that James had broken two moral codes: one, of passion that must be kept secret, and the other, of people's having a strong feeling about someone and still using the person as a convenience. Yet, the writer did not seem convinced that James was thoroughly immoral

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[15] The Critic, February, 1904, p. 146.

[16] Current Opinion, June, 1913, p. 489.

for having violated the codes. He conceded that James' people were so complex that a sort of paradox was created, and he explained the situation in this way:

> . . . a doing wrong which is accompanied and conditioned by the most sensitive perception of other people's spiritual needs may easily be a richer moral good than a strict, straight road of obvious duty.[17]

The insight of this critic showed that a new trend in criticism was possible in view of the new trend in literature. The trend could be likened to trying to see around corners and inventing a periscope to solve the problem.

Of course, the trouble with this sort of literature is the general lack of enthusiasm on the part of the public for tying up the loose ends of such "richer moral goods." That sort of thing frankly either passes over the heads of the public or leaves them cold, for the most part.

Four years later the argument was still unresolved, for one essay stated that "James' classification as a puritan was wrong."[18]

An essay published in 1937 entitled "Henry James and the Relation of Morals to Manners" by Yvor Winters re-examined the question. The writer felt that James' ideas on a moral sense were that there is one ". . . inherent in human character at best," and through association it may be enriched and cultivated and that "it as an American characteristic may be weakened or in some other manner betrayed by an excess . . .

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[17] The New Republic, March 11, 1916, pp. 152-53.

[18] The Bookman, May, 1920, p. 364.

of such association [generally referring to 'association' with the types of Europeans with whome James concerned himself]."[19] This moral sense was a rather outstanding one in Americans, but as far as he could tell, it was not strong enough to withstand the blandishments of clever European tactics which operated from lower motives.

James saw the moral sense, Winters thought, as an American phenomenon essentially (this American morality has been commented on by many foreigners), as an "actual and historical development in the American context," and "the ultimate and rarefied development of the spiritual antagonism in which the provincial civilization asserted its moral superiority over the obviously superior cultivation of the parent."[20]

Winters also felt that this moral sense was a result of the influence of the church on New England life and, through New England, on the rest of the country. Further, this sense had been strongly rooted, then damaged, by the War Between the States and the westward movement, so that as manifested in Henry James' American prototypes it was "a fine, but a very delicate perception, unsupported by any clear set of ideas."[21]

Thus, the moral quality of Americans--those who traveled and visited in Europe, at any rate (perhaps those who stayed at home were better grounded in morality in ratio to their being grounded at home)--was an open invitation to demoralization by the Europeans who came in

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[19] Yvor Winters, The North American Review, October, 1937, p. 490.

[20] Ibid., p. 483.

[21] Ibid., p. 490.

contact with it. In the resorts and country houses of Europe were people who were bored, who sought diversion. They often were poorer than they wanted to be. Why not tamper with these Americans, manipulate them a bit, mightn't the results be interesting, for a time, at any rate? And who would be hurt by it? At the worst, only an American or so.

In contrast to Thomas Hardy, James gave the effect of his characters' having the greatest amount of freedom of choice. He "sought to create the illusion of unhampered choice,"[22] the article continues. Some of the critics felt that the characters were in play, not against the enticements of the other characters in the story, but against the blandishments of James himself. Perhaps the critics felt this was not a fair struggle.

Somewhat in the manner of a scientist who transplants ants from their native colony (the colony idea fits in all to well with America, also) to study their reactions, James, as Winters thought, created his Americans as "paradoxes of New England conscience along with an acquired fortune in a time when it was impossible to acquire a fortune honestly." What the writer seemed to regard as a flaw in creative production may be explained by the theory that James was interested almost wholly in society and its interplay. His Americans may have gotten their fortunes without allowing their consciences to impede their progress; America was a land where fortunes were to be made. Their business ethics had little

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[22]Ibid., p. 492.

to do with their social behavior. The Europeans in the stories had no business ethics, either, for they had no businesses. Their fortunes had been made generations before. When placed in the older social atmosphere of Europe, the Americans were beyond their depth. People in America had manners, of course! Their relations with one another were not carried on behind a thousand layers of devious action, though. The veneer of manners in America was much thinner, not lined with fine cracks of age and re-application. Their consciences may have been imperfect on the business facet, but on that of social intercourse they were still pure.

In 1960 Leon Edel, one of the foremost James scholars, wrote that James attacked a subject which was admittedly highly sophisticated in writing <u>The Golden Bowl</u>, for example, showing that James was aware of the situations which he could be stirring up; that his hints and nods in his other stories were not naive provocations of such thoughts. Edel said that <u>The Golden Bowl</u>

> reveals him breaking new ground and finding a resolution to questions left unresolved in his other novels. . . . A subject as "adulterine" as this James had wanted to treat for many years, complained that the American "family magazines made him write at the level of adolescents." But <u>The Golden Bowl</u> was not serialized, and he was free to handle his subject without any reservations.[23]

These statements show clearly that James knew exactly what he was doing when he wrote a story, and that he was compelled to bow to the decrees of editors if he wished to have publication in America. His

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[23]Leon Edel, <u>Henry James</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 35.

earlier stories might have been quite different had he been allowed perfect freedom, and his development would likely have been different, too.

IV. JAMES' STYLE

After reading "Daisy Miller," a critic wrote the statement about James' style, already quoted on page 5 (footnote 6), which said that James was little more than a beginner, but that he had already "acquired a manner." The manner of the young writer was approved, but the review ended with the observation that Mr. James would have to be careful to avoid becoming a mere reflection of Trollope, a pitfall which the reviewer felt would be easy. That James did not become a mere reflection of Trollope, or of any one else, for that matter, hardly needs to be stated.

