

THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN IN THE NOVELS  
AND STORIES OF HENRY JAMES

APPROVED:

*Howard C. Key*  
Major Professor

*Donald K. Pickens*  
Minor Professor

*E. S. Clifton*  
Director of the Department of English

*Robert B. Toulouse*  
Dean of the Graduate School

THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN IN THE NOVELS  
AND STORIES OF HENRY JAMES

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
North Texas State University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Margaret Hart Smith, B.A., B.S.

Denton, Texas

August, 1969

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE EARLY PERIOD . . . . .	25
III. THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD . . . . .	62
IV. THE LATE PERIOD . . . . .	78
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	118

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Vernon Louis Parrington, in 1929, characterized Henry James as a "self-deceived romantic," who dedicated his life to flight from the garish realities of the Gilded Age and who wasted his talents in the pursuit of "intangible realities that existed only in his imagination."<sup>1</sup> Anthologists, for the most part, followed Parrington's lead for more than a decade. Picturing James as dealing "more and more with less and less,"<sup>2</sup> they seemed to be attempting to outdo one another in fashioning critical descriptions that showed an expatriate writer devoted entirely to the tea table tangles of a bored leisure class, insulated securely against the intrusion of the mundane and ordinary struggles of life.

To accept Parrington's view without qualification is now, and was then, to ignore many facts. For one thing, the economic structure of James's time was not so stable as might be thought. In the late nineteenth century, great fortunes were subject to distressingly sudden dips, both in England and America, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, Vol. III of Main Currents in American Thought, 3 vols. (New York, 1930), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

James family itself was not exempt from the exigencies of panics and forced economies. Henry James himself was no stranger to financial vicissitudes.

Writing his memoirs, late in life, James was still to recall vividly the family exile from Paris caused by "a 'financial crisis' of great violence to which the American world . . . had tragically fallen victim, and which had curtailed for some months our moderate means of existence."<sup>3</sup> Leon Edel identifies the time as 1857, and the financial crisis as one involving speculation in railroad lands based on credits dispensed by unstable banks. In consequence of this, according to Edel, "a great insurance and trust company went bankrupt and a characteristic American 'crash' was under way."<sup>4</sup> Henry James was fourteen at the time, old enough for the event to make a deep impression. Edel quotes a letter from Henry James's father, waiting out the crisis with his family in an inexpensive French fishing village, which attributed this "social disease" to "the lack of the sentiment of brotherhood--the prevalence of self-seeking."<sup>5</sup> In this letter, financial insecurity resulting from the panic is linked with ideas of social responsibility on the part of

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<sup>3</sup>Henry James, Autobiography, edited by Frederick W. Dupee (New York, 1955), p. 223.

<sup>4</sup>Leon Edel, The Untried Years, Vol. I of Henry James, 4 vols. (New York, 1953), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

business, a linkage which suggests the influence of Henry James Senior's Swedenborgian religion. Both a fear of financial insecurity and a distrust of business activity were to be reflected in the writing of his son, the future novelist.

The shaky financial base of the James family could not have led to a complete contempt for moneymaking, however, in an individual like Henry James, who valued such expensive items as culture and travel. Although the son of a disinherited heir, Henry James Junior was also the grandson of an Irish immigrant who made a fortune of approximately three million dollars in real estate, banking, and mercantile ventures. It is a matter of record that the young Henry James exhibited early a bent for literary earning, and that for the greater part of his life he did not share in the wealth of the founder of the family which the other heirs helped restore to Henry James Senior. Edel calls attention to the fact that Henry James was the first member of Henry Senior's family to try his hand at earning, and further remarks that in receiving the twelve-dollar payment for his first literary effort, "In a very general sense Henry James Junior had returned to the American path of William James of Albany."<sup>6</sup> The young reviewer-critic was then twenty. By the time he was thirty, James was able to total up his

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

expenses and earnings during his stay in Rome and show a credit balance.<sup>7</sup> When the death of his parents again threw the James children into something of a financial crisis, Henry James resigned his share of the father's estate (a fifth of properties yielding an annual income of about \$10,000) to his invalid sister, Alice.<sup>8</sup> Until her death, James supported himself in London entirely by his writing. In connection with the business affairs of Henry James Senior, it is worth noting that he designated Henry, his second son, rather than William, the eldest, executor of his estate.

The actual financial background of Henry James, then, is hardly that of a rich playboy. Although James's business experience was almost entirely limited to publications, Edel furnishes the information that "he took care of all his publishing arrangements."<sup>9</sup> This must have involved no small amount of activity for a writer with both English and American markets, particularly in the period before 1891 when the United States had not adopted the international copyright

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Edel, The Conquest of London, Vol. II of Henry James, 4 vols. (New York, 1962), p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Edel, The Middle Years, Vol. III of Henry James, 4 vols. (New York, 1962), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Edel, The Conquest of London, p. 347.

law.<sup>10</sup> In a sense, then, Henry James was himself a businessman, and, in the main, a successful one.

Even the much discussed expatriation, Henry James's decision to live in England rather than in America, seems to have had an economic aspect as well. After publication of Roderick Hudson, Henry James went to New York, where he stayed exactly six months. According to Edel,

He seems almost literally to have sat at his work-table day and night and "scribbled," as he put it, in a kind of rage of endeavor to see how much he could earn. . . . He had to read three or four books, and write about them, to earn as much as he could gain from a single travel article. What he got from his New York stay was the confirmation that it was better economy for him to live in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

The decision to live in Europe, then, was preceded by a practical trial of the literary vocation in his own country, and his choice of Europe was based on sound business reasoning.

The idea of going to Europe to make money may have been rather new, but the idea of going for educational or cultural purposes was almost as old as America itself. Milton Plesur remarks, "Ever since 1766 when the aging Benjamin Franklin visited in the University of Göttingen, Teutonic universities had attracted thousands of American students." After the American Civil War, however, the stream of travelers reached

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<sup>10</sup>H. Wayne Morgan, editor, The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal, (Syracuse, New York, 1963), p. 159.

<sup>11</sup>Edel, The Conquest of London, pp. 181-182.

flood tide. According to this historian, "By the time Reconstruction was completed, some 30,000 American travelers were reported in Europe. Business expansion in the 1880's meant more money, leisure, and travel for the restless nouveaux riches."<sup>12</sup> Many of these were American businessmen, married, wealthy, often retired at an early age, traveling with their families, and from these Henry James was to draw subjects for some of his fiction. In his early fiction he was to show them as tolerant of culture, even when they seemed unwilling to absorb it.

None of these cited instances of James's concern with money and business literally contradicts Parrington's negative opinion of James's understanding of important American phenomena, but considered together they do lead to a modified interpretation of Parrington's unfavorable estimate. If Henry James really was a "self-deceived romantic," it was not because he was himself unacquainted with pressing financial necessity; and if he did prefer to write of the activities of the leisure class, it was not because he was too secure himself to know of any other kind of life.

Undoubtedly James's feelings about the American businessman were mixed. His memoirs, intended originally as a biography of his brother, William, developed into his own story. Interspersed with family recollections are references

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<sup>12</sup>Morgan, The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal, p. 155.

which postulate neither a negative nor a positive attitude toward the American businessman. It was the American way to be in business and to make money largely, yet James seemed unsure whether this was a good thing or a bad. Because of these mixed feelings, James himself in his memoirs may be partly responsible for the inaccurate ideas about his interest in business. The novelist's glamorous New York cousins, many of whom were in business, receive more attention than his own immediate family, about whom he remarks, "We were never in a single case, I think, for two generations, guilty of a stroke of business."<sup>13</sup> The quotation bears repetition well, for it is charming; but it throws a deceptively delicate, patrician light on the novelist's background. In this statement, the mellow glow of recall did not fall on James's own energetic and lifelong series of business negotiations with editors and publishers, or, in middle life, with actors and producers of theatricals. Also overlooked were the unsuccessful "cottonlands in Florida," a southern plantation which the "easily beguiled" elder James helped to purchase for the younger brothers, Wilky and Bob. Despite the fact that the crops raised by the younger sons "refused alike, it seemed, to come and to go,"<sup>14</sup> Serenola was certainly a business venture. Edel, drawing on private papers of the

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<sup>13</sup>James, Autobiography, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 461.

James family, throws additional light on the business enterprises which James, in the famous quotation, forgets:

When the war was over, Wilky and Bob, flushed with victory and imbued with the cause for which they had fought, embarked on a courageous if misguided venture: they set out to be plantation owners in Florida with paid Negro labor, as if the South no longer considered them "enemy" once the last shot was fired. They struggled valiantly, risked their lives, lost large sums of money advanced to them by their father, and finally gave up. The rest of Wilky's brief life was a series of efforts to find a place for himself in a disjointed America; sociable, as always, improvident, he drifted finally westward, worked as a railway clerk and died at forty after a period of prolonged ill-health. Robertson lived into our century, a brilliant, erratic individual, gifted, witty, deeply unhappy. Henry called him "our one gentleman of leisure." He too worked for a railroad for a while; he tried to paint, he wrote verses, he travelled and he experienced a series of religious conflicts much like his father--for a while he found solace in Catholicism, then he rebelled against the Church's authority and turned to the family religion, Swedenborgianism.

He died the same year as William, in 1910. . . .<sup>15</sup>

William James, the elder brother, became a successful medical doctor, psychologist, and teacher, supported a family, managed over half of his father's estate after the latter's death, and in time acquired an international reputation as a philosopher. Of those "two generations," the only one really not guilty of a single stroke of business seems to have been Henry James Senior. The novelist, in his memoirs, mentions that management of Henry Senior's share of the

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<sup>15</sup>Edel, The Untried Years, pp. 189-190.

original estate was in the hands of a maternal uncle, Robertson Walsh. Perhaps this was part of the problem. To accept the Calvinism of Grandfather William James would be to reject the opinions of his father. There is, in the memoirs, despite a determined, sweetly filial tone, an undercurrent of embarrassment with regard to the impracticality of Henry James Senior.

Some adjustmental difficulty for all of the James children was inevitable, since they were reared in a contrived, somewhat artificial environment where a definite effort was made to separate them from the mainstream of American culture. The memories of the aging novelist include recollection of a youthful dismay at perceiving the gap between the values which prevailed in his household and those of his play-fellows:

I remember well how when we were all young together we had, under pressure of the American ideal in that matter, then so rigid, felt it tasteless and even humiliating that the head of our little family was not in business. . . . Such had never been the case with the father of any boy of our acquaintance; the business in which the boy's father gloriously was stood forth inveterately as the very first note of our comrade's impressiveness. We had no note of that sort to produce, and I perfectly recover the effect of my own repeated appeal to our parent for some presentable account of him that would prove us respectable.<sup>16</sup>

Facetious replies from Henry Senior did not fill this need for an identity; the novelist was to remember his father's answers to his own recurrent question as "strange unheard-of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

attributions, such as would have made us ridiculous in our special circles."<sup>17</sup> Henry James Junior's youthful sense of isolation, of envy for those who were "so other,"<sup>18</sup> may have stemmed directly from this lack of identification in a society where what one was depended on what one did, that is, on one's business connection. In this passage James even recalls the name (Simpson) of the schoolmate who "crushed" him with the information "that the author of his being . . . was in the business of a stevedore."<sup>19</sup>

The relationship between identity and occupation was to remain a problem area for Henry James; it caused the boy acute embarrassment, and as an older man he remembered it vividly. The stern Presbyterianism of William James of Albany, against which the elder Henry James had rebelled, was still a force in his grandson's day. According to this ethic, prosperity was the outward sign of an inward grace. The spiritually elect were expected to exercise diligence and frugality as a religious obligation. Material blessings would inevitably follow, but work itself had a positive value. Members of all major Protestant denominations were carefully observant of the Biblical injunction, "Six days shalt thou labour,"<sup>20</sup> for idleness was considered a sin.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>20</sup> Exodus, 20:9.

A partial solution to the problem of identity in a work-oriented society was supplied by the younger brother, Bob, who, when "challenged" about his identification "was ready not only with the fact that our parent 'wrote,' but with the further fact that he had written Lectures and Miscellanies James."<sup>21</sup> Son Henry's eventual solution seems to have been to decide that everyone else was out of step, and to place an equally high, equally arbitrary value on leisure. Following his description of this childish dissatisfaction, the novelist went on to insist that "we in particular of our father's house actually profited more than we lost,"<sup>22</sup> a rather curious use of business terminology, and James then referred to the prevailing culture as "a danger after all escaped."<sup>23</sup>

A great deal has been written about Henry James's duality of sentiment concerning religion, but the connection between religion and business which then existed has not been stressed. Certainly the novelist recounted his childish feelings of deprivation over "our pewless state,"<sup>24</sup> and he seems to have found the elder Henry's sweeping invitation to accept all churches a poor substitute for a formal religious affiliation in childhood. If the connection between business and the Protestant ethic has eluded commentators, however, it

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<sup>21</sup>James, Autobiography, pp. 278-279.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

did not escape Henry James. He wrote rather feelingly in his memoirs about the "framework, ecclesiastical and mercantile, squared at us as with reprobation from other households."<sup>25</sup> The memoirs indicate that perhaps kindly neighbors were, from time to time, inclined to minister to the little barbarians of the James household. If so, it was not appreciated.

Although Henry James confessed that as a young man he paid little attention to the Swedenborgian notions of his father--and even expressed curiosity about his own youthful lack of curiosity--the novelist took pains in his memoirs to stress the adequacy of his family's spiritual resources. In A Small Boy and Others, he described the James children's "religious instruction" as "plenty, and of the most charming and familiar [kind]." <sup>26</sup> In Notes of a Son and Brother, James insisted that his father's religion "met, with a beautiful good faith and the easiest sufficiency, every other when such came up: those of education, acquisition, material vindication, what is called success generally."<sup>27</sup> The wording is curious, but revealing: three business terms follow the solitary intellectual term. The father's system, actually violently anti-business, is here re-worked to cover the "framework" of the prevailing religio-business ethic of James's Presbyterian grandfather, and perhaps of the majority of young Henry's neighbors as well.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 336-337.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 336.

If attempted rationalization and repressions are obvious here, the editing which took place in the writing of the memoirs is not always so readily apparent. Edel supplies the information that Henry James repressed details of their family excursions to Europe, and that James deliberately created the impression that there was only one expedition in his youth when actually there were two. According to Edel, James asked his nephew not to "give my Small Boy away,"<sup>28</sup> and in a letter to T. S. Perry at the time of publication he "confessed that he suppressed the 1859 journey to Europe to avoid giving the impression that his father was 'too irresponsible and too saccadé in his generous absence of plan and continuity.'"<sup>29</sup>

Just how much of this sort of rearrangement the writer of the memoirs actually indulged in would be impossible to say, since James destroyed most of his own papers in middle life. It would, however, be incorrect to imply that no real sympathy existed in Henry James, the novelist, for his father's "ideas." The less attractive side of Calvinism, its harshness, its overpowering concern with self-salvation, its joyless concentration on labor in this life for repose in the next, all of which the elder Henry was fond of pointing out, must have been early visible to his second son. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Edel, The Untried Years, pp. 137-138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.

memoirs, James was to recall, from his own family, a disagreeable demonstration of Calvinistic shortcomings. A "cousin Helen"<sup>30</sup> (Helen Wyckoff Perkins), who had had the care of her simpleminded brother, challenged young Henry's imagination in childhood. Believing that her ward was "not to be trusted,"<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Perkins treated him to a severely curtailed allowance and a great deal of supervision. His unhappy facial expression and uncomplaining acquiescence while he was "stinted and captive,"<sup>32</sup> were recalled by the novelist as "simply heroic."<sup>33</sup> When the young Henry read Dickens's novel, David Copperfield, he saw a parallel. Comparison of cousin Helen and her brother, also a Henry, with the Dickens characters was to the disadvantage of Helen:

There were disparities indeed: Mr. Dick was the harmless lunatic on that lady's premises, but she admired him and appealed to him; lunatics, in her generous view, might be oracles, and there is no evidence, if I correctly remember, that she kept him low. Our Mr. Dick was suffered to indulge his passions but on ten cents a day, while his fortune, under conscientious, under admirable care--cousin Helen being no less the wise and keen woman of business than the devoted sister--rolled up and became large; likewise Miss Trotwood's inmate hadn't at all the perplexed brooding brow, with the troubled fold in it, that represented poor Henry's only form of criticism of adverse fate.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>James, Autobiography, p. 80.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

After Helen died, the unfortunate brother passed into the hands of her cousin, "our admirable Aunt,"<sup>35</sup> who seems to have been of an entirely different character. She seems, in fact, to have been rather unscrupulous. This "admirable" woman helped the simple Henry to prove that he was still "harmless and blameless"<sup>36</sup> when supplied with funds. As James tells it,

He "handled" dollars as decently, and just as profusely, as he had handled dimes; the only light shade on the scene--except of course for its being so belated, which did make it pathetically dim--was the question of how nearly he at all measured his resources. Not his heart, but his imagination, in the long years, had been starved; and though he was now all discreetly and wisely encouraged to feel rich, it was rather sadly visible that, thanks to almost half a century of over-discipline, he failed quite to rise to his estate. He did feel rich, just as he felt generous; the misfortune was only in his weak sense for meanings.<sup>37</sup>

The happiness of the feeble-minded one made the aunt "admirable," and created a "dazzling dénouement,"<sup>38</sup> vindication for simple Henry, but he lacked the wit to "rise to his estate." The covert dismay of the delicately-hinting aunt when presented with a bag of popcorn instead of "cheques for hundreds"<sup>39</sup> is delightful to imagine, but the behavior of Henry is attributed to bad after-effects of the misguided meanness of Henry's former (Calvinist) keeper-sister. The

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

"kind" aunt's position is not disguised: "The ideal solution would be his flashing to intelligence just long enough to apprehend the case and, of his own magnanimous movement, sign away everything [to her]; but that was a fairy-tale stroke, and the fairies here somehow stood off."<sup>40</sup> In Henry James's account of it, the only thing that restrained his aunt's eagerness was a fear of "legal process for undue influence."<sup>41</sup> Yet, James seems to have found this affable con-woman far more attractive than the self-righteously virtuous Helen.

