THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY
AS SEEN IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES.

BY

D. F. MIDDLETON. B.A. HONOURS (NATAL)

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

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Henry James (1843-1916) is a curious and, by his own choice, enigmatic figure. We have a great many dates, a few letters, and little else. James's fragment of autobiography, vast as it is, is strangely unrevealing. There is a wealth of impressions as one would expect from such a writer but precious little about the man. Henry James was chary of describing his personal feelings - so much so that some doubted his ability to have any strong emotions.[1] His autobiography, interesting as it is, is pure observation, memories of people, places and impressions, all marvellously sensitive, but little personal feeling. Compared with a work like André Gide's autobiography, so spectacular in its personal exposures, it is hardly one at all. James was no exhibitionist. From the bonfire of personal papers he allowed to emerge precisely what he wished to be known about himself and nothing more. Such teasing questions as to the 'obscure hurt' suffered at the age of eighteen (which some have understood as being castration) or the precise nature of his regard for his cousin Minny Temple, receive no answer. Thus obscurity does not, one fancies, arise from James's inability to communicate but a determination not to. When Pater died James wrote to Edmund Gosse (1894). The letter is unpublished, but quoted by Leon Edel.

> He had had, 'the most exquisite literary fortune' and had achieved 'the mask without the face.' Henry added almost exuberantly that there wasn't an inch in the total area of 'pale embarrassed, exquisite Pater', not even 'a tiny vantage for a newspaper to flap its wings on'.[2]

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1. Somerset Maugham, The Vagrant Mood, Heineman. 1950.
2. Leon Edel, The Middle Years, p. 317

For James the life of the successful artist was his work and there was little left over for an observable life. He often broke this rule in his own stories, many of his artists being successful artists and some of them, like John Berridge in "The Velvet Glove," living or not living with great intensity. James has, however, left points of vantage for his biographers to flap their wings on. Mr. Edel in his monumental biography of James[1] has reversed the normally dangerous procedure of interpreting the works from the life, and has written, as a result, a psychological thriller. Such matters as James's supposed love for Elena Lowe and his deep friendship for Miss Fennimore Woolcott Woolson remain delightful conjectures unsupported by evidence. On the more conventional details of James's life, Mr. Edel provides a valuable source book, but his conjectures as to the inner life are impossible to prove and rather disrespectful to James's belief that the artist has a right to privacy.

Suffice it to say of James's life that he was born in 1843 to a wealthy Swedenborgian father who was determined that his children should become citizens of the world. To this end they had no settled education but travelled widely in America and Europe, being taught by tutors or sporadically attending school. Henry and his brother William (1842-1910), the philosopher studied painting, a training which was to stand Henry in good stead. Later both diverged, William to medicine and Henry to literature. From then on Henry James devoted himself to writing, with a devotion, which, in its less openly ascetic way, rivals that of Flaubert. He vacillated

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1 Henry James, The Untried Years, Rupert Hart Davis (1953) The Conquest of London (1962), The Middle Years (1963)

between America and Europe until 1875, when he spent a year in Paris and later settled permanently in England. He visited America, his native land, occasionally, with a gap from 1881 to 1901, and was frequently on the continent, Italy being his especial favourite. In middle life he was an habitué of the best society, one year dining out on three hundred occasions. A keen register of gossip, his social popularity stood his writing in good stead. Towards the end of the century he left London and lived at Lamb House, Rye, in Sussex, becoming something of a recluse, though his friendship was always extended, especially to young writers. With the outbreak of war in 1914 he adopted British citizenship. In his last years he was able to write little on account of failing health, and he died in February 1916. He never married, a fact which has caused a great deal of unnecessary speculation concerning his private life, and, as far as we can tell, he never seriously considered marriage. It seems he considered it an unnecessary interference with his work. Perhaps he never loved at all, but few men have escaped that calamity.