Some short stories which appeared in 1879 also received commendation for their style, quoted on page 4 (footnote 4). This notice ended with the hope's being expressed that "he is not yet at the end of his invention . . ."[24] Here another apprehension about James' sliding into an easy rut appeared. One wonders whether these critics found something so good, so promising in him that they actually did not wish to see him descend, or they were merely laying groundwork for future reviews which might take the tone of mock dismay at beholding what they had forseen to be happening. The role of prophet may not always make the prophet popular, but it tends to increase his reputation for mental prowess.

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[24] The Athenaeum, November 8, 1879, p. 593.

The hopes expressed in these reviews, if they were sincerely wishing well for James, were rewarded with a surprising amount of invention. It would be interesting to discover what the same reviewers' reactions would have been to James' later stylistic developments, whether they would have been greeted with delight or despair.

A review of Confidence, a story published in 1880 which receives little notice now, showed the reviewer's pleasure in the "seemingly light but really careful touch of which Mr. James more than any living English writer possesses the secret."[25] Perhaps this was the reviewer who worried about James' running low on invention (it is exceedingly difficult to tell, because almost none of the reviews in any of the magazines were signed). It did appear in the same magazine and only two months later. At any rate, there are few people at present who think of Henry James as writing with a light touch. Usually just the opposite feeling is evoked by his name. In some of his early short stories, however, his tone was quite different from that of the later works.

The fact of his varying styles in long and short story writing has precipitated another controversy: whether James was better in brief or at length. A review of Roderick Hudson (which was being republished four years after its first appearance) stated that he was better in the long stories, and another review in the same magazine five years later said:

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[25] The Athenaeum, January 3, 1880, p. 16.

> Mr. James often shows at his best in the short story, where space does not allow of circumlocution or prolonged fencing with direct issues.[26]

In The Atlantic in 1893 another thought appeared on the subject:

> We confess to liking this author best in his larger books, because with greater space there is more room for his characters, built up out of an infinity of particulars . . . and because we think Mr. James himself therein brings into play powers of composition which scarcely have scope in his shorter stories.[27]

It would appear that a great deal of the matter rested with the individual taste of the person writing the review. James went through a period in which he concentrated more heavily on the production of short stories, in order to provide income and leisure for working on his novels. He himself did not regard his short stories as a particularly important part of his output.

To the present-day reader of James the following quotation may come as a surprise, much as the idea of James' having a "light touch":

> Their style is so nearly perfect that in reading them one rarely comes upon a weak, an ungraceful, or an inelegant sentence.[28]

This appeared in 1885, in a review of short stories. Such a statement might be difficult to accept by someone who has recently struggled through one of those page-long rambles containing only one period which James evidently considered a sentence. It seems, somehow, that his stories with the most involved structures are more familiar

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[26] The Athenaeum, March 19, 1892, p. 601.

[27] The Atlantic, November, 1893, pp. 695-96.

[28] Harper's Magazine, February, 1885, p. 492.

than the simpler ones.

Another extract, from a review of The Other House, shows the unfamiliar side of James' style:

> . . . so deftly is it wrought that one scarcely notices economy . . .[29]

Those who consider themselves fairly familiar with James' stories would be brought up short by the word "economy," unless, of course, they had done some reading in the early stories. His style, it is obvious through these reviews, underwent considerable change during his long career.

By 1893 some reviewers were taking notice of the changes, for in discussing Essays in London and Elsewhere, one of them remarked:

> But the main drawback to the volume is the tortuous English which Mr. James has chosen to write, evidently under the impression that he ought to evolve a style of his own.[30]

Though this critic took a somewhat sneering attitude about the matter, he was close to the truth about James' trying to evolve a style of his own. It has been mentioned that James felt he was following his own school, in the same way that Irving had followed his own. What the critic may have regarded as simple audacity was really what James was deliberately trying to accomplish. Innovations are not always looked on with favor, however, and this time the critic did not welcome James' efforts.

In another review, of William Wetmore Story and His Friends in

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[29] Living Age, March, 1903, p. 365.

[30] The Athenaeum, July 29, 1893, p. 158.

1903, a critic took a rather regretful look at the evolution of what he considered

> the peculiarly involved and often puzzling style which now tyrannizes over Mr. James. Long and complex sentences greet the reader, the very first of these occupying nearly half a page.[31]

These glimpses of reactions James' earlier works manifest very clearly the fact that there was a discernible change wrought in his style as he matured. A greater preoccupation with what one critic called the "dragnet method," in which he felt that James thought of a sentence "primarily as a trunk to pack with his own intellectual belongings,"[32] came over him. There are those who think it a shame that he allowed this preoccupation to overcome him; there are those who could not care less about it, and there are those who are frankly puzzled by it or who may claim to understand it clearly, but who in either case regard him with wonder and awe because of it.

It is hardly necessary to say that those in the last group comprise the "cult" of Henry James enthusiasts, the Jacobites. As time passes, the believers seem to have become more firmly entrenched in their positions, and the middle ground between them and the disparagers has widened and has become deserted.

V. JAMES' CHARACTERIZATION AND PLOT

In 1877 a review of The American, already quoted on page 2 (footnote 1) gave James a notable bit of praise for a relative newcomer. It

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[31]The Nation, November 5, 1903, p. 365.

[32]North American Review, October, 1914, p. 632.

mentioned the lack of passion in the story but then launched into a long encomium which discussed his "rare skill" and "the apparent simplicity which was the height of art," among other remarkable attributes. It was evident that this reviewer found James' style worthy of a great deal of admiration, even though he had not had much opportunity to develop it.