James tells this little anecdote as a tale, and the hero, of course, is the mute, uncomplaining idiot who meets persecution and misunderstanding with resignation and sealed lips. The gallantry of his not taking any kind of action is more characteristic of Henry James's late fictional heroes than those of the early period, but it is interesting to note that this little story incorporates a whole constellation of Jamesian elements around a core of business. The pious, good businesswoman is the villainess, despite the fact that she "lived and died without an instant's visitation of doubt as to the due exercise of her authority."<sup>42</sup> The apprehensive fortune hunter is the kind fairy godmother, balked, however, in her efforts to see that "bounty might blessedly flow."<sup>43</sup> The ambiguity of Henry James's treatment of good and evil in

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

his fiction, if the memoirs correctly reflect his childish opinions, may have stemmed in part from childhood observation of disagreeable people who were 'good' by Calvinistic standards, and people who were 'bad' by the same standards, but who were nevertheless kind, considerate, and charming. James's attitude toward the American business man, at least, was somewhat ambiguous throughout his literary career.

The Swedenborgianism of Henry James's father may have indirectly influenced James's attitudes toward business and businessmen. The essence of the elder James's creed seems to have been a belief that God was present in all men; therefore, no human being was superior to another. If all men were equal, then any efforts to influence, manipulate, coerce, or use another human being were sins against the God within. Religious organizations and civilizations themselves existed to exert influence, and were therefore bad. Business involved manipulation of goods (in Henry Junior's stories it often involved manipulation of funds), and business activities might conceivably involve manipulation of people. Business, so closely associated with the detested Presbyterianism, was therefore evil to the elder Henry James. Henry Junior found himself generally more in sympathy with the diffidence of his father's creed than with the chilly and dogmatic self-righteousness of conventional Calvinism.

While Henry James Junior recognized the business-morality of his grandfather as the prevailing one, the ethic associated

with identity and power, he also had a clear view of the abuses that this system led to. Over the years, the conflict almost resolved itself in favor of his father's attitude, but traces of the dominant business ethic remain. It was difficult for James to disassociate himself completely from prevailing ideas and influences of his time. He was born into the age of business. After the industrial revolution, the businessman was the leader, the moulder of opinion. Present-day historians cite the popular spread of the theory of Social Darwinism as one example of this influence; businessmen of that time found Spencer's "survival of the fittest" doctrine<sup>44</sup> to be congenial to their exercise of ruthless free enterprise. According to Robert Falk, "Money, in this 'golden age of business,' was a frequent literary motif. Juvenile readers eagerly swallowed the long series of success stories by Horatio Alger, Jr., which painted the rainbow possibilities of wealth amidst degradation and poverty."<sup>45</sup>

It is not surprising that such a generally pervasive atmosphere of business should have some influence on the young novelist. Even his passionately opposed father seems at one time to have been touched by the popular trend. Although Henry Junior was to declare with pride in his memoirs that at the school of Richard Pulling Jenks "we were

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<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston, 1967), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup>Morgan, The Gilded Age, p. 199.

not . . . inordinately prepared for 'business,'"<sup>46</sup> at the next institution which he and William attended James was to recall,

. . . strange neighbours and deskfellows who, not otherwise too objectionable, were uncanny and monstrous through their possession, cultivation, imitation of ledgers, daybooks, double-entry, tall pages of figures, interspaces streaked with oblique ruled lines that weirdly "balanced," whatever that might mean, and other like horrors. Nothing in truth is more distinct to me than the tune to which they were, without exception, at their ease on such ground--unless it be my general dazzled, humiliated sense, through those years, of the common, the baffling, mastery, all round me, of a hundred handy arts and devices.<sup>47</sup>

Henry James Senior, then, had lodged his two elder sons with "Messrs, Forest and Quackenboss," for the winter of 1854-1855 to learn the "theory and practice of book-keeping."<sup>48</sup> The instruction was wasted on Henry Junior, dreaming of the impending trip to Europe, but in later life he was to find himself handicapped by his lack of useful business information.

In The American Scene, the "restless analyst" as James termed himself at the time, returned to an America from which he had been absent twenty years. The crashing commercialism of the nation both thrilled and appalled him. The American Scene, which Maxwell Geismar calls "one of the weirdest social documentaries ever to be written,"<sup>49</sup> deals almost entirely with

<sup>46</sup>James, Autobiography, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-128.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>49</sup>Maxwell Geismar, Henry James and the Jacobites (Boston, 1963), p. 9.

business, at least with business as Henry James understood it. James's response is an interesting commentary on his feelings about the American world of business at the turn of the century:

Yet was it after all that those monsters of the mere market, as I have called them, had more to say, on the question of "effect," than I had at first allowed?--since they are the element that looms largest for me . . . of "downtown" seen and felt from the inside. "Felt"--I use that word, I dare say, all presumptuously, for a relation to matters of magnitude and mystery that I could begin neither to measure nor to penetrate, hovering about them only in magnanimous wonder, staring at them as at a world of immovably-closed doors behind which immense "material" lurked, material for the artist, the painter of life, as we say, who shouldn't have begun so early and so fatally to fall away from possible initiations. This sense of a baffled curiosity, an intellectual adventure forever renounced, was surely enough a state of feeling, and indeed in presence of the different half-hours, as memory presents them, at which I gave myself up to the thrill of Wall Street (by which I mean that of the whole wide edge of the whirlpool), and the too accepted, too irredeemable ignorance, I am at a loss to see what intensity of response was wanting.<sup>50</sup>

If Henry James felt any permanent regret that he had neglected the area of business, his feeling was somewhat neutralized by his conviction that his inability to understand was a "settled" one.<sup>51</sup> In his late fiction, the novelist did attempt to handle the subject of contemporary business; for despite his lack of specific knowledge and his occasional tendency to

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<sup>50</sup> Henry James, The American Scene, edited by Leon Edel (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

fantasy and romance, he remained at heart a realistic writer. His lack of specific detail about business, however, was to be a serious handicap to him in his efforts to write of twentieth century America.

The word "downtown," which James placed in quotation marks, had a particular value for the author. As Edel explains, "He later came to give New York's Uptown and Downtown special meanings related to money. Downtown was the world of the money-makers that he didn't know and couldn't write about."<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Uptown was where the women pursued lives of leisure while the men were away at work. In Edel's opinion, this circumstance, Henry James's limited knowledge of business, is one of the reasons for the dominance of the feminine element in the writing of Henry James.

Since the publication of Vernon Parrington's famous remarks, there has been a curious reversal of critical opinion with regard to Henry James, his era, and his outlook. After years of crying him down, critics have for the past two decades tended to place increasingly higher value on his concepts, particularly those dealing with business and society. Rather than being castigated or dismissed as an effete observer of the petty intrigues of high society, Henry James

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<sup>52</sup>Edel, The Untried Years, p. 103.

has been recognized as a penetrating social critic. F.W. Dupee, for example, describes James as "in advance of his age."<sup>53</sup> Geismar, provoked by a chorus of praise which he thought founded on very flimsy support, complains in 1962 that,

James has become an institution. He is considered today not only a major figure in world literature, but, along with Melville, perhaps, as the greatest American artist; or sometimes as the American writer of modern times.

Now I don't wish to deny Henry James the kind of belated justice and recognition which has come to him, and which in part he surely deserves. But he deserves it for different reasons, I believe, than those which are generally advanced for his art.<sup>54</sup>

Geismar's dissenting opinion engendered considerable controversy. His description of The Princess Casamassima, the subject of much scholarly enthusiasm in the fifties, as "one of James's poorest and most tedious novels"<sup>55</sup> went counter to the prevailing current; and his designation of The Ambassadors as "one of the silliest and most uninformed novels about American business and French art alike"<sup>56</sup> provoked spirited rejoinders from those who shared F. O. Matthiessen's enthusiasm for late-James. Edward Stone's The Battle of the Books, for example, is a reply to Geismar.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup>F. W. Dupee, Henry James

<sup>54</sup>Geismar, Henry James and the Jacobites, pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>57</sup>Edward Stone, The Battle of the Books: Some Aspects of Henry James (Athens, Ohio, 1964), passim.

The critical interest in Henry James and his relationship with the "Gilded Age," or the "golden age of American business," indicates that a chronological study of the American businessman, as this character appears in James's fiction, may have some value. James, despite his modesty, did have some general knowledge of business and was an acute and penetrating observer of people. Accordingly, this brief study will trace the American businessman's progress through the writings of Henry James in three stages: the early novels and tales, a period generally considered to end in 1881 with the publication of James's first completely mature novel, The Portrait of a Lady; a transition period in which James devoted himself partially to play writing and innovations in the writing of fiction; and the period beginning in 1902 which is usually referred to as late-James.

In such a study, it is important to remember that the hard and fast line between business and professional people which exists today had not come into being at the close of the American Civil War. In the booming post-war economy, doctors and lawyers often made fortunes by investments which were in no way connected with the practice of medicine or law. Accordingly, the term businessman in this study will simply be understood to mean a maker of money. Since Henry James at times presented female characters as makers of money, the usual sex distinction implied by the term will have to be waived in discussion of certain works of fiction.

To consider in detail all of James's writings would exceed the scope of this study; only those novels and stories which deal most obviously and directly with American businessmen will be included. The list includes the following, arranged by period: (early James) "My Friend Bingham," "Travelling Companions," "Guest's Confession," Roderick Hudson, The American, "Daisy Miller," "An International Episode," "The Pension Beaurepas," "A Bundle of Letters," Washington Square, and The Portrait of a Lady; (transitional period) "The Siege of London," "Lady Barbarina," "Pandora," The Reverberator, "The Coxon Fund," "The Altar of the Dead," and "Mrs. Medwin"; (late James) The Ambassadors, The Golden Bowl, "The Jolly Corner," "Crapy Cornelia," "A Round of Visits," The Outcry, and The Ivory Tower.

The order of this list, of necessity rather arbitrary, is by date of publication. No particular attempt has been made to use a consistent edition of James's works, since the subject under consideration does not significantly involve revisions and emendations. However, the earliest texts available have been used in preference to later revised versions as being more expressive of the author's views at the time of writing.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY PERIOD

Of the forty-two works of fiction which constitute the early output of Henry James, eleven have American businessmen as major or minor characters. In James's third published story, the hero is one of the New York rentiers, a class with which James was familiar from childhood; but the story is told by a working businessman, and the setting is American. Four years later, James published a story with a European setting in which he explored briefly the idea, then popular,<sup>1</sup> that the American businessman was one of Nature's noblemen. Four of James's best-known early novels have American businessmen as characters, and in The American, a businessman is the hero.

James considered himself primarily a realistic writer and usually created characters from people whom he had observed directly. For this reason, the author does not portray the businessman in the act of making his money but rather as James himself observed him: wealthy, often retired, usually married and traveling with his family, respectful of

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston, 1967), p. 39.

culture even when unappreciative of it, good-natured, generous and self-sufficient. The slow growth of international trade, a result of high post-Civil War tariffs, made pleasure the usual object of the American businessman traveling abroad.

For the most part, James's American businessmen during the early period are shrewd, honest, outspoken, and somewhat idealistic. James, however, seemed to feel that these individuals made a distinction between business dealings and family relationships. It is possible that in James's early enthusiasm for the British aristocracy he affected a polite disregard of commerce, but he was nevertheless explicitly interested in the wise use of wealth; in the early fiction James does usually tell how his characters made their pile. Even when James's treatment of the American businessman is satirical, it is never unkind; the villains in the early works are Italian or French, or, blackest of all, Europeanized Americans, whom James seems to have considered a race apart.

The only business crime in James's early fiction is swindling, a motif which recurs through all three periods of his fiction, but details are furnished only in the early period. The stories and novels of the early period show an attempt by James to do justice to the American businessman as a type. James, aware of his lack of specific knowledge, tried to avoid the areas in which he was deficient.

He reveals, however, even in these early tales, his ambivalent feelings about his businessmen's Calvinistic attitudes toward wealth and capital. It is possible that James intended, in his early fiction as a whole, to hold up an ideal of behavior for wealthy Americans.

"My Friend Bingham" (1866) is the first story of James's with a businessman, George Bingham, the protagonist, as a man of considerable wealth, who in his early twenties has inherited his father's fortune. Although the story does not state precisely how the elder Bingham made his money, it does suggest real estate. George is described first as inheriting a "large property," and then as inheriting a "handsome property," and the fact that he does not have work is stressed.<sup>2</sup> This was a typically American situation even before the Civil War, and much of the great wealth of the novelist's grandfather was in unearned increment. Rising property values enabled such heirs to live well without much risk or exertion. George Bingham, however, profits from the rentier system without approving of it. The unnamed narrator, whose work is indicated only by the phrase "my office desk,"<sup>3</sup> agrees with Bingham's low opinion of the usefulness and morality of those enriched by unearned increment, and recalls Bingham's family as ignorant and vain.

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<sup>2</sup>Henry James, The Madonna of the Future and Other Early Stories (New York, 1962), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

The narrator further remarks, "It was their fortune to make a splendid figure while they lived, and I feel little compunction in hinting at their poverty in certain human essentials."<sup>4</sup> The hint is rather vague, but from what follows it appears that at least part of this poverty in human essentials was lack of "knowledge of the real world," and no "knowledge of human nature."<sup>5</sup> The young author may simply have been trying to say that Bingham's father was complacent and coldly selfish, as well as ignorant and vain. This polite ambivalence was to be a characteristic attitude of the novelist toward the makers of fortunes, however, and it did not change essentially throughout his long career. Although James paid due tribute to "splendid figures," perhaps a shade enviously, their ignorance, vanity, and "poverty in certain human essentials" were drawbacks which he seldom overlooked.

In this story, James does seem to be holding up an ideal of behavior for wealthy Americans. Bingham, for instance, is "par excellence a moralist, a man of sentiment."<sup>6</sup> He is, it would seem, a distinct improvement over the previous generation of getters and spenders. When Bingham accidentally shoots a small child, however, he reacts with an appalling composure: "I don't see how I could endure to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

have mutilated the poor little mortal. To kill a human being is, after all, the least injury you can do him."<sup>7</sup> It seems to bother Bingham much more that the child's mother, Mrs. Hicks, is "utterly poor" and has only "a hundred dollars a year . . . worse than nothing."<sup>8</sup> This painful condition Bingham later remedies by marrying the bereaved woman, and the moral retribution or expiation of both turns out to be that due to a "fantastic principle of equity--she has never again become a mother."<sup>9</sup> The characterization of George Bingham is on the whole rather distasteful, even though James tells the story through an admiring narrator. At this stage in James's career it is possible if not probable that James himself actually tended to identify with the narrator rather than to hold him up for ironic effect.

In "My Friend Bingham," then, there seems to be a thought that the businessman, though inadequate in his own right, can produce excellent improvements in his family and social status as a result of his canny handling of business affairs or money-grubbing. This view certainly ties in with the James family's history and is a justification of his unbusinesslike father.