By all accounts James was genuinely fond of his family and friends, always courteous and helpful and always interested in other writers. He was a brilliant conversationalist. The myth of James as a recluse has arisen from his later years. In middle life he mixed widely, sufficiently so to be on good terms with Mr. Gladstone and Lord Asquith. He also met Prince Kropotkin. The anecdote on which The Turn of the Screw was based was related to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Perhaps it is true that he never felt quite at home among the English, but he had great opportunities for observing them. Among writers his range of acquaintance was vast. He knew writers from Thackeray

and Dickens (he met the latter once) to ones still living, such as Sir Hugh Walpole and Sir Compton Mackenzie. Stevenson (1850-94), Bourget, and above all, Turgenev (1818-83) were especial friends while such as Flaubert (1821-80), Daudet and Browning (1812-89) were more than passing acquaintances.

As to his knowledge of the arts, his understanding of the novel was wide and profound, his taste was catholic (his approval of Thackeray, Trollope, Pater and Stevenson would shock Dr. Leavis) and he speaks with authority on painting. Not only did he study drawing in his youth, he spent a lifetime in looking at paintings and knew many artists. His interest in music and poetry (especially lyric poetry) was more superficial and his knowledge of them seems to have been that of a vastly appreciative amateur.

Nobody lived more for his art than Henry James, and, as he observed in <u>The Tragic Muse</u>, nobody is more alone than an artist at his trade. An opinion frequently expressed by him was that the artist's life was contained in his work. Little was allowed to interfere with this, his wide social activity was, indeed, grist to his mill. Unlike Flaubert, no Louise Colet was allowed to disturb the serene flow of his artistic development, though Minny Temple <u>was</u> perhaps his Madame Schlesinger. It is perhaps natural that a man, who devoted his life so single-mindedly to the practice of his art, should meditate both upon its nature and its value. It would be equally natural for him to express his thoughts upon the matter in his art. Henry James's reflections in this regard form the subject of this essay. He pondered certain matters throughout his life and we will attempt to trace them and their development.

In a certain sense many Jamesian characters are

artists in the sense that they possess in a high degree an aesthetic sensibility and moral awareness which James considered essential to a great artist. We shall limit ourselves, however, to those who attempt some form of production, those who paint or write. Hyacinth Robinson as a bookbinder with great promise of being a writer, and Gilbert Osmond whose cold ability to manipulate paint is extended to those around him, also qualify. As it is, his artists show great variety, from cold tasteless pedants to extremely fine and sensitive people.

As we shall see, the discussion emerges as two not entirely separable strands. Firstly, a certain *ars poetica* and *ars vivendi, ad poetam*. What should the artist be like? What discipline should he impose upon himself? Combined with this he attempted to show what great art was, especially in *The Tragic Muse* and in his use of works of art in his novels. Secondly, what place did the artist enjoy or fail to enjoy in his society? What purpose does the truly fine work of art serve among men?

In approaching this surprisingly seldom discussed problem, the first discussion (and most lengthy) will be devoted to those works where James discusses the artist and his art most explicitly. Then I hope to conclude with a brief consideration of the work of art as it appears in the novel and suggest means by which our knowledge of James's attitude to the problem would help to illumine his works and his attitude to subjects other than art. Finally, there will be an attempt to relate James to others who have shared his preoccupations, such as Thomas Mann, and to sketch his context. This last will enable us to approach an assessment as to the value of his considerations.

CHAPTER 11.

RODERICK HUDSON -
(WITH A NOTE ON BENVOLIO)

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(1876)

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Roderick Hudson, by the choice of James himself, stands at the beginning of his novelistic oeuvre. This is fitting as the novel is seminal to the whole of James's work. Themes appear in this book which he was to spend a lifetime in developing and elaborating. We see the uncomplex American being materially worsted by the subtle and corrupt European. In Rowland Mallett we see also the value of humility and renunciation, a value James was to hold to the end. Above all, for our purposes at least, we find an artist confronted with the heartbreaking problems inherent in the practice of his art.