This was before James' period of preoccupation with the proper words and phrases, and the consequent difficult style. Some (perhaps more) will bemoan the fact that James did not persevere more to the task of perfecting his ability to handle plot. There is much to admire in the unfolding of a well planned plot. It is a skill which should not be deprecated. Anyone with even a modest background of reading will agree.

Henry James, however, to the dismay of some of his critics, showed no particular interest in attaining this type of skill. Though Mr. Winters has stated that "all intelligent criticism of James is resolved inevitably into a discussion of plot,"[33] this does not seem the case at all. By what the critics have written about him it can be seen that he was a great deal more concerned with the working out of other details of his stories than with those of the plot.

If there be those who feel that these other elements suffered rather than gained from his endeavors, they are entitled to feel as they do. James was certainly not successful in every attempt he made.

James was interested in the people of his novels, but in his own distinct way. Some of the critical reaction to his characterization

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[33]Yvor Winters, North American Review, October, 1937, p. 490.

include one from 1879, quoted on page 4 (footnote 5), in which the critic said that James did not expose his characters in the usual way, the way which the critic felt was most natural, that James did it by making them "creatures of the intellect merely." What this critic may have thought of as "natural" in character development may well have been merely the type to which he had become accustomed. Innovations should not be decried merely because they aren't the usual thing, any more than they should be heralded joyfully for the same reason. They should be taken for what they are, then judged on the basis of whether they accomplish their intended purpose.

Again, another critic was moved to give great praise to the characterization of Miriam Routh in The Tragic Muse, calling it "brilliant," and lavishing other such generosities on it. The excerpt has been quoted on page 10 (footnote 17). This represents much admiration on the part of the critic and a general progress toward mutual understanding on both sides. Book reviewers are not generally noted for passing out superlatives. Whether it indicates a high degree of rapport between James' writing and the understanding of the particular critic or merely that the critic had a somewhat limited background in reading about actresses, it is rather remarkable for its agreeable tone.

In 1898, a review also previously quoted, on page 24 (footnote 46), stated that Maisie of What Maisie Knew was "an arbitrary, artificial creature," and continued in this somewhat unflattering vein. There is little noticeable rapport here, or if there is, the critic certainly felt that he had gained superiority over Mr. James. Here was one man

who refused to accept characters who were not to his standards of naturalness.

A review of The Awkward Age in 1899 showed that the critic who wrote it appreciated its heroine a great deal, in fact, more than any of James' other characters, for he wrote of her that "Nanda, is, in fact, Mr. James' supreme creation . . ."[34] Human frailty must be allowed for, and in this case, the critic lost out to the judgment of time. For any reader who could even place Nanda in her proper novel, there are probably ten or more who could do a fair sketch of Daisy Miller or Isabel Archer. A question which the critics have not tried to answer concerning this sort of thing is whether the latter two heroines are more famous because they appear in superior stories, or whether the heroines themselves are the important achievements in the books.

James was often berated for the poor job his reviewers felt that he had done in character portrayal. In The Sacred Fount and The Wings of the Dove, for instance, two excerpts quoted previously show that in the first story he was said to have read into the characters too subtle conditions of the soul,[35] and in the second, he had created a character who was thought to be even stronger than he.[36] Both of these reviews disclose rather strong urges to place the reviewers above the author by their ridicule of him. Neither of the critics were in sympathy with

[34] The Critic, August, 1899, p. 754.

[35] The Athenaeum, March 2, 1901, p. 272.

[36] The Atlantic, January, 1903, p. 81.

James' line of thought and did not submit to the conditions of his world. It would be impossible for them to appreciate his characters and their motives in that case.

The fact that The Wings of the Dove has recently been made into an opera seems some sort of vindication of the attractions of James' works to modern readers. If Milly Theale had really been so ponderous and Merton Densher's fascination been represented by what a reviewer called "only the author's rather anxiously reiterated word,"[37] it could not possibly have held the minds and imaginations of the creators of the opera long enough for them to have completed the job.

William Dean Howells, a friend of James, wrote an essay on James' later novels which appeared in January, 1903. He discussed some of the female characters at length and said that James was so supremely gifted in divining women and portraying them that beyond any other great novelist he had imagined few heroines acceptable to women. Howells realized that women generally prefer more noble and attractive creations to represent their sex than the types James liked to portray.

Howells also praised James for the way he presented his characters to the reader without analyzing or typing them. He felt that such a practice had added greatly to the craft of fiction-writing.

This practice, of course, was one of the things that caused other critics to dislike James. They felt that without some sort of labels it was hard to tell who were the good characters and who the evil ones.

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[37]Ibid.

Again, adding to the mental burden of the reader caused James to lose a general popularity. It also led to his being charged with obscurity, with which subject the next section deals.

VI. JAMES' OBSCURITY

Probably the most familiar, talked-about, joked-about, condemned, and explained feature of Henry James' fiction is his obscurity. In recent times students have spun themselves into whirlpools of murky waters by trying to translate bits or all of the mystery into some meaning for themselves or any readers they might have. The more time one has put into studying James, the more elaborate one's dissection of him becomes; this elaboration does not necessarily exist in proportion to the validity of the student's theories. Sometimes the validity seems to decrease proportionately to the elaboration, in fact.

The reviewers who undertook to discuss James' books as they were published naturally had less time to dwell on any particular qualities, and of course, their space was quite limited, as opposed to that of the heavy tomes published by some of the scholars. The public wanted comment on the books rather quickly, so that judgments had to be handed down with more rapidity than characterized some of the scholars' labors. In consequence, usually only the more striking points of the stories were mentioned in the reviews. This mentioning of the highlights would naturally give a good deal of the space to the discussion of his obscurity, for it was indeed a striking point. A picture of James' obscurity as the critics noted its progress will follow.