In "Travelling Companions" (1870) Mark Evans, an elderly, widowed, successful, retired stockbroker from Arminta, New Jersey, is traveling in Italy with his daughter, Charlotte,

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

when they meet the narrator, Mr. Brooke, an American who has been studying at a German university. Evans is a secondary character and more of a type; for this reason he is both instructive and interesting. Good-natured about indulging his daughter's desire for culture, Evans is himself not interested in culture or tradition. While the young people moon over Leonardo's painting of the Last Supper, Evans watches a copyist at work; when the youngsters trudge to the top of a church dome, the businessman first passes the time watching the pretty Italian ladies at prayer, then leans his chair against the wall and naps. James undoubtedly considered travel to acquire culture a wise use of wealth, but there is a strange combination of admiration and disapproval in the narrator's description of Evans:

He was in many ways an excellent representative American. Without taste, without culture or polish, he nevertheless produced an impression of substance in character, keenness in perception, and intensity in will, which effectually redeemed him from vulgarity. It often seemed to me, in fact, that his good-humored tolerance and easy morality, his rank self-confidence, his nervous decision and vivacity, his fearlessness of either gods or men, combined in proportions of which the union might have been very fairly termed aristocratic. His voice, I admit, was of the nose, nasal; but possibly, in the matter of utterance, one eccentricity is as good as another. At all events, with his clear, cold gray eye, with that just faintly impudent, more than level poise of his ample chin, with those two hard lines which flanked the bristling wings of his gray moustache, with his general expression of unchallenged security and practical aptitude and incurious scorn of tradition, he impressed the sensitive beholder as a man of incontestable force.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Henry James, *The Complete Tales of*, edited by Leon Edel, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961- ). II. 198.

There is a certain amount of national pride here, but James seems rather doubtful about accepting Evans as Nature's nobleman. When the young people miss the last train back from a sightseeing trip to Padua and are forced to spend the night in the town's only hotel, Evans is pleased that Mr. Brooke is willing to offer marriage to Charlotte, but even more pleased when she refuses him. The narrator's pleasure and puzzlement over the Evans's scorn of convention seems to reflect James's own attitude toward American self-sufficiency. James appeared to have more faith in the second generation's wise use of wealth, however; when Evans dies after a one-day illness, Charlotte and Mr. Brooke marry and continue their sight-seeing together.

Six years after his first publication, Henry James undertook to write a story with American businessmen as the three major characters. "Guest's Confession" (1872) is longer than the previous stories in which James wrote about businessmen and much more complicated in plot. The three businessmen are developed rather carefully and fully and have sharply individualized traits. Edgar Musgrave, an example of the Puritan ethic carried to the extreme in business, is honest but extremely disagreeable; he is vain about his business ability and his unsentimental objectivity. Edgar feels himself bound by duty to work hard and is so self-righteous as to be almost unbearable. David, the

narrator, is not given a last name, but he is Musgrave's step-brother and the central character in the story. David does not actively participate in money making, but is quite willing to enjoy his wealth. For this reason, Edgar's charge that David is hypocritical in his disdain for business activity generates some sympathy for Edgar. Edgar's business interests seem to be rather diversified; he has bonds and "Pennsylvania stock,"<sup>11</sup> as well as a house in Philadelphia which he has endowed in his will as a twenty-bed hospital. The author, however, represents the intended act of philanthropy as motivated by selfish vanity rather than real charity. Henry James, in his fiction, was never to take an enthusiastic view of such projects. John Guest, the third businessman, is a dapper, pleasant, well-dressed person, but a shady business operator. In this story, James seems to have been more interested in the contrasts between his characters than in the swindle to which Guest eventually confesses. Guest, oddly enough, is represented as more the injured party in the transaction which causes so much trouble. Guest has taken a telegram from Edgar reading "Do as you think best" to another of Edgar's associates, Stevens, and assured the man that this telegram was Edgar's permission to raise money on \$20,000 worth of Edgar's bonds; it was not. Edgar's unexpected checking up has detected the embezzlement

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 432.

before Guest can hope to replace the bonds. Edgar has already taken the case to his lawyers when the story begins. David, the admirable inheritor of wealth, is dismayed by the accidental confrontation of Edgar and Guest at the watering place to which the prostrated Edgar has repaired to recover from the shock of having been cheated. David is far more tolerant of Guest's dandified manner than of Edgar's self-righteous fury, and confesses in his narrative to a dislike of violent scenes. Forced by Edgar to witness Guest's discomfort, David's heart beats "very violently on his [Guest's] behalf."<sup>12</sup> Guest pleads for a "man of the world" attitude from Edgar and says, "I confess to not having been quite square. There! My very dear sir, let me get on my legs again,"<sup>13</sup> as though this handsome concession on his part will make everything right again. When Edgar remains obdurate, Guest pleads a tender desire to indulge his daughter with ample funds as an extenuating circumstance. Edgar snorts, "Did you kiss your daughter the day you juggled away my bonds?"<sup>14</sup>

David, distressed, perceives that the two men simply have different values: "Guest, I felt, was a good-natured sinner. Just as he lacked rectitude of purpose, he lacked rigidity of temper, and he found in the mysteries of his

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 395.

own heart no clue to my step-brother's monstrous implacability."<sup>15</sup> David suggests a compromise: if Edgar will not go to court, Guest will sign a confession and a note for the twenty thousand dollars. Edgar insists that Guest also get down on his knees to beg pardon, and, after a struggle with his self-esteem, Guest does so. To David, this is a "revolting sight," and he sees Edgar "with his hands behind his back" as "solemn and ugly as a miniature idol."<sup>16</sup>

Guest does pay back the money promptly, selling everything but his daughter's books and piano to do so,<sup>17</sup> but Edgar does not return the damaging confession to him. David is astonished to find this out:

"You mean to keep it?" I cried.

"Of course I mean to keep it. Where else would be his punishment?"

There was something vastly grotesque in the sight of this sickly little mortal erecting himself among his pillows as a dispenser of justice, an appraiser of the wages of sin; but I confess that his attitude struck me as more cruel even than ludicrous. I was disappointed. I had certainly not expected Edgar to be generous, but I had expected him to be just, and in the heat of his present irritation he was neither. He was angry with Guest for his excessive promptitude, which had given a sinister twist to his own conduct. "Upon my word," I cried, "you're a veritable Shylock!"<sup>18</sup>

Edgar's rejoinder is that Guest "has committed his fate to Providence,"<sup>19</sup> and David's retort is that Edgar is no

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 395-396.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 423.

gentleman. Here the story demonstrates James's dislike of conventional Calvinism and its outgrowth, Social Darwinism. In James's story, the mannerly con-man comes off better than the strenuous Puritan. David marries Guest's daughter, after burning the incriminating document before the relieved eyes of the embezzler. This burning of an incriminating document was to become a recurrent gimmick in James's writing, but it appears here for the first time. The association of idols with money-making was to return in the late period.

Roderick Hudson (1875) was the first novel acknowledged by Henry James. Although American businessmen are not central to the plot, several appear in sketches throughout the book. Rowland Mallet, the central character, is a young man of fortune whose only act of business has been to break his father's will. The story is told from Rowland's point of view. Rowland's father, dead some years before the story begins, is nevertheless reconstructed in some detail by the author:

Jonas Mallet at the time of his marriage was conducting with silent shrewdness a small unpromising business. Both his shrewdness and his silence increased with his years, and at the close of his life he was an extremely well-dressed, well-brushed gentleman with a frigid grey eye, who said little to anybody, but of whom everybody said that he had a very handsome fortune.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Henry James, Roderick Hudson (London, 1961), p. 26.

Here again it may be seen that James was critical of the chilly manner of successful Calvinist businessmen. The elder Mallet's "rigid and consistent will"<sup>21</sup> is represented as harshly overbearing, and his desire to see that his son is not "corrupted by luxury"<sup>22</sup> is depicted as narrow-minded and unnecessary. Rowland himself is disdainful of business activity, but is nevertheless motivated by a desire to spend his money wisely and unselfishly. Critics tend to see Rowland as representative of the New England conscience; certainly he is serious-minded, modest, responsible, and in no way objectionable. At the beginning of the novel, Rowland feels a certain amount of guilt, or perhaps it is simply a sense of apology, for his lack of interest in money-making. He has determined to go to Europe to live because "the burden of idleness is less heavy than here [America]." <sup>23</sup> Rowland's well-intentioned sponsorship of Roderick Hudson's study of art in Italy culminates in tragedy when Roderick discovers that he lacks the finer discrimination and insight which distinguish the true artist.

Besides the elder Mallet, two other American businessmen appear in Roderick Hudson, although the treatment of them is superficial and sketchy. These are Barnaby Striker, the pompous country lawyer with whom Roderick Hudson has

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

been "reading law at the rate of a page a day,"<sup>24</sup> and Mr. Leavenworth, the borax baron, who commissions a statue from Roderick after the young man has progressed somewhat in the study of art. Striker is a country Philistine and Leavenworth is an urban one. Despite disagreeable manners and contempt for nude statuary, Striker out of friendship has been handling Mrs. Hudson's property for her and out of kindness has been coaching Roderick for the law. His parting lecture to Rowland Mallet reveals his character:

I'm a plain practical old boy, content to follow an honourable profession in a free country. I didn't go off to the Old World to learn my business; no one took me by the hand; I had to grease my wheels myself, and such as I am I'm a self-made man, every inch of me! . . . If your young gentleman [Roderick] finds things easy and has a good time of it and says he likes the life, it's a sign that--as I may say--you had better step round to the office and look at the books. . . . No offense intended. I hope you'll have a first-rate time.<sup>25</sup>

Leavenworth, traveling in Rome after the death of his wife and his retirement "from the proprietorship of large mines of borax in Pennsylvania,"<sup>26</sup> is described enthusiastically by Miss Blanchard: "A very worthy man. The architect of his own fortune--which is magnificent. One of nature's gentlemen!"<sup>27</sup> In the novel, Leavenworth is a moralizing bore.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

As has been pointed out, in Roderick Hudson "the importance of money . . . is more generally pervasive than specific,"<sup>28</sup> but "the point is made quite obvious that giving money away--no matter what good motives--is a very risky business for both giver and taker."<sup>29</sup> The money-makers may seem to have been treated rather badly by James in this novel, but compared with the conditions which prevailed in the America of his day, James's businessmen in Roderick Hudson compare favorably with their real-life contemporaries. Robert L. Heilbroner gives some helpful background on the period:

In America a man was as good as he proved himself, and his success needed no validation from a genealogist. Hence, while there was not too much to differentiate the dark and sweated mills of New England from the gloomy mills of old England, when one looked into the manners and behavior of their masters, the resemblance lessened. For while the European capitalist was still caught in the shadow of a feudal past, the American money-maker basked in the sun--there were no inhibitions on his drive to power or in the exuberant enjoyment of his wealth. In the bubbling last half of the nineteenth century, money was the stepping stone to social recognition in the United States, and having acquired a passport of suitable wealth, the American millionaire needed no further visa for his entree into the upper classes.

And so the game of money-making in the New World was a rougher and less gentlemanly affair than the competitive struggle abroad. The

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<sup>28</sup>Wilba Shaw Swearingen, "Money in Four of the Early Novels of Henry James," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1966, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

stakes were higher and the chances for success were greater. The<sup>30</sup> sportsmanship, accordingly, was somewhat less.

Although James represented the money-makers in Roderick Husdon as rather disagreeable people, they are represented as honest, and, in the case of Striker, as having a kind heart under a rough exterior.

In The American (1876), James selected an American businessman for the hero of a rather romantic novel. Christopher Newman, the American businessman, has retired at the age of thirty-five from the competition of the market place. Newman's early career has a touch of Horatio Alger about it:

When he was fourteen years old, necessity had taken him by his slim young shoulders and pushed him into the street, to earn that night's supper. He had not earned it, but he had earned the next night's, and afterwards, whenever he had none, it was because he had gone without to use the money for something else, a keener pleasure or a finer profit. . . . In his darkest days he had had but one simple, practical impulse--the desire, as he would have phrased it, to see the thing through. He did so at last . . . and made money largely. It must be admitted, rather nakedly, that Christopher Newman's sole aim in life had been to make money . . . . Upon the uses of money, upon what one might do with a life into which one had succeeded in injecting the golden stream, he had up to his thirty-fifth year very scantily reflected.<sup>31</sup>

Newman has been too busy to think his situation over before, but on the way to Wall Street to pay another businessman

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<sup>30</sup>Robert L. Heilbroner, The Worldly Philosophers (New York, 1968), p. 193.

<sup>31</sup>Henry James, The American (New York, 1965), pp. 35-36.

back for a "mean trick,"<sup>32</sup> he has had a sudden revulsion against the corruption of business. He accordingly turns his back on the sixty thousand dollars involved, puts his affairs in the hands of agents, and goes to Europe. Telling his old friend Tristram about this peculiar experience, Newman says, "I had money enough, or if I hadn't I ought to have. I seemed to feel a new man inside my old skin, and I longed for a new world." Newman still shows his business attitude by adding, "When you want a thing so very badly you had better treat yourself to it."<sup>33</sup>

Newman is presented very sympathetically. He is willing to keep an open mind about the fabled Old World, despite some ill treatment. The businessman is straightforward and direct, entirely without false modesty. His only fault is a failure to realize that the power of money is so limited. He tells his friend that he wants "the best," and adds, "I know the best can't be had for mere money, but I rather think money will do a great deal. In addition, I am willing to take a good deal of trouble."<sup>34</sup> When Newman announces his desire to marry, he is equally frank: "I can give my wife a good deal, so I am not afraid to ask a good deal myself. . . . I want to possess, in a word, the best article on the market."<sup>35</sup> His success, Newman feels, is barren without a beautiful woman

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

to crown it. Madame de Cintr , the young woman whom Mrs. Tristram recommends for Newman's acquisition, seems at first more to fit Mr. Tristram's description, "a great white doll of a woman, who cultivates quiet haughtiness,"<sup>36</sup> than to be the parcel of perfection Mrs. Tristram claims. Newman, however, is enchanted.

The genial millionaire is not hostile to culture, but his open-minded tour of Europe seems to make little impression on his own uncultivated taste. On his return to Paris, after an exhaustive inspection of the art treasures of Europe, Newman's preferences are unchanged:

He had a relish for luxury and splendor, but it was satisfied by rather gross contrivances. . . . His idea of comfort was to inhabit very large rooms, have a great many of them, and be conscious of their possessing a number of patented mechanical devices--half of which he should never have occasion to use. The apartments should be light and brilliant and lofty; he had once said that he liked rooms in which you wanted to keep your hat on.<sup>37</sup>

The businessman moves into a garish, gilded, satin-swathed apartment "chiefly furnished with mirrors and clocks," and leaves his trunk in the drawing room for three months.<sup>38</sup> It is only when he sees that this gaudy splendor amuses the suave Valentin de Bellegarde, Madame de Cintr 's brother, that Newman realizes his error in taste. Thus Henry James, despite his sympathy did not attempt to conceal the shortcomings of the American nouveaux riches.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

Valentin warns Newman against the intrigues and prejudice of the old world, even those of his own family:

You have evidently had some surprising adventures; you have seen some strange sides of life, you have revolved to and fro over a whole continent as I walked up and down the Boulevard. You are a man of the world with a vengeance! . . . Happy man, you are strong and you are free. But what the deuce . . . do you propose to do with such advantages? Really to use them you need a better world<sup>39</sup> than this. There is nothing worth your while here.

Since Newman is now in love with Valentin's sister, he parries the question, but the Bellegardes, after a try, reject him because of their snobbish distaste for Newman's commercial background. The older James, revising The American for the New York Edition, was to spot this development as a "queer falsity--of the Bellegardes" who "would positively have jumped then, . . . at my rich and easy American, and not have 'minded' in the least any drawback"<sup>40</sup> of this kind. The idea of what to do with the advantage of freedom, absolute freedom conferred by possession of great wealth, recurs as the central idea of The Portrait of a Lady.

In The American, the family objection forces the lovely Madame de Cintré to enter a convent. The distraught Newman, unable to understand the implacable Bellegardes, nurses his wounded feelings and ideas of revenge. He returns to America

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-117.

<sup>40</sup> Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York, 1962), p. 35.

and tries to renew his old interest in business affairs, but in this he is not successful. "He had nothing to do, his occupation was gone, and it seemed to him that he should never find it again."<sup>41</sup> Only after his return to Paris and his facing the convent where Claire is, to his way of thinking, entombed for life after taking her final vows, is Newman finally able to master his feelings and burn the paper which accuses the Bellegardes of murdering Madame de Cintré's father by negligence. Kermit Vanderbilt has pointed out that Newman's position as the good man wronged is not altogether secure. Vanderbilt claims that Newman, visiting the Duchess, simply realizes that revenge will not get him anywhere, and he abandons his scheme: "What he feels here is mainly a sense of futility rather than a refined sense of right and wrong--or it is, at best, a pragmatic sense of ethics: the revenge is wrong because it apparently will not work."<sup>42</sup> Besides, after hearing Mrs. Tristram's opinion on the matter, Newman does take a quick peek to see if the paper is totally consumed.<sup>43</sup> This final turn of affairs suggests that James's treatment of even his most sympathetic American businessman in the early period is somewhat ambiguous.