Soon after the close of the American Civil War a wealthy and artistic man, Rowland Mallett, meets in a small New England town, Northampton Mass., a young sculptor of great promise - Roderick Hudson. The young man has no chance in America of advancing his talents, and his work in a law office is uncongenial, so Mallett offers to take him to Italy ~~in order to~~ that he may learn the skills he needs. This offer of patronage is eagerly accepted, but before they sail Hudson proposes to, and is accepted by his cousin Mary Garland - a young lady of some looks and delightful character for whom Mallett has formed an undeclared attachment. In Italy Hudson begins to have more than mere promise and shows actual achievement, but falls in love with a supremely beautiful _femme fatale_ - Christina Light, the daughter of an American expatriate. He has little money however, and Christina, if she is in love with anyone, is in love with his friend Mallett, or

so it could be argued. Christina gives Roderick some encouragement; however, under the threat of her illegitimacy being revealed, she is forced to marry the wealthy and dogged Prince Casamassima. Roderick however, has had his head quite turned, and his work seriously deteriorates to the point where he claims to be without 'inspiration'. Even when his mother and fiancée join him in Italy no improvement is brought about. Finally Christina, bored with her marriage, intimates to Hudson that he may follow her and that favours may be given. He attempts to borrow money for his pursuit from Rowland. A quarrel ensues during which Rowland accuses Roderick of crass insensitivity, revealing for the first time his love for Mary Garland. Hudson is angered at his own blindness and walks off into the Alps and dies during a snow-storm. There is no union between Rowland and Mary nor does Rowland marry his cousin's widow, who, it seems, would not be averse to such a plan. The mother, Mrs. Hudson, is crushed and Mary, it seems, will remain an old maid. Christina is left bored and without her prey, to reappear more fully realised in a later novel. Thus everyone lives, if not unhappily, at least unsatisfactorily for ever after.

It is singular that Henry James, at the very beginning of an artistic career, should write a novel which takes so pessimistic a view of the artist's position. There are, as I hope to show, certain complicating factors such as Roderick's weakness of character and the international situation, but nevertheless the position of the genuinely creative genius is seen as bleak.

Is Roderick Hudson truly a genius? This question presents itself at the outset, for some (e.g. Professor

Warren Beach)[1] have suggested that the reader cannot be sure whether his despair as to his ability for further creation which so possesses him at the end is grounded in truth or not. Was his talent merely a meteor doomed to quick extinction? It does not seem so; indeed, James appears to have expended much effort in laying before us evidence of an undoubted talent. The fact that Roderick's familiarity of reference to Michelangelo is made to seem in no way ridiculous or vain is a case in point, but there is much surer evidence. Mallett and the humble water-colourist Singleton, who are no fools in the matter of judging the plastic arts are both unwavering in their admiration of a major talent. Gloriani, however, the adept craftsman and cool man of the world, provides the crucial test. Constantly he had been cynical of Roderick's prospects. Faced with his Adam and Eve and later his bust of Christina Light, he had maintained that here was a flash of youthful precocity which would give way to commercialism with the coming of maturity. Faced however with Roderick's portrait bust of his mother this shrewd artist says,

> It is a pearl of pearls -[2]

and later more significantly,

> You are strong enough not to care about me at all. You are very strong . . . . . I should like to say now that I believe in you.

Apart from the effect of the works on competent critics the reader is also impressed by the nature of the subjects which Roderick so effortlessly masters.

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1 Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, London (1918).
2 Roderick Hudson, edition of 1878. Rupert Hart-Davis, (1961). Introduction by Leon Edel, p. 300

The first piece which Mallett sees is a statue of a nude boy drinking from a pitcher, which, despite certain faults, impresses him greatly. This, and the later representations of Adam and Eve, are all nudes. Now the nude is the richest resource open to the plastic artist but on account of the danger of its assuming an aphrodisiac quality and through the very power of its resources, a difficult subject to achieve. Roderick can achieve it without (in the case of Adam and Eve) lapsing into prettiness. (It should be noted however that the prettiness of the drinking boy is a quality rare enough). Furthermore the representation of these pristine archetypal figures shows Roderick as young and from uncorrupt America. In a sense he has not yet begun to suffer, his life seems a happy prospect, and, untouched by life, he is able to achieve a precocious success in such subjects. Later his busts of his mother and Christina his beloved show his awakening to those tormentors and his entry into knowledge of suffering. It is on account of his success in handling these maturer subjects that Gloriani finally concedes his greatness. These subjects mark the transition from the unformed young man with genius and health to the broken creature at the end. We feel, however, that had Roderick had the fibre of a Rowland he would have been the greater for his unfortunate erotic experiences. The later portrait busts are again what one would call 'major subjects', for the subjects of both are charged with passion for the artist. That Roderick should be able to deal so finely with such subjects is further proof of his genius. His passionate nature, could he have desciplined it as Michelangelo disciplined his, would never have failed to provide him with subjects. James distrusted passion and, as we