In 1881 a reviewer said, in an excerpt which has been quoted, that "once or twice the desire to put things smartly has made him obscure."[38] Perhaps this was the reason for the beginning of his obscurity, his desire to be different and to impress his readers in general as well as the members of the fashionable world in which he enjoyed moving. It may have been only this, and it may have certainly been his more lofty aim to extend the English language and its ramifications.

In 1893 another reviewer wrote that James had a tendency to make his reader feel stupid because it was so hard to discover what the story was all about.[39] Most people are not very willing to let a writer make them feel that way. It is more pleasant to read the simple things and have a feeling of superiority.

In a review, quoted previously, appearing in 1893, a critic commented that there were "bizarre phrases," some of which turned out happily, but usually "they are the reverse."[40] It did not sit well with this critic that he should have to go over a sentence several times to find out what was meant. This critic was not alone, either, in his rebellion against hidden meanings, for even in those times, which are thought of as being more leisurely, readers chafed against having to take the time to work out the author's implications.

It is interesting to discover in these reviews that something of

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[38] The Athenaeum, February 12, 1881, p. 228.

[39] The Athenaeum, July 8, 1893, pp. 60-61.

[40] The Athenaeum, July 29, 1893, p. 158.

James' long sentence structure seems to have infected his reviewers. One of them once said that James' influence immediately after reading him was tremendous, and it is evident from such as this from 1899:

> There is no other living writer who could have written the book, who could so patiently and delicately labour to make a fine point, who could deal so sensitively with fine shades, who could analyze the slight so subtly, so wittily.[41]

What a copy of James! And what a seeming appreciation of his qualities! It is not known, of course, whether this is merely a carry-over from having read James, or whether the imitation is really a conscious effort. The styling is unmistakable, however.

In a review of The Real Thing, in 1893, which has been quoted on page 16 (footnote 30), the writer of the review states that he reached an interpretation boldly, but that he was confident it was not the only one which could be reached, and in fact that he was sure James could reach a dozen others.[42] Unless this critic was being extremely sarcastic, his feeling almost of reverence shows in the statement, for he protested his boldness in reaching a conclusion about it, and called the story a parable, too. Such devotion generally does not appear in criticism of James until later in his career. Most of his contemporaries treated him as a talent to be reckoned with, even though the reckoning might be almost impossible, and they did not reach the feeling which seems to be evident in this one. This is not to ignore the mention made

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[41] The Bookman, July, 1899, pp. 172-73.

[42] The Atlantic, November, 1893, p. 696.

in the excerpt about the "bewildering and teasing effect." Is this effect, though, not treated as a property of a supernal sort? It seems an attitude of one who has heard the oracle, does not quite understand its meaning, yet is content to let the understanding come when it will.

Another reviewer showed a good deal of perception in another previously quoted statement, in saying that though James had suffered a tremendous amount from people who were either unable or who refused to understand him, and that all the while he was striving towards "the perfection of expression."[43] That this was James' only goal in writing is doubtful, but it is certain that it was one of his serious aims.

The glimpses that have been afforded of James' personality show him to have been the sort of person who could not take such a task lightly; he was constrained by nature to labor over it and polish it, and then to rework it innumerable times in order to achieve his ends. In the resulting literature, all but the most Job-like patiences are put to a severe test.

Various reviewers, of course, have seen various keys as the solution to James. The one quoted above took perfecting expression; another thought of the mystery as involving a

> submerged and elusive consciousness (that is not exactly sentiment and is certainly not incident) is never suffered to emerge clearly nor yet to sink completely. The consequence is the reader, and we suspect the writer also, experience a sense of strain and effort.[44]

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[43]The Nation, November 30, 1893, pp. 416-17.

[44]The Athenaeum, June 15, 1895, pp. 769-70.

It is not quite clear why there should be any confusion over whether elements of the story are sentiment or incident. How these two vastly different components should need to be distinguished is not certain. This actually sounds as if the critic were trying for some special effects of his own to confound the reader. No wonder that there is a sense of strain and effort!

A third critic thought it was more a product of James' maturing as an artist.

> His work of today varies from his earlier work, does so through the natural process by which the subtle grows more impenetrable, and the delicacy of shade is divided by still finer discrimination.[45]

There may be some differing opinions as to whether the subtle growing more impenetrable is a natural process, but if that premise is accepted, the rest of the theory seems to follow.

Still another critic hints at what he thinks may be the cause of James' obscurity, with less reverence and more wit, perhaps, than others who have been quoted:

> . . . it almost looks as if an attempt were being made to conceal the poverty of the idea in vast swaddling clothes of verbiage.[46]

This critic felt that James was good at camouflage, at least, if he did not have much of value to say. He could make it seem as if he did, and if he could fool some people into thinking that ideas were beneath all that "verbiage," it would amount to a triumph of sorts.

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[45] The Atlantic, November, 1893, p. 695.

[46] The Athenaeum, October 22, 1898, p. 564.

This, a part of a review of The Turn of the Screw, continues, showing that the reviewer did think more highly of James' talents than it seemed at first;

> . . . the author makes triumphant use of his subtlety; instead of obscuring he only adds to the horror of his conception by occasionally withholding the actual facts and just indicating them without unnecessarily ample details . . . a touch which would have made even Hawthorne envious on his own ground. And here, too, the style--braced up as it were to the task of not missing a detail of the author's effects--loses its flabbiness and indistinctness, and only gains in stimulating power where a curious turn of phrase is substituted for a more hackneyed expression. . . . it seems to do him good for once to kick over the traces of his over-anxious analyzing and to indulge in a real frolic. . . .[47]

That this reviewer was no stranger to James' works shows here in the relief he expresses in James' abandonment of his usual practice of "over-anxious analyzing." It was this practice which had given so many readers trouble in trying to follow the story line.