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<sup>41</sup>James, The American, p. 375.

<sup>42</sup>Kermit Vanderbilt, "James, Fitzgerald, and the American Self Image," Massachusetts Review, VI (Winter, 1965), p. 296.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

The year following the publication of The American, Henry James scored his first solid popular success with "Daisy Miller: A Study." According to Edel, "The story was promptly pirated in New York and Boston and became a best-seller overnight."<sup>44</sup> Although this success must have gratified James, it could hardly have made him happy that others reaped the financial benefit. The novelette did introduce to the fictional world the free American girl. Daisy's raucous little brother, Randolph, announces, "My father's name is Ezra B. Miller. . . . My father's in Schenectady. He's got a big business. My father's rich, you bet."<sup>45</sup> Since this is the only reference to the American businessman, "Daisy Miller" may have contributed much to Parrington's impression that James was not interested in the American businessman. Daisy's lack of cultivation certainly fits James's opinion concerning the wistful Philistinism of money-mad American men who slave to send their uncouth women-folk to Europe and other centers of culture.

Almost as though he wished to give equal time to opposing points of view, James followed "Daisy Miller" in the same year with "An International Episode," a novelette in which wandering Europeans for a time grope around in the wilds of America. The

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<sup>44</sup> Leon Edel, editor, The Complete Tales of Henry James, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961- ), Vol. IV, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> James, The Complete Tales, IV, 148.

arrival of two young Englishmen, Lord Lambeth and Percy Beaumont, Esq., gives James a chance to satirize both the conservatism of the English and the rather raw appearance of New York City. The pair have a letter of introduction to an American businessman, J. L. Westgate. Both the ten-story office building and the businessman are described in detail, Westgate sympathetically:

He was a tall, lean personage, and was dressed all in fresh white linen; he had a thin, sharp, familiar face, with an expression that was at one and the same time sociable and businesslike, a quick, intelligent eye, and a large brown moustache, which concealed his mouth and made his chin, beneath it, look small.<sup>46</sup> Lord Lambeth thought he looked tremendously clever.

Westgate assures his sweltering visitors that the heat will not last, "nothing unpleasant lasts over here," and adds, "I thought it would be time some of you should be coming along. A friend of mine was saying to me only a day or two ago, 'It's time for the water-melons and the Englishmen.'<sup>47</sup> As a "matter of national pride" the businessman wants all Englishmen to have a good time, and the information that Percy is "by way of being a barrister"<sup>48</sup> and is preparing to bring suit against the Tennessee Central Railroad does not lessen Westgate's cordial reception.

"Leave the Tennessee Central to me, Mr. Beaumont. Some day we'll talk it over, and I guess I can make it square,"<sup>49</sup> Westgate suggests. In the meantime, his guests must go to

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

Newport and stay with his wife and sister-in-law. Asked about the sister-in-law, Westgate replies, "She has always led a very quiet life; she has lived in Boston." When Lord Lambeth professes an interest in visiting Boston, Westgate tells him, "At Boston, you know, you have to pass an examination at the city limits; and when you come away they give you a kind of degree."<sup>50</sup> In the first of the four chapters, James thus gives a clear picture of the New York businessman, friendly and capable, with a rather lively sense of humor.

After this build-up, however, Westgate never appears in the story again. At Newport, Bessie Alden, the sister-in-law remarks, "The gentlemen in American work too much," but adds of Westgate, "he is a perfect husband. But all Americans are that."<sup>51</sup> Others of the Newport crowd chatter to Lord Lambeth, "It was a pity Mr. Westgate was always away; he was a man of the highest ability--very acute, very acute. He worked like a horse and he left his wife--well, to do about as she liked. He liked her to enjoy herself, and she seemed to know how."<sup>52</sup> It is possible that in this story James intended to make Westgate the protagonist of a little comic situation in which the American's superior practical experience would operate in a kindly manner to help the British. If so, James's lack of knowledge of the world of business prevented his developing

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 267-268.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

such a plot. The solution to the problem of the Tennessee Central takes place during Beaumont's absence from Newport, forty-eight hours during which "with Mr. Westgate's assistance, he completely settled this piece of business."<sup>53</sup> James had moved his residence to London shortly after publication of The American, and when he wrote "An International Episode" was in no position to remedy his lack of specific detail. As a result of this difficulty, perhaps, there is an awkward shift in emphasis between the first and the last part of this tale.

In 1879, Henry James presented his reading public with what is perhaps his most touching and disturbing portrait of an American businessman. The story was "The Pension Beaurepas," and the setting for it was Geneva. The unnamed narrator, a young American with literary aspirations, has moved to the Pension Beaurepas because it is economical. Two weeks after his arrival, he meets a fellow-American, Mr. Ruck. Observing Ruck later from the garden, the narrator remarks, "He looked very much bored, and--I don't know why-- I immediately began to feel sorry for him. He was not at all a picturesque personage; he looked like a jaded, faded man of business."<sup>54</sup>

Ruck, it develops, is a New York businessman traveling for his health, and bored beyond belief with "fourteen weeks

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

and a half"<sup>55</sup> of Europe. Ruck accuses his doctors of suggesting European travel because they "didn't know what else to do," and he remarks plaintively, "I wanted to be cured--I didn't want to be transported. I hadn't done any harm."<sup>56</sup> The illness appears to have been a mental one: sleeplessness, loss of appetite, restlessness, inability to walk the short distance from his house to the cars, and loss of interest in business are mentioned in turn by the ailing New Yorker.

When the narrator remarks that Ruck was in need of a holiday, the businessman replies that he had "been paying strict attention to business for twenty-three years," with only Sundays off, but that this exertion had been necessary to reach the "very advantageous position"<sup>57</sup> which he had achieved three years before. "I did a very large business. I was considerably interested in lumber,"<sup>58</sup> he adds. The real trouble with Ruck's health appears to be that "business in the United States is not what it was a short time since. Business interests are very insecure. There seems to be a general falling-off."<sup>59</sup> When the younger man suggests that a slack period in business is ideal for a vacation, Ruck remarks that his wife has had the same idea. His own idea, however, was different:

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 336-337.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

Well, sir, the ground I took was that the worse a man's business is, the more it requires looking after. I shouldn't want to go out to take a walk--not even to go to church--if my house was on fire. Mr firm is not doing the business it was; it's like a sick child, it requires nursing. What I wanted the doctors to do was to fix me up, so that I could go on at home. I'd have taken anything they'd have given me, and as many times a day. I wanted to be right there; I had my reasons; I have them still. But I came off, all the same. <sup>60</sup>

Mrs. Ruck, the wife, is afflicted with the American passion for comparing everything she encounters with the native institutions to which she is accustomed; and her daughter, Sophy, has a mania for shopping. The ladies have left Paris, reluctantly, at the insistence of Mr. Ruck, but despite his ill health they are prepared to nag him until he returns. The narrator feels a certain amount of compassion for the patient Mr. Ruck when Sophy tells him of these plans to return to Paris. Ruck, however, is proud of his wife and daughter, and he is unwilling to discuss financial reverses with females who depend upon him. The narrator's efforts to help come to nothing. When he suggests to Sophy that Switzerland has other attractions than jewelers' shops, she tells him that they have plenty of mountains at home; when he suggests taking a walk, Mr. Ruck tells him, "I ain't a postman."<sup>61</sup> Ruck is as reluctant as his womenfolk to accept his altered financial status.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

Two more Americans, Aurora Church and her Europeanized mamma, are introduced into the story chiefly to emphasize the good points of the Ruck family. Aurora, about Sophy's age, has been brought up à la française.<sup>62</sup> If the Rucks have no social resources, at least they make no complaints. If they lack manners, they are at least open and honest. Mrs. Church is a sly vixen, very like Christina Light's mother in Roderick Hudson, and she has an inflated sense of her own importance; her daughter is a mixed-up little international monstrosity.

While the ladies are about their eternal shopping, Mr. Ruck communes dismally with the New York Herald and announces, "Nine failures in one day." He is now waiting, fatalistically, for his own:

So many houses on fire. . . . When mine catches, I suppose they'll write and tell me--one of these days, when they've got nothing else to do. I didn't get a blessed letter this morning. . . . If I could attend to business for about half an hour, I'd find out something. But I can't, and it's no use talking. The state of my health was never so unsatisfactory as it was about five o'clock this morning.<sup>63</sup>

While the details in this little story are not explicit, the picture James creates is moving and convincing. Ruck is a fully developed character, and his story avoids pathos only because so much of his trouble is his own fault. His lack of firmness with his wife and daughter is, however,

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

represented as owing to excessive good nature rather than shallowness. The narrator, summarizing the Ruck family for the inquiring Mrs. Church, calls Ruck "a really tragic figure."<sup>64</sup> The wife and daughter are simply doing the only thing they know how to do; and since it is the duty, in their opinion, for the father to pay their bills, they see no reason to restrain their extravagance. Ruck, on the other hand, has "been used to doing things in a big way, and he feels 'mean' if he makes a fuss about bills."<sup>65</sup> The failure of Ruck's business is obvious when the narrator finds him sitting gloomily at the American banker's with a pile of crumpled letters in his lap. Mr. Ruck does not feel like eating, but he joins the narrator at breakfast:

But if he ate very little, he talked a great deal; he talked about business, going into a hundred details in which I was quite unable to follow him. His talk was not angry nor bitter; it was a long, meditative, melancholy monologue; if it had been a trifle less incoherent I should almost have called it philosophic.<sup>66</sup>

Again, there are no specific details here, but they are not needed. James is able to cover up his own lack of knowledge about detailed business transactions by having a narrator who likewise does not understand them.

In the same year, 1879, Henry James wrote a much slighter tale, "A Bundle of Letters," in which another pair

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

of American girls, one with her mamma, are lodged in a pension, a Parisian one this time. As the title suggests, letters from various individuals tell the story. Miranda Hope, the girl from Bangor, Maine, is traveling alone and shocking the Europeans by doing so; but she manages quite competently. Her letters are the first and the last of the short tale, and the final one concludes, "Dearest mother, my money holds out, and it is most interesting!"<sup>67</sup>

Miss Violet Ray, writing to a New York girlfriend, begins, "We had hardly got here when father received a telegram saying he would have to come right back to New York. It was for something about his business--I don't know exactly what; you know I never understand those things, never want to."<sup>68</sup> Mr. Ray, unlike Mr. Ruck, is fussy and he also "nags" until he forces his extravagant ladies into some semblance of economy. Violet is not happy about having to move from a hotel to the pension:

It's all humbug, his talking about economy, when every one knows that business in America has completely recovered, that the prostration is all over; and that immense fortunes are being made. We have been economising for the last five years, and I supposed we came abroad to reap the benefits of it.<sup>69</sup>

Despite Violet's having pouted on the sofa for three days, she has been transported to less expensive quarters. Although

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 434.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 435-436.

Henry James is here describing an American businessman with more starch in his makeup than the unfortunate Mr. Ruck, Ray is still rather at the mercy of his womenfolk: "Father lost three steamers in succession by remaining in Paris to argue with me."<sup>70</sup> Although the American businessman appears only indirectly in the story, James creates in "A Bundle of Letters" one more indulgent, hard-working money-maker, determined that his family may enjoy the blessings of European culture despite an unstable economy at home. Both American girls are represented as strong-willed, but Miranda Hope is self-sufficient and capable of managing her money. Violet is spoiled, but James makes it clear that the American businessman who is her father has done much of the spoiling.

Henry James is usually considered to have come to full maturity as a writer in 1880, at which time he published two novels, Washington Square and The Portrait of a Lady.

F. O. Matthiessen humorously calls Washington Square "James' favorite novel with readers who don't really like James,"<sup>71</sup> because of his own preference for the different style of the later works of Henry James. Dr. Sloper, builder of the house in Washington Square, is a successful New York doctor and a canny businessman as well. After his

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>71</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, editor, The American Novels and Stories of Henry James (New York, 1956), pp. x-xi.

marriage to a wealthy and beautiful woman, he manages to establish a flourishing practice and live on the proceeds, not only making twenty thousand dollars a year but contriving to put aside half of this income.

Dr. Sloper, despite his financial success, is determined not to spoil the only surviving member of his family--plain, stolid daughter Catherine. Catherine must sustain herself on a relatively small amount of money because, "It simply appeared to him proper and reasonable that a well-bred young woman should not carry half her fortune on her back."<sup>72</sup> The move to Washington Square is necessitated by the spreading of New York's commercial district. Henry James, despite his disclaimer about business, seems to have had a continuing interest in property, as the following passage indicates:

By the time the Doctor changed his residence the murmur of trade had become a mighty uproar, which was music in the ears of all good citizens interested in the commercial development, as they delighted to call it, of their fortunate isle. Dr. Sloper's interest in this phenomenon was only indirect--though, seeing that, as the years went on, half his patients came to be overworked men of business, it might have been more immediate--and when most of his neighbours' dwellings (also ornamented with granite copings and large fanlights) had been converted into offices, warehouses, and shipping agencies, and otherwise applied to the base uses of commerce, he determined to look out for a quieter home.<sup>73</sup>

The protagonist of Washington Square--shy, overlarge, dull-looking Catherine Sloper--eventually attracts the attention

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-171.

of Morris Townsend, an obvious fortune hunter; and her romantic, addle-pated aunt favors the match. Morris, accompanied by Arthur Townsend, the twenty-year-old stock-broker to whom Catherine's cousin is engaged, calls in Dr. Sloper's absence, and the impressionable Catherine is irreparably smitten.

On meeting Townsend, Dr. Sloper has little difficulty in appraising the young man: "'He has ability,'" the doctor tells himself, "'decided ability; he has a very good head if he chooses to use it. And he is uncommonly well turned out; quite the sort of figure that pleases the ladies. But I don't think I like him.'"<sup>74</sup> Morris, sensing that the girl's father has formed an unfavorable opinion, underhandedly calls when he knows that Dr. Sloper will be out. Ultimately, Dr. Sloper outguesses or outbluffs Townsend. When Catherine, after a year abroad, still doggedly clings to her love for the fortune hunter, Dr. Sloper repeats his threat to disinherit her if she marries Townsend. This effectively disposes of the suitor, who seems to feel Catherine's plainness unpalatable on the mere ten thousand dollars a year she has from her dead mother. Townsend, returning to the courtship after Dr. Sloper's death, encounters a Catherine with her eyes opened. Looking at Townsend's

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

still handsome but hard face, Catherine thinks that "if she had first seen him this way she would not have liked him."<sup>75</sup> She dismisses him.

The character of Dr. Sloper is one of the most unsympathetic in Henry James's extensive gallery. He is depicted as unwittingly sarcastic and cruel, although he has his daughter's interest at heart and is not without a certain tenderness for her. His self-righteous disregard for the feelings of others makes it difficult to see how he maintained such a flourishing practice. Bowden correctly appraises the nature of the conflict in the novel: "Caught between a powerful father acting for her best in the cruelest manner, and a lover acting for her worst in the most charming manner, Catherine can only draw further into her protective shell of apparent passivity."<sup>76</sup> Dr. Sloper embodies the defects of Calvinism in business as James saw them. The doctor's objectivity and lack of sentiment for his daughter and sisters is extremely disagreeable and business-like.

The Portrait of a Lady is one of two works which Henry James was to consider his best. American businessmen in the novel are entirely subordinate to the central figure of Isabel Archer, the independent American girl. There is,

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>76</sup> Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, Connecticut, 1956), pp. 43-44.

however, at the very beginning a new note: the suggestion that having a fortune is itself in some elusive way wrong. This is hinted at in the description of the aged, infirm, expatriated American banker, Daniel Touchett, whose American face bears "an expression of placid acuteness. . . . It seemed to tell that he had been successful in life, yet it seemed to tell also that his success had not been exclusive and invidious, but had had much of the inoffensiveness of failure."<sup>77</sup> When Lord Warburton, Touchett's young neighbor, says, "'You're hardly the person to accuse a fellow-creature of being too rich!'" Touchett's son Ralph defends him, mercifully pleading that Touchett is not very rich and that he has "'given away an immense deal of money.'"<sup>78</sup> The tone is quite different here from the first of the early stories. The arrogance of James's American businessmen is gone. Touchett is excused for having become wealthy because he has been a public benefactor. It is likely, however, that Warburton's view of this giving away of money as the ultimate in self-indulgence more nearly corresponds with James's own opinion. Perhaps there is also a touch of British envy of enormously rich expatriated Americans.

Henry James's portrait of Touchett, however, is sympathetic on the whole. Touchett's advice to Warburton not to

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<sup>77</sup>Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (Boston, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

fall in love with his niece reveals a certain lack of tact in the businessman. In addition, Touchett has had what seems to be a failure in human relations; his wife refuses to live with him for any extended period of time. Mr. Bantling tells Henrietta Stackpole, "'Mr. Touchett's always squabbling with his wife.'"<sup>79</sup> Though Touchett appears to blame his wife for the failure, it is not at all clear that the novelist does so as well. "'She likes to drop in on me suddenly; she thinks she'll find me doing something wrong. She has never done so yet, but she's not discouraged,'" Touchett tells the neighbor. Ralph's "appreciation of the matter"<sup>80</sup> is more favorable to his mother; he simply thinks of her as a remarkably independent woman. In the first few minutes of introduction to the niece Mr. Touchett has never seen, he frankly reveals the state of his domestic affairs. On being told by Isabel that Mrs. Touchett has gone to her room, he says, "'Yes--and locked herself in. She always does that. Well, I suppose I shall see her next week.'"<sup>81</sup> On his deathbed, Touchett worries about Ralph's plan to leave Isabel a fortune because he thinks that making everything so easy for a person is "immoral."<sup>82</sup>

Caspar Goodwood, Isabel's discarded suitor from Boston, is the other American businessman in the novel. Goodwood

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

is a real rarity in the James canon, a second-generation successful businessman. Among James's businessmen he also seems to be about the only young man who is not an orphan. Goodwood's father is "a proprietor of well-known cotton-mills in Massachusetts," and Caspar, after graduation from Harvard, has not only taken over management of the mills but has "invented an improvement in the cotton-spinning process" which is widely used in the industry and patented in his own name. Caspar does not appeal to Isabel, who considers him a "kind of grim fate"<sup>83</sup> and not "her idea of a delightful person."<sup>84</sup> Henrietta Stackpole, Isabel's friend, likes Goodwood but frankly calls him an ugly man. Isabel qualifies Henrietta's opinion somewhat: "'He's very simple-minded . . . and he's got so ugly.'<sup>85</sup> Goodwood's appearance, nevertheless, counts against him:

She [Isabel] cared nothing for his cotton-mill--the Goodwood patent left her imagination absolutely cold. She wished him no ounce less of his manhood, but she sometimes thought he would be rather nicer if he looked, for instance, a little differently. His jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff: these things suggested a want of consonance with the deeper rhythms of life. Then she viewed with reserve a habit he had of dressing always in the same manner; it was not apparently that he wore the same clothes continually, for, on the contrary, his garments had a way of looking rather too new. But they seemed all of the same piece; the figure, the stuff, was so drearily usual.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

Although James pays this character the mild compliment of calling his invention a "fruitful contrivance," he seems as little interested as his heroine and rather denigrates the cotton industry through his characterization of Goodwood as hard, ambitious, narrow-minded, and driving. Isabel associates Goodwood with a warrior image and thinks that something "large and confused, something dark and ugly,"<sup>87</sup> something about like the Civil War, in fact, will be needed to permit Goodwood to realize himself fully and rise above his status as a dreary businessman. When Goodwood surprises Isabel at her hotel in London, she repulses his overtures with blunt frankness, reminding herself that he is "naturally plated and steeled, armed essentially for aggression."<sup>88</sup>

The note of apology for having made money, and the view of a businessman as associated with warfare are the most striking aspects of this novel, in which American businessmen play a very minor part.

Consideration of the early works of Henry James in sequence thus reveals several things about the American businessman and James's development of the American businessman as a character. A quarter of the fiction written during this period contains American businessmen either in major or minor roles. It is therefore not possible to say that Henry James was not interested in business, even during the early

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

period, to the extent of ignoring all money-making Americans. James was handicapped by his lack of specific knowledge and training, and after his removal to Europe his contrivances to overcome the handicap are more and more noticable.

Although James was a realistic writer and described the American businessman as he saw him, James's view was usually sympathetic. It is possible that other factors such as James's interest in the wise use of wealth, his admiration for the non-commercial character of British aristocracy, and his appreciation for the family feeling demonstrated by wealthy, uncultivated American businessmen traveling in Europe influenced his outlook, but it is obvious that James wished, as well, to hold up a good example for his readers. If American businessmen are idealized and the methods by which they made their money are not altogether clear, at least James could see promise in the businessman and was quite willing to use him as a character. Only in the last novel of this period is there a suggestion that money-making itself is grounds for apology.

Detail is of a general nature, but in the first part of this period James was not handicapped to the extent that he was later on; difficulty over specifics becomes noticeable toward the end of the period, but James's increased skill in technique compensates for some of the deficiency.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The period from 1881 to 1901 was a productive one for Henry James. Of the seventy-one novels and stories published during this time span, however, only eight mention Americans as money-makers. Failure of two of his major novels to achieve popular success discouraged James, and he devoted much effort to play-writing during the last decade of the century in an unsuccessful attempt to win the fortune which had so far eluded him. The British, so greatly admired in the past, had begun to seem all too human after the first ten years of James's residence among them, and the works of this transitional period bear the marks of disillusion. James seems to have lost interest almost entirely in his early subjects, including the American businessman, and to have concentrated more and more in his fiction on innovations in technique and form. Of the works which do concern the subject of the American businessman, only one, The Reverberator, has a businessman as a major character. The works as a group do not reflect any change in basic attitudes toward business on the part of Henry James.

In "The Siege of London" (1882), a rather wild little prairie flower from the American West, Mrs. Headway, succeeds

in crashing London society and marrying a British peer. She is able to do so only because her compatriot, Littlemore, is for a time too gentlemanly to give her away; but the obtuseness of the British in receiving the former Nancy Beck amazes Littlemore. The financial background of this American businessman is rather sketchy:

George Littlemore's residence in the far West had been of the usual tentative sort--he had gone there to replenish a pocket depleted by youthful extravagance. His first attempts had failed; the days were passing away when a fortune was to be picked up even by a young man who might be supposed to have inherited from an honorable father, lately removed, some of those fine abilities, mainly dedicated to the importation of tea, to which the elder Mr. Littlemore was indebted for the power of leaving his son well off. Littlemore had dissipated his patrimony. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The fortune was not to be "picked up" but it did arrive through chance. Littlemore purchased a share in an admittedly worthless silver mine to oblige a friend. Two years later, one of the other shareholders, who refused to believe in a silver mine without silver, discovered "the sparkle of the precious element deep down in the reasons of things." Littlemore, whose "purpose was never very keen," may not have deserved the fortune as James implies. Nevertheless, the mine remained "perversely productive," and Littlemore added a Montana cattle ranch to bolster his financial position. Over forty by this time, Littlemore married, lost his young

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Complete Tales of, edited by Leon Edel, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961- ), V, 26.

wife within a year, and settled down in London so that he might be close to the home of his only sister, married to "an English squire,"<sup>2</sup> who is bringing up his little daughter for him. All this information is given in a brief flashback; and though it does show that James still had some interest in American business affairs, the details are of a very general nature.

Leon Edel, commenting on the situation of Henry James at this time, seems to think that in "The Siege of London," James may have identified to a certain extent with both Littlemore and Mrs. Headway. He remarks:

Art thus seemed to have no place either in an industrially-expanding America bent on equalizing everything, or in an England where the "conventions and prejudices," not to speak of "inaptitudes and fears," made him [James] feel as if he were a freak of nature, or some curiosity, to be wined and dined and patted on the back,<sup>3</sup> without ever being truly appreciated or understood.

"Lady Barbarina" (1884) is simply an ironic reversal of the actual Gilded Age custom of marriage between American heiresses and titled Europeans. In James's story, the wealthy young American, Jackson Lemon, falls in love with Lady Barbarina Clement, a beautiful, frozen-faced clod. Lord and Lady Canterville, Lady Barb's parents, are delighted at the prospect of all that lovely money (Jackson has seven

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Edel, The Middle Years, Vol. III of Henry James, 4 vols. (New York, 1953-1969), p. 52.

million dollars), but knowing that American fortunes are "notoriously insecure" and quite likely to melt away like snow, the Cantervilles urge Barbarina to demand a "settlement."<sup>4</sup> This is disagreeable to the American, who feels his generosity is being questioned, but he eventually manages to swallow even this in order to secure such a prize as Lady Barb. He soon finds out, however, that the only idea her tiny mind contains is that of returning permanently to London. Since he is as unable to manage his womenfolk as any other good American husband, he eventually finds himself doing things her way.

The only businessman in the story is Lemon's merchant father, who is referred to only indirectly. The elder Lemon was thoughtless enough to be slow in making the fortune; as a result, Jackson was already trained to be a doctor when the money finally came in. Barbarina's parents look rather askance at having a person whom they consider a tradesman for a son-in-law: "It was unfathomable, to begin with, that a medical man should be so rich, or that so rich a man should be medical. . .,"<sup>5</sup> but, unlike the Bellegardes of The American, they manage to overcome their aristocratic scruples. Since Barbarina never permits her husband to practice, the odor of commerce is effectively restrained.

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<sup>4</sup>James, Complete Tales, V, 243-245.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

It is difficult in this day to realize how common the European marriage was for wealthy American girls of Henry James's time. At the New York wedding of Gertrude Vanderbilt and Harry Payne Whitney in 1896, however, the orchestra leader, Nathan Franko, "surprised some of the fashionable by playing 'The Star Spangled Banner'" in addition to the more traditional nuptial airs. In explanation of his totally unexpected display of national enthusiasm, Franko said, "'It is so rarely that an American girl of fortune marries one of her own countrymen . . . that I thought the selection decidedly in keeping with the occasion.'"<sup>6</sup> The European marriage, it would appear from this, was the rule rather than the exception. Henry James was to take the subject up again in The Golden Bowl.

Later in 1884, Henry James published "Pandora," a very slight work, in which a "Junker of Junkers,"<sup>7</sup> Count Vogelstein, observes the charming but puzzling behavior of Pandora Day, a pretty American fellow-passenger on the steamship which is carrying Vogelstein to a secretaryship at the German legation in Washington. It takes a great number of pages for the dense German to get the facts on Pandora, but eventually he

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<sup>6</sup>Wayne Andrews, The Vanderbilt Legend (New York, 1941), p. 351.

<sup>7</sup>Henry James, The American Novels and Stories, edited by F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1956), p. 384.

is told, "My dear Vogelstein, she's the latest freshest fruit of our great American evolution. She's the self-made girl!"<sup>8</sup> Pandora is a Daisy Miller with brains and some manners. Researching the phenomenon, the Count finally comes to the following evaluation:

She was possible doubtless only in America; American life had smoothed the way for her. She was not fast, nor emancipated, nor crude, nor loud, and there wasn't in her, of necessity, at least, a grain of the stuff of which the adventuress is made. She was simply very successful, and her success was entirely personal. She hadn't been born with the silver spoon of social opportunity; she had grasped it by honest exertion.<sup>9</sup>

Such girls, he further learns, can be identified by the fact that their parents are nobodies, and the girls have always been to Europe. As a result the old distinction this educative trip used to have is losing value. Too many are coming into society by the European back door. Pandora marries the Utica businessman to whom she has been quietly engaged for some time, as soon as his appointment comes through as United States minister to Holland. Vogelstein, who has feared an emotional entanglement with the pretty girl, is shocked with the rapidity of her rise to the top of the social ladder. The nature of the business in Utica is never given, but it is nothing disreputable.

In the year following, Henry James departed from his usual themes and ventured directly into the realm of social

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

criticism. Publication in 1885 of two major novels, The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, met with an almost total lack of reader response; and Henry James was crushed by these failures. "They have reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero,"<sup>10</sup> he lamented in a letter to his friend, W. D. Howells. Americans did not take kindly to the satirical tone of The Bostonians, and W. H. Tilley, after considerable research, suggests that the failure of The Princess may have been caused by its lack of specific information on pertinent points: "When people are concerned about mysterious events, what they usually want is information. . . . James was in no position to write an exposé of anarchism, nor was he so inclined."<sup>11</sup> Warner Berthoff, on the other hand, thinks that the trouble with both novels is that James's bent toward naturalism was in conflict with "a Hawthornesque" tendency to write of "soul conflicts."<sup>12</sup> In Berthoff's opinion, James could handle either approach competently, but his failure to choose between them caused both novels to fall apart in the middle.

Three years after this failure, Henry James published The Reverberator (1888), which Bowden identifies as almost

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<sup>10</sup> Henry James, The Letters of, edited by Percy Lubbock, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 135.

<sup>11</sup> W. H. Tilley, The Background of The Princess Casamassima (Gainesville, Florida, 1960), p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism (New York, 1965), p. 107.

a "parody" of "such novels as Roderick Hudson and The American."<sup>13</sup> The American businessman, "submissive, almost servile"<sup>14</sup> Whitney Dosson, is a cheerful spoof of the careworn Mr. Ruck as well: "Whatever he did he ever seemed to wander: he had a transitory air, an aspect of weary yet patient non-arrival, even as he sat (as he was capable of sitting for hours) in the court of an inn."<sup>15</sup> Dosson has been dominated in social matters by his two daughters (one plump, one pretty), and when the girls depart with a "Young commercial American,"<sup>16</sup> George Flack, the journalist they met on the boat, Dosson is satisfied because they are not going off with a stranger.

The hotel is crowded with Americans: gadding, shopping women and tired businessmen. Dosson, however, "had not the extremely bereft and exhausted appearance of certain of his fellows. . . . you would have guessed that he was enjoying a holiday rather than panting for a truce. . . ."<sup>17</sup> Despite his French tailor, Dosson lacks a commanding presence: "He never held himself at all; providence held him rather (and very loosely), by an invisible string, at the end of which

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James's (New Haven, Connecticut, 1956), p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Henry James, The Reverberator (New York, n.d.), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

he seemed gently to dangle and waver."<sup>18</sup> Dosson's fortune was made by the time he was middle age and made "without . . . strength of will or keenness of ambition. . . . he had grown rich not because he was ravenous or hard, but simply because he had an ear, or a nose." Dosson can spy out or sniff success, but this ability is equated with the gift of a good singing voice or the aptitude for doing tricks; his real virtue is his devotion to his daughters: "He had no tastes, no acquirements nor curiosities, and his daughters represented society for him. He thought much more and much oftener of these young ladies than of his bank-shares and railway-stock; they refreshed much more his sense of ownership, of accumulation."<sup>19</sup>

If the character of Dosson seems a much mellowed version of the American businessman than James's previous renditions, as representatives of America the Dossons do not show any substantial improvement. They manage to inject the word "ain't" into every other utterance and they introduce almost every statement with a drawling "Well"--annoying mannerisms which set them apart from the previous flock of James's uncultivated Americans whose language is bare but usually grammatical. Francie, in addition, says "'Parus'"<sup>20</sup> and this irritating mispronunciation almost prevents the sweet

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

girl from being considered as a possible daughter-in-law by the stuffy Proberts, a gallicized American family whose son, Gaston, has fallen in love with Francie. When the reluctant Probert père calls to tell Dosson what he will "'do'" for his son, he expects his rich compatriot to announce a handsome settlement on Francie, but Dosson simply appears to be amused.<sup>21</sup> He remains innocently unaware that it is his turn to announce some sort of provision for the future of the young couple.

Francie's engagement nearly founders when, partly through her innocent prattle to journalist George Flack, two columns of scandal<sup>22</sup> disclosing the Probert family skeletons appear in Flack's American newspaper, The Reverberator. The horrified Proberts have a collective seizure. Francie tries to explain that she thought the article was simply to be about her portrait and engagement, but ends by taking full responsibility.

Weeping she goes back to the hotel where her father and sister try to comfort her. Before Dosson even finds out what is wrong, he promises to take her "anywhere."<sup>23</sup> When he hears about the offensive article, Dosson asks mildly, "Do they mind so what they see in the papers? . . . I guess they haven't seen what I've seen. Why, there used to be

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

things about me--!"<sup>24</sup> Sister Delia is exasperated. "Lord, what a fuss about an old newspaper! . . . It must be about two weeks old, anyway. Didn't they ever see a society-paper before?"<sup>25</sup> Francie, however, fearing that she has wounded Gaston, takes to her bed.

When the "dreadful 'piece'" is finally located, all of the Dossons are deflated by its innocuousness, and Dosson looks over it again "with a certain surprise at not finding in it some imputation of pecuniary malversation."<sup>26</sup> Francie secretly thinks it "'skimpy'"<sup>27</sup>--at least with regard to details of her portrait and her engagement. Dosson can only advise her to wait for Gaston's return from his first business trip to America:

He [Dosson] was not afraid but he was vague. His relation to almost everything that had happened to them as a family for a good while back was the absence of precedents, and precedents were particularly absent now, for he had never before seen a lot of people in a rage about a piece in the paper.<sup>28</sup>

The absence of precedents, of course, was at the heart of most of the problems of the nouveaux riches, but James does not develop this point. At bottom, Dosson feels "that if these people had done bad things they ought to be ashamed of themselves and he couldn't pity them, and if they hadn't done them there was no need of making such a rumpus about

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

other people knowing."<sup>29</sup> Since he can easily support a son-in-law, Dosson's wealth counterbalances the weight of Old World disapproval, and Gaston marries Francie without his family's consent. The financial arrangement is not only agreeable to but preferred by Dosson.