James considered "The Turn of the Screw" as a mere potboiler, hardly more than an exercise, and yet it has proven to be one of his most popular and often-dramatized stories. It may well show that an artist is not always the most perceptive judge of his own works; it stands to reason that he is not the most objective. Possibly in this short story he found a certain perfection of expression of which he was unaware; it is one of his better vehicles of communication. There have been suggestions that it has been overdone insofar as dramatizing as mentioned in January, 1962, by a reviewer who was writing about the

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[47]Ibid., p. 565.

recent film version, "The Innocents."[48] If this is the case, more harm than good might be done in making James more familiar to a wider audience.

Another reason for James' obscure style was offered when in 1902 Frank Moore Colby wrote an essay on James' work in general. Part of the piece has been quoted previously, on page 27 (footnote 55), in which the critic refers to "that verbal hedge" behind which he thought that perhaps James was hiding guilty secrets. It was a matter, then, of the morality which has also been a principal issue in discussion of James. The review continued, after saying that his "difficult and complicated muse may say just what she chooses,"

> This may be because it would be so difficult to expose him. Never did so much vice go with so much sheltering vagueness.[49]

This relates to the review which mentioned the many possible interpretations of James, and also the one in which the reviewer said that one was tempted always to pick the worst meaning, with the accompanying thought that "evil is who evil thinks." Is not Mr. Colby, in the light of the other review, showing how his own mind ran strongly to evil interpretations? He concedes that there is a verbal hedge, and that it hides something; then he leaps over it into a cesspool.

Probably anyone who writes any quantity about human relationships will be accused of immorality. Henry James came in for a large share of such accusations.

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[48] The New Yorker, January 6, 1962, p. 72.

[49] Frank Moore Colby, The Bookman, June, 1902, pp. 396-97.

In a review of 1902, which has been quoted on page 28 (footnote 58), concerned with The Wings of the Dove, James was said to have "lost himself in the ultimate azure of himself,"[50] and the reviewer revealed himself as rather disturbed to be left behind. He also referred to "the decorated treadmill" which he thought James insisted was a chariot,[51] and did not concede for an instant that his own heavy-footedness might have been somewhat at fault for his not being in step with the author. This leads to the question of upon whom should the responsibility rest for getting in step, the author or the reader? An attempt will not be made to answer the question here.

Another writer in reviewing The Wings of the Dove likened James to the serving boy in an old story. The boy had his head shaved, then had someone write an inscription on the bald spot. After this, he went about asking everyone what it said. They would look at the top of his head and say, "There is nothing there." His curiosity terribly goaded, he finally resorted to rigging up some mirrors so that he could see for himself. Sure enough, the legend read, "There is nothing there." The critic felt that trying to find the meanings in James would bring about the same result. Then, inspired by a flight of his own fancy, the critic wrote:

> There is, indeed, little else but long, dull, paragraphs of emotional tergiversation, wherein one loses all sense of direction for lack of one little clue, one singly clear straightforward

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[50] The Critic, November, 1902, p. 409.

[51] Ibid.

word, which would, to be sure, if it were there, dispel the greater part of the story like a mirage.[52]

The same reviewer divided novelists into two groups, those who chose from the two parallel streams of life either the stream of circumstance or that of consciousness, and it was decided that James kept to the latter. The reviewer felt that James' procedure didn't accomplish its purpose, that it left the reader too bewildered. The critic did not mention Proust, but it can be seen that he described James' technique in a way that also could describe the French author's.

Perhaps the reviewer did not feel that the public could handle the bewilderments in James' stories, for he brought in the issue of morality, tying it in with the confusion by saying, "There is nothing so prone to depravity as unrelieved speculation . . ."[53] Perhaps he had seen the effects of people's behavior on town gossips, who, if they have not the facts to report, fall prey to the depravity of "unrelieved speculation," and end by manufacturing stories. At any rate, it was James' fault, in the critic's eyes, that the confusion he caused in his stories led the readers to have immoral thoughts.

Many reviewers, seemingly distrustful of what they could not con by comprehension, took an attitude of superiority. They sought to disparage James by casting shadowy doubts where they could find nothing specifically wrong.

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[52]The Independent, November 13, 1903, p. 2711.

[53]Ibid.

Other critics, who may have been afraid of looking dull should time prove them wrong in not liking or understanding James, often gave his stories a sort of general praise, without mentioning any particular points, seemingly in order to straddle the fence all the way. Others were fond of asserting that they had divined James' purpose, or that they had discovered that his novels were addressed to the cognoscenti, whose "insight into those secret places of the human spirit approaches his own."[54] This enabled them to seem twice brilliant, for having found out what the novels were all about, and for being one of those to whom they were addressed. They must have been the addressees, or else how could they have understood the stories?

One of the critics who took this stand swept himself along on a verbal tidal wave:

> Like some microscopist whose instrument, focussed on a pellucid drop of water, reveals within its depths horrible monsters feeding on one another, Mr. James shows forth the baffled passion, fear, jealousy, and wounded pride, the high courage and self-sacrifice which may lurk beneath the fair and shining surface of modern life in its finest and most finished manifestations.[55]

It is interesting that whereas this critic refers to the society James depicted as the "finest and most finished," other critics have called it the most idle and depraved. Perhaps this is an indication of the critics' attitudes towards various strata of society and also of their own position in it.