Although The Reverberator is charming social comedy, it is a warning to those who might take too seriously Henry James's advice to look for clues to an author's personality in his writing. The Dossons' cheerful acceptance of the yellow journalism of the period was only James's way of emphasizing their general lack of culture. James himself abhorred newspapers, and in no way considered them as agents of reform.<sup>30</sup>

"The Coxon Fund" (1894) followed one of James's most ambitious novels, The Tragic Muse, which he wrote during his venture into the theater. The figure of interest in "The Coxon Fund" is Ruth Anvoy, an American girl of fortune who is appointed administratrix of the Coxon Fund, an early foundation established by Ruth's daffy aunt, Lady Coxon, for subsidizing struggling artists of any kind. Just as Ruth is about to marry a rising member of Parliament, Ruth's father loses his money, and her lover refuses to make further matrimonial plans unless she simply appropriates the fund for their use in buying a house. Despite the fact that a

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. v-vi.

kind of case can be made for naming herself recipient of the fund (the fund was a pretty silly idea anyway), Ruth remains true to her trust, unmarried and poor; and Frank Saltram, the recipient of the fund, immediately ceases to produce. The letter which tells why Saltram should not have received the money is, of course, burned unread. Although no one in the story takes the idea of a foundation seriously but Ruth, the story illustrates one of the well intended but dubious ways in which the rich try to put their money to use. The author himself seems here, as in Roderick Hudson, rather opposed to the idea of giving away money to prospective artists.<sup>31</sup>

"The Altar of the Dead" (1895) has as hero an aging businessman who is living on his memories. George Stransom, having no formal religion, rents an altar in a Catholic church where he places a candle every time one of his old friends dies. Although Stransom may be intended for an Englishman--his fiancée is buried in a London suburb and his university chum was Sir Acton Hague--the story does not give him any real nationality. Stransom could be any man, moving into his twilight years. Soon Stransom notices a woman worshiping at his altar. A hack writer, she has had sufficient sensitivity to guess Stransom's strange,

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<sup>31</sup>James, The Complete Tales, IX, 119-184.

self-made religion. She mourns only one, yet it turns out that this one is the very Acton Hague whose memory Stransom has refused to commemorate because they had quarrelled. This sets up a conflict between Stransom and the woman, to whom he has become quite attached, and forces Stransom to re-examine his own values. By the nature of things, Hague has injured her more deeply than he could ever have hurt Stransom; she is Hague's discarded mistress. The woman will not be happy, however, until Stransom forgives Hague as she has done. Stransom thinks this concession "too handsome," and "exorbitant,"<sup>32</sup> even though he realizes his refusal will mean a separation. The price seems too high because it offends his sense of justice:

To the voice of impersonal generosity he felt sure he would have listened; he would have deferred to an advocate who, speaking from abstract justice, knowing of his omission, without having known Hague, should have had the imagination to say: "Oh, remember only the best of him; pity him; provide for him!" To provide for him on the very ground of having discovered another of his turpitudes was not to pity him, but to glorify him.<sup>33</sup>

Stransom even tries to rationalize that there is now no room for the addition of another candle, but eventually he overcomes his stubborn principles. After nine months, during remission of a serious illness, Stransom makes his way to the church to commune with his dead for the last time. He is

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<sup>32</sup>Henry James, The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels (New York, 1962), p. 280.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

prepared to admit his unworthy friend to the circle of his beloved dead. The unnamed lady is there; she has forgiven Stransom as she forgave Hague. Stransom collapses in her arms. Although Stransom's work is not specified, the struggle has to do with values accepted in the business world at that time. Stransom as a businessman overcomes them only with great difficulty.

The short story, "Mrs. Medwin," published in 1901, seems to support Cargill's opinion that James is tiring of English society.<sup>34</sup> Mamie Cutter, the protagonist, first thinks that the unexpected arrival of her disreputable half-brother, Scott Homer, will hurt her business as a social agent. Mamie, having been accepted by British society, exploits her position by introducing others for a fee. Lady Wantridge, however, is so enchanted by the funny American that she is willing to invite Mamie's client, the inoffensive but lumpish Mrs. Medwin, in order to 'get' Scott for the party at her country house.<sup>35</sup>

In the transitional period, then, Henry James almost ceased to use the American businessman as a character. James had some information, of a very general nature, to serve as background in "The Siege of London" and as a framework for

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<sup>34</sup>Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York, 1961), p. 296.

<sup>35</sup>Henry James, Daisy Miller, Pandora, The Patagonia, and Other Tales, Vol. XVIII of The Novels and Tales of Henry James, 26 vols. (New York, 1922), pp. 473-506.

"Pandora," but the novels and stories of this period are concerned more with the decay of European high society (particularly the British) than with the American money-makers who come in contact with these flowers of civilization. Whitney Dosson, the only American businessman characterized fully, is gently satirized; but Dosson's family is pictured as provincial and more uncouth in manner than previous traveling Americans in James's fiction. On the whole, American money-makers in the transitional period appear as sympathetic characters only because James pictures the Europeans as being a great deal worse. Both the successful American businessmen, Littlemore and Dosson, are depicted as having achieved their fortunes by freak rather than through effort.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LATE PERIOD

Discouraged by the failure of theatrical ventures in which he had hoped to make a fortune, but fortified with a new dramatic method and fresh enthusiasm for narrative form, Henry James returned to the writing of prose fiction in the early Twentieth Century. Three of his most famous novels followed: The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904). These novels return to early themes; all three tell of Americans in Europe, and the last two have American businessmen as important characters.

A period of increasing ill-health and dwindling production followed Henry James's visit to America in 1904; but he did produce, after returning to England, one novel, two fragments of novels, and eight short stories, three of which have American business as a motif and which concern the businessman. James's last completed novel, The Outcry, has an American billionaire as a key figure.

The recurrence of business and the American businessman in James's later fiction indicates that his own business trip<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, Henry James and H. G. Wells (Urbana, Illinois, 1958), p. 91.

to America had yielded new material for his writing. The Ivory Tower shows unmistakable evidence of James's interest in business and business types. This fragmentary novel is set in Newport, playground of the new money-makers, and indicates that Henry James made an unsuccessful attempt to create a believable world of fiction which would accommodate the economic changes which had taken place during his absence of twenty years. Warner Berthoff quotes James as having said, at the turn of the century, that the American business tycoon was a figure "whom the novelist and the dramatist have scarce yet seriously touched."<sup>2</sup> In The Ivory Tower, James seems to have attempted a serious treatment of this subject without success. The fact that the novel was not completed, together with an examination of the kind of difficulties which were developing, indicates that the handicap of James's long absence from the American scene was too great for his genius to overcome.

Eleanor M. Tilton summarizes the difficulties which attended Henry James's situation with regard to business during the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century:

Having been no kind of pirate and known none intimately, James dared not risk dealing directly with the getters of money on their own ground.

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<sup>2</sup>Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism (New York, 1965), p. 36.

To his sharp vision, the "huge organized mystery of the consummately, the supremely applied money-passion" constituted "nineteen-twentieths" of American life. "Cornered" in the drawing room, James was forced to see the characteristic American type--the businessman--out of his natural habitat, where to James's sympathetic eye, he was bound to cut an awkward and unhappy figure. . . . Generous, ignorant, goodnatured, and unutterably bored, the same type is on view now in Europe, eyes alight with curiosity when the landscape shows a factory and dim with dismay when it shows a cathedral. And one can still hear a patiently hopeful voice inquiring of a tireless wife in the Musée de Cluny: "Had enough, dear?"<sup>3</sup>

The Wings of the Dove (1902) is a major novel which tells the story of an American heiress, victimized by a pair of English friends who are simply waiting for her to die in the expectation of carrying out their plans with her money. Milly Theale, the heiress, is too ill to transact any business other than to write a letter of forgiveness for the attempt to use her and inherit her fortune. The letter, intended by Milly to be read after her death, is burned unread.<sup>4</sup> There is no direct concern with business or business men in the novel.

The following year, 1903, James published The Ambassadors, a story based on a very slight incident. Lambert Strether, editor of a New England literary magazine, is sent from Woollett, Massachusetts, to Paris to fetch the son of his

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<sup>3</sup>Henry James, The Marriages and Other Stories (New York, 1961), pp. viii-ix.

<sup>4</sup>Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (New York, 1963), passim.

employer, Mrs. Newsome, from the arms of some unknown foreign siren. This is the only reason that Mrs. Newsome can hypothesize for son Chad's long stay abroad in a supposed study of art. Mrs. Newsome is sending Strether because she and he have an understanding that Strether can deliver her son from iniquitous Paris and then enter the firm as her husband. Although Strether is assured that Chad's connection with the woman, Madame de Vionnet, is a "virtuous attachment,"<sup>5</sup> he eventually finds out that it is the usual shady kind. Before the truth comes out, however, Strether is so much impressed with what the woman has done for Chad that he has changed sides, and Mrs. Newsome has to send a second emissary, her daughter Sarah, to find out what has become of both men. The plot summary suggests an amusing short story, yet James made it into a novel of over 100,000 words. In a sense, James was justified in considering this novel "quite the best, 'all round,' of my productions,"<sup>6</sup> because his contriving to do so much with so little was certainly an impressive achievement. By employing the 'dramatic method,' unfolding the action in 'scenes' rather than by exposition, James was able to delay Strether's meeting with Chad until the third book, and his understanding of the actual nature of the

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<sup>5</sup>Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York, 1964), p. 112.

<sup>6</sup>Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York, 1962), p. 309.

relationship with Madame de Vionnet until the eleventh of the twelve books. What redeems the novel from hopeless tediousness is the amount of identification the author seems to have made with his aging hero, and the resulting authenticity of Strether's inner experiences. Strether's developing perceptions furnish the dramatic tension and stretch out the scanty plot. All the clues are furnished, yet Strether's preconceived notions, some of them, prevail to the end. Maria Gostrey, Strether's expensive looking friend, tells him almost immediately that there is a woman, that the woman is "excellent,"<sup>7</sup> and that Chad "does really want to shake her off." When Strether protests, "After all she has done for him?" Miss Gostrey assures him, "He's not so good as you think!"<sup>8</sup>

Chad, the cad, turns out to be a true descendent of his fortune-making maternal great-grandfather, and his father, the late Abel Newsome, another farsighted money-maker. Chad, despite his polite protests to Strether, has already seen the call to come home and attend to business as a way out of his entanglement with a woman ten years older than he is. Chad has, in fact, jumped at the chance. It has simply taken a while to sever the connection.

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<sup>7</sup>James, The Ambassadors, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

Since the novel is stretched over a framework of business, it is pertinent to examine the actual information which it contains. Strether is elaborately non-committal about the financial structure of Woollett, which the Newsome family appears to own. In describing the situation to Miss Gostrey, Strether explains:

"The source of his [Chad's] grandfather's wealth-- and thereby of his own share in it--was not particularly noble."

"And what source was it?"

Strether cast about. Well--practices."

"In business? Infamies? He was an old swindler?"

"Oh," he said with more emphasis than spirit,

"I shan't describe him nor narrate his exploits."<sup>9</sup>

Strether contradicts Miss Gostrey's theory that Chad has refused to come home because he is ashamed of the way in which his wealth was accumulated: "What shame? . . . The men I speak of--they did as every one does." Strether's defense of laissez faire is feeble, however, since he will only characterize Chad's father as "different," not better. He refuses to talk about Mrs. Newsome, but permits Miss Gostrey to describe her life as one of "expiation." This vagueness of Strether's is carried to a maddening extreme when he refuses to name the product manufactured in the Newsome factory complex. Strether has described the business as "a big brave bouncing business. A roaring trade,"<sup>10</sup> but he cannot bring himself to name the article which is made.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

"Clothes-pins? Saleratus? Shoe-polish?"<sup>11</sup> Miss Gostrey presses, in a fever of impatient curiosity which readers seem to share. The interesting question is never resolved. Henry James, obviously, was indulging himself with a little joke while employing a variation of the technique which had proved so successful five years earlier in The Turn of the Screw. The reader is left to invent his own product, just as readers of the earlier tale constructed their own "horrors." There is, however, a major difference. The suggestion in the ghost story is adequate, and the result is satisfying; the blank in The Ambassadors is annoying. This absurd delicacy of Strether's seems to indicate technical trouble. The "big brave bouncing business" is suspicious, but the gratuitous poetic alliteration might simply indicate disapproval of money-making activity. If the product is, as Strether insists, neither improper nor ridiculous nor wrong nor unmentionable, why postpone identification? In the two thousand word scenario which James submitted to his publisher, the author mentioned that the article was "to be duly specified,"<sup>12</sup> indicating that he would think of one later. Perhaps he never could. This suggestion is not acceptable to critics like R. W. Stallman,<sup>13</sup> who seems to feel there is

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>13</sup>R. W. Stallman, "Time and the Unnamed Article in The Ambassadors," Modern Language Notes, LXXII (January, 1957), 27-32.

a hidden logical meaning in the mystery. Possibly the article is not named, the business not identified, and the misdeeds of Chad's forebearers passed over with a blush, because James had simply been out of the American environment too long to have these handy little details at his fingertips. He still could see the overall picture, but he could no longer be at all specific. Christopher Newman of The American, sitting in a French drawing room, could confess blandly to having manufactured washtubs; Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors is completely tongue-tied when asked the nature of Chad's proposed job. He talks, instead, all the way around it:

He'll come in for a particular chance--a chance that any properly constituted young man would jump at. The business has so developed that an opening scarcely apparent three years ago, but which his father's will took account of as in certain conditions possible and which, under that will, attaches to Chad's availing himself of it a large contingent advantage--this opening, the conditions having come about, now simply awaits him.<sup>14</sup>

Two thirds of the way through the book, Jim Pocock, Sarah's nondescript businessman husband, "small and fat and constantly facetious, straw-coloured and destitute of marks,"<sup>15</sup> demonstrates exact knowledge of Chad's proposed place in the firm when he says that if he were in Chad's place he would not give up Paris "to go back and boss the advertising!"<sup>16</sup> If

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<sup>14</sup>James, The Ambassadors, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

Strether has been too delicate to mention Chad's job before, he is able to discuss it freely in the final pages of the novel. A likely explanation for this is that Henry James simply did not think of a job for Chad that fitted his plot requirements until he was over half through with the novel.

Besides Chad and Pocock, there is one other American businessman in The Ambassadors. Waymarsh, the lawyer, life-long friend of Strether, is a successful businessman. His value in the story is that he resists the demoralizing temptation actually to enjoy Europe and suffers from a combination of boredom and disapproval that effectually keeps New England standards before the infatuated Strether. Like Daniel Touchett of The Portrait of a Lady, Waymarsh is separated from his wife. Strether sympathizes with his friend, but recognizes separation as one of the most obvious kinds of failure. Strether admires Waymarsh because he has made a large income and suffered his domestic buffets in silence.<sup>17</sup> Although James uses the character of Waymarsh as a comic foil to Strether, the comedy is low-key and sympathetic. Miss Barrace affectionately calls Waymarsh "Sitting Bull,"<sup>18</sup> and finds his continual desire to "'treat'"<sup>19</sup> her (which she tactfully represses) a source of amusement.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

Pocock, on the other hand, is a nonentity; he is "nothing compared to Sally,"<sup>20</sup> and a horrible example to Strether of what his position in society might be if he were himself married. A leading Woollett businessman has no place in what Strether recognizes as "essentially a society of women."<sup>21</sup> Jim Pocock is described as normal and cheerful, and he demonstrates an acute understanding of the character of his wife and her mother; but he is not a sympathetic character in the novel. "Jim is a damned dose!"<sup>22</sup> Chad comments wryly. Bowden aptly terms Pocock "the fictional forerunner of the American Legionnaire."<sup>23</sup>

The idea of poor health connected with business continues in The Ambassadors. Waymarsh is "dyspeptic"<sup>24</sup> and Mrs. Newsome dislikes to be called an invalid.<sup>25</sup> Both Strether and Waymarsh are described at the beginning of the book as tired and overworked. It is notable that many of James's businessmen are represented as weary from hard work, but James does not seem to know exactly what this hard work is.

In The Golden Bowl, published the year after The Ambassadors, Henry James considered the new kind of American

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>23</sup>Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, Connecticut, 1956), p. 101.

<sup>24</sup>James, The Ambassadors, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

money-maker, the billionaire. Even in the comparative isolation of his residence in England, James could see that the American businessman was becoming richer, and in some cases, very much aware of culture. There is one fleeting reference to this type in The Ambassadors: Strether has seen the work of the distinguished sculptor, Gloriani, "in the New York of the billionaires,"<sup>26</sup> which indicates that James may have even then had the subject in mind.

Adam Verver, whom his son-in-law identifies as a billionaire,<sup>27</sup> is so rich that he feels he compromises Charlotte Stant a little when he lets her watch him sign a check.<sup>28</sup> His subsequent marriage to Miss Stant sets up the problem in Henry James's novel, The Golden Bowl. James had heard in the London chit-chat of a man whose second marriage to a young, pretty wife was causing the usual tedious complications in his newly-married daughter's home. Adultery, as such, did not interest James, but the tension of the situation in what James conceived as a sort of double marriage furnished a vehicle for this story, which has become one of James's most popular novels.

The Golden Bowl is divided into two sections: Book First: The Prince, and Book Second: The Princess, which

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>27</sup>Henry James, The Golden Bowl (New York, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

indicates that James intended for primary attention to be given to the son-in-law and the daughter, rather than to Adam Verver, the remarried billionaire. The relationships of the four, however, are so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them. The golden bowl, a wedding gift that symbolizes the flawed relationships between the two couples, rests on the pedestal of Adam Verver's wealth. Previous to his second marriage, Verver has led a carefree life. His first wife died rather young, and when his daughter reached the age of ten, Verver had made enough money to retire. He and the daughter, Maggie, have been roaming Europe for years in search of art treasures for the museum which Verver intends to donate to American City, the town where he made his money. All this information is introduced gradually. There is no effort on James's part to make Verver an active figure in part one of the novel. He is seen first through the eyes of the Prince, his prospective son-in-law.

Part two of the first book, a matter of about seventy pages, is the only place in the novel where Verver is given direct attention by the author. In this section, James represents him as an amiable, easily interrupted man who, despite the fact that he has a duty only to his daughter, is constantly besieged by importunate claims which his conscience demands that he attend to. The poetic metaphor of a forge suffices James for a description of Verver's money-making years. As the novelist says:

A dim explanation of phenomena once vivid must at all events for the moment suffice us; it being obviously no account of the matter to throw on our friend's amiability alone the weight of the demonstration of his economic history. Amiability, of a truth, is an aid to success; it has even been known to be the principle of large accumulations; but the link, for the mind, is none the less fatally missing between proof, on such a scale, of continuity, if of nothing more insolent, in one field, and accessibility to distraction in every other. Variety of imagination--what is that but fatal, in the world of affairs, unless so disciplined as not to be distinguished from monotony? Mr. Verver then, for a fresh, full period, a period betraying, extraordinarily, no wasted year, had been inscrutably monotonous behind an iridescent cloud.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast with the cattle ranchers, cotton mill operators, stockbrokers and manufacturers of earlier periods, Adam Verver seems to have made his money being monotonous. The effect of this description on the usual reader is to make him doubt Verver's money-making ability. Austin Warren, for example, says, "Adam's alleged power of making money remains unconvincing";<sup>30</sup> Berthoff remarks that "it has become a commonplace of critical opinion that James failed to imagine this character in the round and with regard to the plain gross data of getting and spending which . . . remain the shaping principle of his being."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>30</sup>Austin Warren, "Symbolic Imagery," in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 137.

<sup>31</sup>Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism, p. 37.

Verver, forty-seven when the story gets underway, thinks back over his money-making years and the years of his first marriage with almost equal embarrassment. He thinks of them as "his years of darkness,"<sup>32</sup> in which his blind labor and undeveloped taste had prepared the soil for his great idea to flower. This great idea, "that a world was left him to conquer,"<sup>33</sup> has revolutionized his life. In the process of rifling the Golden Isles, Verver has become such a distinguished collector and connoisseur that he no longer has to hunt for treasure; his name is so well known that dealers seek him out when they have something extremely precious and expensive to sell. Verver, however, is not a selfish collector. It is his intention to donate the bulk of his treasures to the proposed museum in American City, which he visualizes as "a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land."<sup>34</sup>

The businessman's altruism nevertheless remains a bit suspect because of his conviction that the Prince, Maggie's husband, is one of his most tasteful and expensive acquisitions. Henry James may have felt that there was no contradiction; or, despite the fact that he considered the museum a needed remedy for the bondage of ugliness which enslaved the American

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<sup>32</sup>James, The Golden Bowl, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

masses, James may have still been struggling with a conviction that giving away money is wrong. The ambiguity, whatever the reason for it, is noticeable. The second half of the book, confined to the point of view of Verver's daughter, makes Verver an even more shadowy character. All the other people in the book spend considerable time wondering how much he suspects and whether or not he is going to do anything about the peculiar situation developing among the expanded family. Whether or not the Prince and the second Mrs. Verver are guilty of adultery is not entirely clear, but when Verver perceives that his daughter is aware of and unhappy about the state of affairs, he takes definite, if unspecified steps to bring the situation under control. Charlotte, the second wife, is simply described as suddenly obedient to her wifely duties, as though she had an invisible silken halter about her neck, and Verver were holding the invisible rope in his hand. Caroline Gordon comments on this scene as follows:

The neck is beautiful but the body to which it belongs is Harpy-like and foul. Charlotte's evil practices have turned her into a monster. Mr. Verver, following the custom of national heroes, may, at any moment, place his foot upon her neck. The American girl has turned into "the terrible woman of the future," but James seems to have hoped that Uncle Sam could subdue even her!<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Caroline Gordon, "Mr. Verver, Our National Hero," Sewanee Review, LXIII (Winter, 1955), 44.

In spite of the cloudy integument with which James surrounds his businessman in this particular novel, Verver retains a certain amount of vitality. Berthoff, despite his reservations about Verver's money-making, comments, "Perhaps only outright fantasy could capture so fantastic a social phenomenon . . . [as the] business tycoon. . . ." <sup>36</sup> James came close to fantasy in his characterization of Verver, who bears an unmistakable resemblance to the good king in a fairy tale, safeguarding the prince and the princess and turning the bad girl into a toad. James, never really a historical novelist, manages to convey an impression despite his shadowy characterization and lack of any kind of detail.

Four years elapsed between publication of The Golden Bowl and Henry James's next three published stories in 1908. One of these, "The Jolly Corner," is pertinent to this study because it deals with an expatriated American, Spencer Brydon, who returns to America and finds he has an enthusiasm for business which he has not suspected for thirty-three years. Brydon left America at age twenty-three "when he had too promptly waked up to a sense of the ugly," and is now returning to "look at his 'property.'" <sup>37</sup> During the last year, one of Brydon's two New York houses has "fallen in,"

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<sup>36</sup> Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, editor, The American Novels and Stories of Henry James (New York, 1956), pp. 792-793.

but he has nevertheless been able to live comfortably in Europe on the rents from his two houses. Brydon, in New York to attend to his property, has decided to renovate and reconstruct as "a tall mass of flats"<sup>38</sup> the collapsed house. His friend Alice Staverton refers admiringly to this proposed edifice as his apartment house, but the actual description of Brydon's plans makes it seem more like a possible lower East Side tenement. Brydon, "not in the least 'minding' that the whole proposition . . . [is] vulgar and sordid," has been climbing ladders, hectoring the workmen and the contractor, and looking at vulgar columns of figures as well. Miss Staverton assures Brydon that had he stayed in America he would have anticipated the inventor of the skyscraper and "have discovered his genius in time really to start some new variety of awful architectural hare and run it till it burrowed in a gold-mine."<sup>39</sup> Miss Staverton, it needs to be noted, approves of everything about Brydon throughout the story. Brydon has already come to be haunted by a mental image of himself as a money-maker. He has, in fact, externalized this image as a sort of alter ego and has come to believe that this other self dwells in the more habitable house which is not being renovated. Visiting this "jolly corner," now vacant, Brydon tells his friend that he intends to leave this house untouched, despite proposals from

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 793.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 794-795.

developers. Miss Staverton twits him gently, "In short you're going to make so good a thing of your sky-scraper that, living in luxury on those ill-gotten gains, you can afford . . . to be sentimental here [in the 'jolly corner']<sup>40</sup> Brydon disclaims this intention; he assures her that he will still cherish the house on the "jolly corner" were the other one not to bring him a dollar. Hesitantly, he tells her of his curious idea that the businessman he might have been still exists in some mysterious fashion. Miss Staverton imagines this other self of Brydon's as "splendid" and "monstrous," but Brydon himself thinks of his alter ego as "quite hideous and offensive." The woman reminds him, ". . . you'd have had power," and Brydon responds, "I see. You'd have liked me, have preferred me, a billionaire!"<sup>41</sup>

Brydon has been secretly stalking his other self at dusk and at midnight in the empty house, although he does not tell this to his friend. Miss Staverton, however, claims that she has seen this "other" in a dream and insists that she likes him. The ghost, when he does materialize, appears to Brydon as "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar" despite his immaculate evening dress. Furthermore, the apparition is disfigured--two fingers have been lost, "reduced to stumps, as if accidentally shot away."<sup>42</sup> The "rage" of the specter's

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 797.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 800.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 815.

personality and the "passion" of the kind of life implied by the terrifying figure are too much for Brydon; he swoons. Miss Staverton, having rescued Brydon and managed to revive him, professes pity for the alter ego: "his poor ruined sight. And his poor right hand--!"<sup>43</sup> Brydon disclaims him: "But it's not me."<sup>44</sup> This tale is actually one of Henry James's most engrossing ghost stories. The detail about the disfigured right hand particularly intrigues critics, who see a great deal of Henry James himself in Spencer Brydon. Gorley Putt, for example, wonders if James's fear of business competition was not simply due to a "long-forgotten castration-complex."<sup>45</sup> Matthiessen sees the mutilated hand as a symbol of a crippled spirit.<sup>46</sup> Edel's opinion seems most nearly correct: "If he [James] had stayed at home he would not have had the fingers with which to hold his pen."<sup>47</sup> In other words, art and business are incompatible. The only words which James has to characterize the commercial aspects of the new power structure observed in "The Jolly Corner" are vague and general--words such as "monstrous," "vulgar," and "odious." The trip to America in 1904 had furnished James with these impressions of business, but it did not give him

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 819.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 818.

<sup>45</sup>Samuel Gorley Putt, Henry James: A Reader's Guide (Ithaca, New York, 1966), p. 53.

<sup>46</sup>Matthiessen, p. xxiii.

<sup>47</sup>Henry James, The American Scene, edited by Leon Edel (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), p. xxi.

any sense of real regret for what he had missed. James is consistent from the first in his preference for art over business.

"Crapy Cornelia" (1909) tells the story of aging but distinguished Mr. White-Mason, who passes up a chance to marry rich, glittering, much younger Mrs. Worthingham in order to share his memories of an earlier, quieter New York with the old friend of his sister, Cornelia Rasch. In this elderly expatriate, too, there seems to be a large amount of author identification. White-Mason recalls the comparative mediocrity of the old Rasch fortune and compares its moderation with "the latest, the luridest power of money" symbolized by Mrs. Worthingham. White-Mason chooses mediocrity and moderation, although he will not go so far as to marry a woman only two years younger than himself. Mrs. Worthingham, like Chad of The Ambassadors, is thoroughly at home in Europe; however, White-Mason finds her lacking in sensitivity, and, in a curious way, too rich. He finds "the angular facts of current finance . . . as harsh and metallic and bewildering as some stacked 'exhibit' of ugly patented inventions."<sup>48</sup> The thought of how the deceased Mr. Worthingham may have made his money is too hideous for White-Mason to contemplate.

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<sup>48</sup>Matthiessen, p. 834.

"A Round of Visits" (1910) revolves around New York and American business at the turn of the century. The idea germinated as early as 1894, when, according to Edel, James noted the idea of "a young man carrying some unspecified burden, who seeks to find someone to tell it to, that he may be eased of it."<sup>49</sup> Mark Monteith, American expatriate, has returned from England because his agent, Phil Bloodgood, has swindled him. The loss of the securities can be borne, but the perfidy of his third cousin and school-fellow literally makes Monteith ill. Upon recuperating slightly, Monteith calls on various acquaintances, hoping to mitigate his disillusionment with his former close friend. Monteith really does not want pity for himself; in a strange way he wants pity for the swindler:

. . . he fairly didn't pity himself; he winced, rather, and even to vicarious anguish, as it rose again, for poor shamed Bloodgood's doom-ridden figure. But he wanted, as with a desperate charity, to give some easier turn to the mere ugliness of the main facts; to work off his obsession from them by mixing with it some other blame . . . as an effect of which . . . it would have . . . a diluted and less poisonous taste.<sup>50</sup>

The similarity to "Guest's Confession," James's earliest tale of American business is remarkable. The gentleman, Monteith, now the victim, still feels compassion for

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<sup>49</sup>Leon Edel, The Middle Years, Vol. III of Henry James, 4 vols. (New York, 1953-1969), p. 374.

<sup>50</sup>Matthiessen, p. 848.

the thief who has abused his confidence. James is still forgiving swindlers, tolerantly pitying them. In his round of visits, Monteith not only gets no sympathy, he does not even get attention. Mrs. Follet can only moan about the ten thousand Bloodgood has swindled her out of, and Mrs. Ash can think only of her impending separation from her husband. Confronted with selfishness where he had expected consideration, Monteith decides that Providence is punishing him for his own selfishness in trying to put his troubles off on others; he goes, therefore, to visit Newton Winch, an old school-fellow, whom he has heard is recovering from an attack of the grippe. Winch, whom Monteith has remembered as rather a dull fellow, immediately perceives that he is troubled and offers the proper kind of sympathy. This delights Monteith, but it disturbs him too. Winch's "right attention"<sup>51</sup> is too great a contrast to the denseness of the two women, "trained supposedly in the art of pleasing."<sup>51</sup> After he has expressed a desire to go to Bloodgood in a kindly effort to "understand," Winch tells him, "Well, you needn't take that trouble. You see I'm such another . . . Only I've stayed to take it." Monteith is shocked, but understanding:

Mark threw back his head, but only tightened his hands. He inexpressibly understood . . . the monstrous sense of his friend's "education." It had been, in its immeasurable action, the education of business, of which the fruits were all around

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 859.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 857.

them. [Winch is living in luxury.] Yet prodigious was the interest, for prodigious truly--it seemed to loom before Mark--must have been the system.<sup>53</sup>

The handicap of lack of specific detail is very evident in this story. Again, only "monstrous" and "prodigious" are available to describe the business world, but the dramatic possibilities of the subject are given recognition. James could see characters like Bloodgood and Winch only from the outside, but he suspected the moral struggle and the presence of evil which he felt himself unable to get at. Unfortunately, the changes which had taken place in the world of business had placed an even greater barrier between the author and such exciting subjects. By returning to the type of social scene in Europe which he had been observing closely, James was able to overcome his handicap to the extent of producing one more short novel, The Outcry, which delivered the American businessman to James on his own terms--as a not fully-informed expatriate.

"A Round of Visits" was James's last published short story; The Outcry was his last published work. Both are about American businessmen. In The Outcry, James regards his subject from the point of view of the British upper class, and is thereby able to create a life-like Breckenridge Bender, the boorish American billionaire whose determination to buy out

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 865.

Europe is frustrated by a slow gathering of British pride. Although the British are by no means glorified in this little social comedy (the women gamble, Lord Theign lives in an imaginary world, and Lord John is a bounder) they appear to be better people than Bender. Lady Grace, complacently reflecting that her father, Lord Theign, will never sell to the rich American the family portrait of the Duchess of Waterford, says, "'Poor baffled Mr. Bender!'" Her suitor, Hugh Crimble, the novitiate art critic, takes a different view of the situation: "'Oh, rich and confident Mr. Bender! . . . Once given his money, his confidence is a horrid engine in itself . . . I dare say . . . he has brought his poisonous cheque.'"<sup>54</sup>

Bender is not without a word in his own defense: ". . . why shouldn't we [Americans] want to grab them [the paintings] and carry them off--the same as all of you originally did? . . . But I grant you your unearned increment, and you ought to be mighty glad that, to such a tune, I'll pay it you."<sup>55</sup> The chief article of contention at this point in the story is an Italian, rather than an English painting, but the allure for Bender seems to be its tremendous cost rather than its beauty or its value as a cultural object. While the painter is still in doubt, Lord

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<sup>54</sup>Henry James, The Outcry (New York, 1916), pp. 45-46.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

Theign snorts, "A mere Moretto . . . is too cheap--for a Yankee 'on the spend.'"<sup>56</sup>

Hugh Crimble correctly guesses that Bender is more than incidentally interested in the publicity which will attend his purchase. Crimble thinks that an outcry in the press will provoke Bender into such an unconscious display of avidity that the British will be forced to want to keep the paintings themselves, a guess that ultimately proves to be the case. Bender, despite his smoother manners, still has the shortcomings of some of the earlier Jamesian American businessmen: he has no real consideration for the feelings of others and only the vaguest idea what the British character is like. He does not care to know British character; he is convinced that money has unlimited power. Bender's technical knowledge is superior, the equal of Adam Verver's, but he is not a sympathetic character. Lord John, the only really repulsive Britisher in the story, is the only one who admires Bender. Lord John calls him a whirlwind, and asserts, "The fellow can do anything anywhere!"<sup>57</sup> To Crimble's excited vision, Bender appears in the character of Atilla the Hun, "armed now with huge cheque-books instead of with spears and battle-axes."<sup>58</sup> The fact that James could see humor in Crimble's position does not

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

mean that James himself had a different opinion. Bender, as his name indicates, is too forceful and ruthless to conform to Henry Jaems's idea of a gentleman. The unity of the tarnished and tempted British as they face down Bender is treated as a real triumph. In the observation of culture-buying Americans in Britain, James had sufficient detail at hand with which to furnish his story. There are no puzzling or irritating lapses and gaps in The Outcry, and it is possibly one of James's better but most neglected books.