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[54] The Critic, January, 1905, p. 20.

[55] Ibid., p. 22.

The author of another essay on James' style noted that at that time (1907) James was busy editing some of his novels. He felt that many people would probably wish that he would clarify them. In view of Henry James' attitude toward his fiction and the people who might read it, however, he resigned himself to the opposite actuality.

> But we doubt very much if he will concede so much to the unregenerate. If they cannot understand him, he is not the man to undertake to supply them with both eyes and intellect.[56]

In a review of The Outcry a critic asserted that James' social comedy was "an artificial creation," and rather pettishly sniffed that the author might have made some "concession of a more human contact with his readers," while calling him "a patent, if limited, genius."[57]

The critic quoted above, as do most of the critics, reveals his own personality as he writes, almost as much as does an author in writing a book. It is quite interesting to find the critics striking poses of one sort or another, being grand or disdainful, sympathetic or aggravated with the writer whom they write about. In short, they turn out to be human, and rarely are they purely objective, no matter how much they may claim the contrary.

In the summer after James died, as essay on "The Art of Henry James" was published. It made some suggestions as to the reasons for James' lack of popularity with the masses. It likened the psychological novel to a game of chess, which some behold in ignorance of the moves

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[56]The Nation, October 17, 1907, p. 343.

[57]The Bookman, December, 1911, pp. 434-35.

and cannot appreciate. It calls for work on the reader's part, further than the mere act of reading, which is too hard for a great many. Moreover, the essayist said that James proved there were more than the three classic plots,

> . . . that in the interplay of any given company of human minds lies material for countless enthralments, bewildering transitions, and chances.[58]

By his not employing the usual type of plots, James was repulsing, deliberately, the attachment of a large portion of the general reading public. The type who prefers having only slightly different characters going through practically the same routines in every story would naturally find a James story pretty tough sledding. When the climax is that hard to discover, it doesn't make a lazy sort of reader happy.

The next year, 1917, another essay appeared, along with a spate of summary articles of evaluation. It contained a valuable point concerning reasons that James failed of his desired effect, which was to have his stories more universally accepted without changing or diluting them to fit a more common style.

> . . . it is because Anglo-Saxons are quite unaccustomed to having their deeps of terror and pity, their moral centres, touched through the aesthetic nerves.[59]

This was something earlier critics had hinted at, but it had not been put so accurately before. It was an idea that seemed to come better from a slightly retrospective point of view. An 1890 review had

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[58] Living Age, July 26, 1916, p. 281.

[59] The Nation, April 5, 1917, p. 399.

said of The Tragic Muse that it talked a good deal about "art for art's sake," which was a concept that the British public had not then absorbed very well. The critic had realized then that James' approach came from the artistic side, which had not formerly been frequented by many writers.

The difficulty lay, in some respects, with his readers, who were unused to being reached through their "aesthetic nerves" and could not accept his radical method of addressing his premise to them. It is rather a novelty to think of Henry James with his Romantic stories as a radical, yet his methods were decidedly new and different.

In other respects, of course, the difficulty was in James himself. He would not unbend enough to try to bridge the gap between himself and the public. His style may have been advanced for his times, but it was disguised by the settings and characters he used. There are strong flavors of lavendar and rose petals, of rather musty drawing rooms and deep dark closets--far from modern, even for his own time. It has taken the passage of years to bring the public, to any degree, up to the point of more general appreciation of James. As Henry Seidel Canby said in 1934, poetry had become so difficult that reading it had made reading Henry James much easier.

The critic who in 1920 announced that he had discovered the reason for James' lack of mass appeal was a bit heavy on accenting the unreality of James' world, but he probably had grasped part of the reasons:

> Decorum is what damns James with the larger public . . . people think how much leisure his characters must have had and what little use they made of it! His beautiful world is in

danger of being demolished by some burly onrush of actuality.[60]

It is evident that this critic did not think James had simulated "actuality" very well in his fiction.

Where some stories have levels of enjoyment ranging up to the psychological in difficulty, James' stories seem to begin there and progress upwards to higher degrees of intricacy. The reader must climb with him or be left dangling. James drew a veil across the naked face of reality so that no sharply defined conclusions could be drawn about the situations, the characters, their conversation, or the ultimate resolution of the story.

Who, when witnessing a scene enacted before a lighted window, or in overhearing a conversation, or even in daily living with one's neighbors, can assign reasons and bases for their actions and words? There are a thousand odd influences upon each person, each acting in various degrees and with shifting depths of power. Put two people together and these influences multiply, working in concord and sometimes in opposition. Add more people, it intensifies. The influences expand in geometric progression.

An observer can be cognizant of only a small number of these influences; he can estimate the causes of only the visible effects. Henry James knew that only an estimation was possible in real life, and he attempted in his fiction to describe only some of the causes along with the visible effects, much as one might recount the events of a

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[60] The Nation, October 20, 1920, p. 441.

dinner party of the previous evening.

Those who discern evil in the stories cannot lay the entire blame on Henry James. Rarely does he delineate evil in concise terms; even in The Turn of the Screw it is more hinted at than stated. James may give some basis for such interpretations, but often much more is made of it than is entirely justifiable. Perhaps it is only normal human nature to make such interpretations.