Henry James died in 1916, five years after publication of The Outcry. Of the two novels he left unfinished, The Ivory Tower was a second attempt on James's part to write of businessmen engaged in business dealings. The dramatic intensity of big business had intrigued James on his American visit in 1904, yet his lack of close range observation seems to have made it impossible for him to complete the story which he had in mind. Matthiessen believes this novel was begun in 1909,<sup>59</sup> when James wrote a letter to Howells mentioning having "broken ground on an American novel." But the letter goes on to speak several times of "difficulty," and James describes himself as wandering "in desert sands."<sup>60</sup> If this was indeed The Ivory Tower, the

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<sup>59</sup>Matthiessen, p. xxiv.

<sup>60</sup>Percy Lubbock, editor, The Letters of Henry James, II (New York, 1920), 119.

difficulties seem to have overcome Henry James. Of the projected ten books, three are complete. The first chapter of Book IV, and a long, disconnected, incoherent, and unfinished sentence which was to have begun the second chapter remain, together with the author's extensive notes, to indicate what the completed novel was to have been like. James appears to have come to a dead end and dropped the story to begin The Outcry. The Ivory Tower, uncompleted, was published in the year following the author's death.

Even in its fragmentary form, The Ivory Tower has a certain amount of range and power. Abel Gaw, the aging multi-millionaire who is first introduced, is, like Adam Verver, a small man. Retired three years and in poor health, Gaw nevertheless gives an impression of dynamic, restless activity. His daughter, Rosanna, disapproves of her father. Watching him, she thinks that his small stature equals the importance of his life:

He conformed in short to his necessity of absolute interest--interest, that is, in his own private facts, which were of numerical calculation altogether: how could it not be so when he had dispossessed himself, if there had even been the slightest selection in the matter, of every faculty except the calculating? If he hadn't thought in figures how could he possibly have thought at all--and oh the intensity with which he was thinking at that hour! It was as if she literally watched him just then and there dry up in yet another degree to everything but his genius. His genius might at the same time have gathered in to a point of about the size of the end of a pin.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Matthiessen, p. 868.

Many of Henry James's money-makers are small: Edgar Musgrave, Adam Verver, Jim Pocock, and Abel Gaw are all little; and in Musgrave and Gaw there is a suggestion of shrinking as a result of their business activities as well. Gaw, however, is designated as a "terrible little man"; he is seen by his daughter as "a ruffled hawk . . . with his beak, which had pecked so many hearts out, visibly sharper than ever."<sup>62</sup> Gaw is waiting for his former partner, Frank Betterman, to die. After Betterman swindled Gaw, breaking up the partnership, the two remained apart for years, "in hate and vituperation,"<sup>63</sup> but for reasons of her own, Gaw's daughter has smoothed over the rupture. Her action has enabled Gaw to perch like a vulture on Betterman's veranda and question the nurses about the progress of Betterman's disease; but the chief interest for Gaw is in finding out the amount of the estate when Betterman dies. Gaw wants to out-live him so that he can determine the extent to which his own retaliatory blows have hurt Betterman. It is James's particular gift that he can make this brooding, calculating, inactive money-maker a figure of horror. The quiet evil in Gaw exceeds overt, vindictive activity. Gaw does not threaten or thunder: "His tone was flat, weak and so little charged with petulance that it betrayed the long habit of an almost

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<sup>62</sup>Matthiessen, pp. 368-369.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 870.

exasperating mildness."<sup>64</sup> Yet his tone betrays commonness rather than civility. Gaw sits for hours, brooding and shaking his foot, lost in thought. Like all of James's businessmen, he does not read, converse, or walk for exercise. Gaw's manner toward his daughter combines Dr. Sloper's manner of address with Mr. Dosson's pride of possession:

. . . it had come to him [Gaw] that she represented quantity and mass . . . and as there was nothing he was fonder of than such attestations of value he had really ended by drawing closer to her . . . and by finding countenance in the breadth of personal and social shadow that she projected . . . . He had actually turned into a personal relation with her as he might have turned, out of the glare and the noise and the harsh recognitions of the market, into some large cool dusky temple; a place where idols other than those of his worship vaguely loomed and gleamed, so that the effect at moments might be rather awful, but where at least he could sit very still . . . and treat the place, with a mixture of pride and fear, almost as his own.<sup>65</sup>

The image of temples, idols, money-making, and personal relationships recur frequently in James's later novels and stories about American businessmen. Critics have remarked the "sacerdotal" tone of the later writings with respect to art and the artist, but the frequent proximity of money-making and idols has been overlooked. Edgar, in the early "Guest's Confession," looks like an idol, Strether in The Ambassadors confesses having sacrificed to "strange gods," and Gaw, in the last novel, also thinks of idols. James, in The American Scene, deplored the great ebony god of commercialism and

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 872.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 871.

expressed approval of the ivory god of leisure. In this, James may have merely reversed the traditional black and white world of conventional Calvinism. The ivory tower, a cabinet fashioned like an oriental building and distinguished by its complete lack of utility, is Rosanna's gift to Gray Fielder. It is symbolic of art and appreciation of art. James intended for Fielder contemptuously to turn his back on the unknown world of American business.

Betterman, Gaw's partner, was obviously intended by the author to be a better man; yet for the story to have sufficient conflict and realism, he could not have been altogether good. James represents Betterman, on his deathbed, as repentent. He congratulates his thirty-two year old nephew on his complete innocence about business activity, and says that he admires Gray Fielder for having, in youth, refused an offer from his uncle to provide business training. "You're the same person I didn't tempt, the same person I couldn't-- that time when I tried. I see you are, I see what you are."<sup>66</sup> Because of Gray's integrity and charming manners, Betterman, before dying, makes Gray his heir. The author's notes, at this point, express satisfaction with the progress he has made:

It comes to me as awfully fine, given the way in which I represent the old dying man as affected and determined, to sweep away everything in the matter of precautions and usualisms,

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 916.

provisions for trusteeships and suchlike, and lump the whole thing straight on to the young man, without his having a condition or a proviso to consider. . . . Thank the Lord I have only to give the effect of this, for which I can trust myself, without going into the ghost of a technicality, any specialising demonstration.<sup>67</sup>

In order to create a realistic picture, however, James needed concrete detail of some kind, here and there in the story. Gaw, living only in hope that Betterman will die first, has a fatal attack when he hears that Fielder's return has brought about an improvement. His daughter is philosophical about her father's condition and comments, "He's just dying of twenty millions."<sup>68</sup> The major conflict in the novel was to have been between Gray Fielder and Horton Vint, the childhood friend to whom, in his trusting ignorance, Gray was to have made over the handling of his business affairs. As Gray became unaccountably poorer and poorer, Vint was to have become unaccountably richer and richer. Rather than prosecute, Gray was simply to have turned his back on what James, in his notes, called the "damnosa hereditas," leaving Vint cursed with the burden of his ill-gotten gains. The problems accumulating were, however, too much for the author:

The whole point is of course that Mr. Betterman has been a ruthless operator or whatever, and with doings Davy Bradham is able to give Gray so dark an account of; therefore if the mass of money . . . is not pretty big, the force of the picture falls a good deal to the ground. The difficulty in that event, in view of the bigness, is that the

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 1013.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 933.

conception of any act on Horton's part that amounts to a swindle practiced on Gray to such a tremendous tune is neither a desirable nor a possible one.<sup>69</sup>

James's intention was to get around the last difficulty, if he could, by making Gray's innocence appear an irresistible temptation to Vint--a fault of Gray's as well as of Vint's; but how could Davy tell Gray about Betterman's shady dealing if James had no information with which to furnish him? James states in his notes, "I haven't proposed from the first at all to be definite, in the least, about financial details or mysteries . . . . I haven't the least need of that, and can make the absence of it in fact a positively good and happy effect."<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, this kind of novel had to have something in it, somewhere, other than mere hints and suggestions. Some kind of extenuating circumstances would have had to operate in Vint's behalf to keep him from being a common criminal and Fielder a common fool. Critics have speculated on the contents of a letter, given after Gaw's death to Fielder and tossed by Fielder into the ivory cabinet. A clue, a detail, might be in the letter. But letters in late James are usually burned unread if they contain incriminating evidence; ensconcing this one in the ivory tower seems a welcome variation. Geismar's theory, that the novel "simply fell apart,"<sup>71</sup> seems reasonable. Confronted with a

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 1005.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Maxwell Geismar, Henry James and the Jacobites (Boston, 1963), p. 421.

story which demanded more detailed knowledge than a remote position from American business could furnish, James seems to have found himself a prisoner in his own ivory tower.

Thus, the late works of Henry James show a return of interest in the American businessman: first through recall, particularly in The Ambassadors, and later through the new impressions which James received on his 1904 trip to America after an absence of twenty years. Treatment of character in the three novels written at the beginning of the late period is sympathetic to the businessman where he appears; the more difficult development of Adam Verver's character in The Golden Bowl is not entirely satisfactory as realism, but James helped himself considerably by careful use of suggestion and introduction of elements of fantasy. Extensive character development in the latter part of the late period is confined to American expatriates and conveys a realistic impression with a minimum of specific detail. Characterization in the last published novel, The Outcry is solid, and use of the British point of view, one with which James was more familiar at that time, permits adequate familiar detail for establishing the credibility of the plot. This last novel indicates that neither age nor illness had impaired James's skill as a storyteller. The unfinished novel, The Ivory Tower, indicates that James did attempt to write a serious novel about American big business, but that he was so severely handicapped by the need for realistic minor detail that he was unable to complete it.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Chronological study of the American businessman in the novels and stories of Henry James reveals that James was far from uninterested in the figure of the American businessman. In the works as a whole, the number and variety of the characters who may be regarded as makers of money is surprising, particularly in view of James's early reputation as a purveyor of leisure class life.

The American businessman appears most often as a character in James's fiction of the early period, where the author employs American businessmen as central characters (most notably in The American, where a businessman is the protagonist), and where brief, vivid sketches of businessmen as types appear in several stories. Businessmen appear in a fourth of the fiction James produced during his early period. In the transitional period, however, few businessmen appear, and only one work, The Reverberator, contains a developed characterization of an American businessman; James during this period seems to have lost interest in the businessman as a subject, possibly because he was concentrating on a business venture of his own, the writing of plays. In the late period, the American businessman reappears as a major

character in much of James's fiction, and there is evidence to indicate that James's interest increased markedly after his 1904 visit to America, his first in twenty years. From his nostalgic but rather amused recollection of American businessmen in The Ambassadors, James went on to write increasingly of the bewildering confusion and raw power of turn-of-the-century business, and the new American businessman, the billionaire, appears to have fascinated him. James's last short story, his last completed novel, and one of his two uncompleted novels are all concerned with the financial developments which had taken place during his long absence from America.

Characterization of the American businessman is, for the most part, sympathetic; but from his earliest days as an author James seems to have had ambiguous feelings about business and the businessman. Critical of the widespread expectation that young men should form a business connection, the young Henry James seems nevertheless to have tried to hold up an example of proper and unselfish conduct for his readers, and to have emphasized the wise use of wealth as a moral obligation. Accordingly, his criticisms of American businessmen during the early period are implied rather than expressed. Although James usually showed American businessmen as uncultivated and uninterested in culture, the early works show evidence that the businessman of that time was eager to provide the benefits of culture and travel for his

womenfolk. James's businessmen display no hostility toward the cultivated sense of appreciation for art and tradition which the author himself valued so highly, but their self-sufficient lack of interest may have been another factor in the ambiguity which James's treatment of the businessman often displays. Even when the businessman was the subject of his satire, however, James was usually not unkind; he seemed to feel that all Americans had certain native qualities of honesty and generosity which did much to mitigate their shortcomings. James portrays the majority of his businessmen as both honest and generous. Only in the latter part of the late period did James depict American businessmen as boorish or dangerously evil, and even in these works there seems to be a reaching out on the author's part for understanding. Horrified by the changes which big business had brought about in the American way of life, James, in his late period, was nevertheless impressed by the power which businessmen had acquired and the literary possibilities of the subject intrigued him.

The only crime connected with business which appears in the writing of Henry James is swindling, which is a consistent motif in all three periods. James seems to have considered this term to include both theft and embezzlement, but his usual attitude toward the swindler is tolerant pity. Another recurrent motif is the association of money-making with

idolatry, and the converse association of art with religious practices; formal religion as a motivating force, however, does not appear in James's work. The popular vogue for Social Darwinism seems to have been objectionable to James, but except for this rejection he gives little consideration to any particular system of philosophy in his novels and stories.

The vagueness about how his characters made their money, a trait for which James has often been criticized, was at least partly a result of his own lack of business training. The scanty instruction in bookkeeping which James received as a child had no appeal for him, and as a young man he had little opportunity to observe the businessman in his natural surroundings. Details of how the businessmen secured their wealth are thus missing from even James's early fiction, but in the early period James did usually indicate the nature of his characters' occupations. Only in the late period is the absence of specific detail irritating or unsatisfactory. As a rule, James was able to compensate for his lack of specific knowledge about business by his superb command of the literary technique of suggestion and implication. Thus, the growing gap between information based on personal observation and the vague, very generalized knowledge of American business affairs shown in the transitional period and the late period does not become obvious until the late period. James's concentration on the American girl during the seventies may

have been connected with his increasing remoteness from direct observation of American businessmen after he took up residence in England. Not only was James interested in the businessman as a factor in American life, but he expressed late in life a desire to see the business tycoon given serious treatment by writers. James's own attempt to write a serious novel on this subject, however, seems to have failed because he did not have sufficient knowledge of current business activities to supply the needed detail for such a work.

James's chief criticism of the American businessman in his early work seems to have been what he called, in his third published story, a poverty in certain human essentials. This vague phrase apparently implied overconcern with self and cold disinterest in other people. The assertiveness and self-satisfaction of the businessmen in the early stories contrasts with the apologetic and somewhat diffident picture of Mr. Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady, the last novel of the early period. In the transitional period, the most successful businessmen, those who have made fortunes, are portrayed as having done so through luck rather than through effort or planning. In the late period, James's most sympathetic characterization of an American billionaire, Adam Verver, is described as a man importuned by unfounded claims on his money which his sensitive conscience will not permit him to ignore. Although Verver is insufficiently

characterized to be really convincing as a money-maker, James represents Verver's connoisseur appreciation of art as praiseworthy, and he extolls Verver's unselfish desire to give an art museum to the American city where he made his money.

In his previous novels and stories, James had taken a dim view of endowments, foundations, public benefactors, and of most people who gave away money. This quirk may have been part of the author's unconscious heritage from his Scotch Presbyterian grandfather, William James. In The Golden Bowl, however, James seemed to think Adam Verver's wish to bring culture to the majority of Americans, languishing in ugliness, was sufficiently high-minded to be exempt from charges of vain munificence.

Although James had an Irish gift for fantasy and a tendency toward romance, he was essentially a realistic writer. His best characterizations have the convincing ring of personal observation, transmuted through his genius into universal truth. In the early period, despite a certain diversity of business interests, James's businessmen belong to the rentier class, a group with which he had been familiar from his New York childhood. Although James was unable to give an account of their activities at work (because of his lack of specific knowledge about what went on in Wall Street), James did picture businessmen convincingly in the situations where he saw them: wealthy, retired or vacationing, usually

traveling with their families or staying at resorts. In the late period, James's stories are usually told from the point of view of American expatriates, and are thus based on his own observations and experiences. The fact that he was not personally involved in big business made it difficult for him to handle such subjects, but in confining his story to what he had observed, James was able to recreate the atmosphere rather well.

Henry James, thus, cannot be considered a historical writer in the usual sense of the word. His works, however, taken as a whole, do give a panoramic view of the "Gilded Age," the heyday of unrestrained economic activity in America, that is both sensitive and valuable. Vernon Parrington's early-Twentieth-Century designation of James as uninterested in the vital subject of the American businessman seems, therefore, inaccurate and extremely superficial.

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