Henry James himself gave a vital reason for his lack of general popularity, in his statement in The Art of Fiction and Other Essays, that a novel should be "an immense and exquisite correspondence with life." He did not specify a mirror of life, or the distillation of life; he used the word, "correspondence." Correspondence is used for keeping in contact with those who are at a distance, is it not? Then James was of the belief that he should correspond with life. He did not aim at transcribing vitality, for it was obviously that part of life from which he was distant. A writer should be judged at least partially according to the standards he sets for himself, and whether his writing fulfills them. It is certain that Henry James should not be judged so much by what the critics had in mind that he should do as by what he meant for his accomplishments.

He was more of an observer than of a participator in life; he set down his observations in his own singular manner. James did not feel it was his mission to interpret life in black and white. His colors were very much in the range of pearly and misty greys. For those willing to penetrate those shifting mists, his stories wait.

As a general thing it seems that in the years contemporary with James there were too few who were willing to attempt this penetration, and as the years have passed since his death, the balance has shifted decidedly in the other direction. The interpreters have grown legion, and their interpretations have become, in some instances, almost too far-fetched to deserve study. They have been included in this paper in order to demonstrate how far the business has been carried in some quarters.

It is true that James has needed some sort of intermediaries between himself and his readers, but some of the recent dissertations on such things as the settings for the climaxes and the decision as to what "the Wollett product" was (in The Ambassadors) might lead to people's being frightened away from him.

VII. ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD JAMES

Although James did not become a British subject until 1915, his living in England for such a long period time prevented Americans from thinking of him exclusively as an American, while the English certainly did not think of him as English. It has been thought that Henry James was a sort of prophet without honor in his own country, considering his own country to be America. How accurate this thought is will be shown by the following comments from magazines in both countries.

An American magazine printed the first review found in this study of a novel by James. It appeared in The Nation in May, 1877, and took approving notice of The American. In March 1878 an English magazine,

The Athenaeum, reviewed his work French Poets and Novelists. Though the books themselves were quite different in nature, the reviews were similar in their favorable attitudes.

Of The American was said:

> . . . how much there is to admire in the novel! . . . The success here attained as it is by that apparent simplicity which is the height of art. . .[61]

Of French Poets and Novelists:

> There has of late years appeared nothing upon French literature so intelligent as this book.[61]

In both countries, then, he was given credit for having done well at the tasks. His expatriation did not enter into the matter to cause the American to scorn him for having left his native country or the English because he was not one of them.

It was not long before the fact of his being American was involved, for in 1879 The Athenaeum found his story The Madonna of the Future better than it might have been because James had managed to write it with "scarcely a trace of what Englishmen are wont to consider Americanisms."[63]

American reaction to "Daisy Miller" as represented in Harper's Weekly in 1879 was that Daisy and her mother were not types really representative of Americans.[64] This would seem to indicate that James

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[61] The Nation, May 31, 1877, p. 325.

[62] The Athenaeum, March 16, 1878, p. 339.

[63] The Athenaeum, November 8, 1879, p. 593.

[64] Harper's Weekly, January, 1879, p. 310.

was being too imaginative or else that he had forgotten what his fellow countrymen were like. On the other hand, English opinion felt that in "Confidence" in 1880, he was prone to treat marriage and divorce more lightly than the English were accustomed to do.[65] On each side of the Atlantic he was, seemingly, being relegated to the other side in touchy matters such as national character and marriage mores.

In the matter of literary criticism James was judged more leniently by an American magazine than by an English one. His book _Hawthorne_, published in 1879, drew this comment from _The Athenaeum_:

> . . . hardly more than a taskwork . . . not especially interesting and not in the least important as throwing new light on its subject.[66]

The American critic was more pleased with what he read in _Hawthorne_:

> . . . the effect of the whole being to make the reader thoroughly acquainted with all the phases of Hawthorne's life and character.[67]

Some dissatisfaction was shown in what the critic felt was condescension on James' part, however:

> . . . occasional interjections of sneering disparagements of American literature . . . detract from the other substantial merits of his performance.[68]

Thus it can be seen that the American reaction was more favorable,

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[65] _The Athenaeum_, January 3, 1880, p. 16.

[66] _Ibid._, p. 14.

[67] _Harper's Magazine_, March, 1880, p. 633.

[68] _Ibid._

whether it showed less critical acumen or not. It was natural that some resentment should be shown if it were felt that James had disparaged American literature.

In 1890 two reviews of The Tragic Muse show some nationalistic tendencies on the part of the writers.

An English critic wrote:

> . . . we have a picture that is characteristic of life as it is in London drawing rooms, or at any rate in Mr. James' conception of them, which perhaps comes to the same thing.[69]

This appears as reluctant acknowledgement of James' ability to recreate London drawing rooms in his writing. The American view, on the other hand, held that his job in the novel was excellent:

> The whole picture of life is a vision of London aspects such as no Englishman has yet been able to give: so fine, so broad, so absolute, so freed from all necessities of reserve of falsity.[70]

On the whole, the tendency seems to have been for the English to withhold any strong enthusiasm. This may be as much expression of a national characteristic of reserve as of their feelings about James in particular. This hesitancy to give accolades shows in this comparison of an English and an American review of The Lesson of the Master in 1892:

From The Athenaeum:

> Is it a want of substance that in some places verges on thinness? rather the echoes of feeling than feeling itself . . . These stories are good as Mr. James' work sometimes is good, and that is saying much.[71]

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[69] The Athenaeum, July 26, 1890, p. 124.

[70] Harper's Magazine, September, 1890, p. 369.

[71] The Athenaeum, March 19, 1892, p. 369.

The last sentence is almost wholehearted praise, but there was a good deal of foot-dragging before it could be delivered.

In The Nation, a reviewer wrote that he thought the stories perfect. He said that James was fulfilling the role of the modern artist in fiction and,

> He is a spectacle of pure intellect and artistic sensibility dominating commoner if not inferior qualities.[72]

Both English and American opinions were favorable in discussing Pictures and Text in 1893. The American opinion from Harper's Magazine:

> Nobody will dispute Mr. James' claim to a high, indeed to a unique place among American novelists. . . . Even if he had nothing to say, his perfection of saying it would commend him to the artistic soul. But he sees both with eyes and imagination, and describes with the true art sense.[73]

The English, from The Dial, took it for granted that everyone knew of James' abilities:

> Of Mr. James' quality as an essayist we need not speak. Even those who do not care for him must admit his painstaking fidelity to his models.[74]

The two schools of thought appeared to be moving closer together. They did not show any special sensitivity in connection with nationality or national characteristics, and this may be a reason for the more general agreement.

For Terminations in 1895, a book of short stories, there was

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[72] The Nation, April 28, 1892, p. 326.

[73] Harper's Magazine, June, 1893, p. 3.

[74] The Dial, July 16, 1893, p. 47.

acclaim from both English and American critics. The English found James' talents remarkably good:

> Scarce any other contemporary man of letters could have brought the same qualities to bear in like degree and proportion, or bestowed the rare and delicate handling he has lavished on this . . .[75]

The American critic likewise gave James recognition for his talents:

> . . . his touch in the American character is brilliant and secure . . . wise and sensitive reticence. . .[76]

The opinion concerning his dealing with the American character should be compared with the opinion of "Daisy Miller" expressed in Harper's Weekly in 1879, in which the critic stated that Daisy and her mother were not at all typical of real Americans. This may indicate a change in James' manner of treating the subject or a change in critics on the magazine.

Concurring views on the good qualities of The Two Magics, the book of short stories containing "The Turn of the Screw," were expressed in both an English and an American magazine.

The English praised James' subtlety and said that he had a touch that would make even Hawthorne jealous:

> Here the author makes triumphant use of his subtlety; instead of obscuring, he only adds to the horror of his conception by occasionally withholding the actual fact. . .[77]

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[75] The Athenaeum, June 15, 1895, p. 769.

[76] Harper's Weekly, July 27, 1895, p. 701.

[77] The Athenaeum, October 22, 1898, p. 565.

The American critic thought that his habit of pursuing

> the elusive impression till he nails it with a familiar phrase . . . [and his] converting into vivid, exquisite, immensely amusing pictures of life stuff that has long been the property of formal and tedious philosophy.[78]

Concurring views were found against The Sacred Fount in 1901. The English called it "an example of hypochondriacal subtlety run mad."[79]

A review in an American magazine stated that it would be

> impossible to tell what the book was about without using almost as many words as Mr. James has wasted in the telling of it; and as when told it isn't worth one's while, we shall prudently refrain from it.[80]

In 1903 James published William Wetmore Story and His Friends, a biography of an American artist who lived abroad. Even in dealing with the facts of a man's life, he presented problems to the critics. An American reviewer in The Nation decided that there would be two classes of readers of the book: those who gave up in despair and those who would persevere to "find it the most attractive book of the season."[81]

Again the English were in accord. One of their critics said in Blackwood's:

> . . . a loyal but wonderfully intimate and searching critic is at our ear . . . the goldenness of appeal to Mr. James [is] recovered by him with all his art of suggestion. The whole canvas is brushed with extraordinary delicacy and finesse.[82]

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[78] The Nation, December 8, 1898, p. 432.

[79] The Athenaeum, March 2, 1901, p. 272.

[80] The Bookman, July, 1901, p. 442.

[81] The Nation, November 5, 1903, p. 365.

[82] Blackwood's, November, 1903, p. 668.

In both instances the critics recognized and paid tribute to James' powers. In neither case was there resentment shown at any difficulty which may have presented itself to them in the story.

It is plainly evident that Henry James found a response from both the English and American critics. It was not identical for every novel or story that he published, nor should it have been. How pointless international communications would be if the readers of each country reacted the same way to every piece of literature! Even worse than if all the people in any one country had the same reaction. There would be no reason for further attempts at new forms of communication.

An obituary notice quoted from The Literary Digest sheds some light on the question of which should be regarded as James' native country:

> . . . after he learned from America what America had to teach him he found in Europe his spiritual and intellectual home. . . . There is a whole school of writers and thinkers, both in America and here, which refuses to accept as a model, or even as the right expression of his own qualities, the later of Mr. Henry James' three methods as a writer. They call him colloquial, involved, un-English, and much else. It does not much signify. The man's genius is what signifies.[83]

Perhaps this is actually the most sensible attitude to apply to James. What difference does it really make, whether he was more English or American in his characteristics? It makes for interesting discussion, that is true, but to lose sight of James' larger qualities and significance is to waste time that might be better spent in writing more meaningful criticism.

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[83] The Literary Digest, February 12, 1916, p. 377.

The American audience, which may have harbored some justifiable resentment at James' expatriation, did not either ignore or disparage his works for that reason. It seemed to accept him often more generously than did the English, in fact. In the present day, there are more American scholars than English who do work in James' writing it would be safe to wager, even though the Americans often must go abroad to do so. Matthiessen and Edel have done much more penetrating studies than has the Englishman, Stephen Spender, for instance. It seems as if the English either consider themselves superior to James, in their own consideration, or else they are not sure of his lasting qualities yet, so they cannot really devote time to him which might be better spent with the real old masters.

While each critic saw Henry James in a different light, and no foreshadowing of the present state of his reputation can be found in the writings of his contemporaries, there were certain qualities which were remarked by his critics. These qualities have formed the main structure of the character of James' writing.

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