shall see, had interesting views concerning its discipline. It seems to me that James's success in suggesting Roderick's genius is a minor triumph. The great technical difficulty in fictional writing is that the works of any sort of pictorial artist do not exist. No amount of assertion will do and lengthy description is apt to be tedious, and, in relation to the non-literary arts quite irrelevant. James, in relying on the nature and effect of Roderick's productions, solves his problem neatly.

Having established Roderick's genius, his disintegration in the dense atmosphere of Europe assumes a greater significance. That there was no place for him in America, James is again at some pains to show. James was little concerned with artists in his native society, which he seemed to feel was not even sufficiently developed to provide a conflict. His decision to leave America in his own life is a demonstration of this. In Northampton, Mass., the only person who appears to have the remotest appreciation of his gifts is Mallett's cousin Cecilia. She, however, does not have the aesthetic wit to see Roderick's true talents, or perhaps it is because she is not of a type to attach much value to such talents. She enjoys his conversation but encourages him in his exuberant immaturities and has little to contribute beyond the genteel high-school culture belonging to a woman who is 'improving'. In his family Roderick's position is still worse. His cousin Mary Garland has given an uncomprehending blank cheque while his mother is summed up by Cecilia in a flash of insight which illuminates the puritan hostility to art which Roderick has to face in America.

> His mother as she one day confessed to me, has a holy horror of a profession which consists exclusively as she supposes in making figures of people without their clothes on.

> Sculpture to her mind is an insidious form of immorality . . . . . .[1]

The legal house into which his mother attempts to force him is a strait jacket, though it is interesting to note the almost paranoic exultation with which he shatters the image of Mr. Barnaby Striker saying:

> "I have driven the money changers out of the temple."[2]

Cecilia helps to sum the matter up further.

> "The flame (of his talent) is smouldering but is never fanned by the breath of criticism."[3]

Finally there is the obvious point that Roderick must go to Italy to learn his art among the remains of antiquity and the Renaissance. It is Europe or nothing. In the end it is both.

Before departing Roderick shows what appears later as a lack of nerve, for so would I explain his proposal to Mary Garland. He had shown no particular attraction towards her before, and afterwards he certainly shows none. In retrospect the matter takes on the aspect of a young man about to embark for distant parts who will propose to the first girl who will accept him, in order to enjoy a feeling of security abroad. James does not state it as such but one only has to consider the reactions of Hudson and Mallett (who _is_ in love with Mary) towards the infinitely alluring Christina Light to see whether Roderick loved Mary.

In Italy Roderick, as is to be expected, shows great promise. An assimilation of the past leads him to create an Adam and then an Eve, which, as we have seen, are both

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1 _Ibid_, p. 39
2 _Ibid_, p. 45
3 _Ibid_, p. 39

very fine. His head is filled with certain grandiose plans for a set of personifications and deities which never materialises.

The two splendid and vivid presences in the book, Italy and Christina, are fused in one of its most important scenes. I refer to the one in which Rowland overhears a conversation between Christina and Roderick in the Colosseum, and intervenes when Roderick undertakes the foolhardy mission of bringing a blue flower to Christina from an inaccessible crevice.[1] The earlier part of the scene illustrates the failure both of Christina and Roderick as human beings. Both speak from private worlds of their own construction and both dramatise themselves exceedingly. Rowland considers Christina's talk as 'sinister persiflage' and rightly so. It shows an ennui which, to adapt Baudelaire, would swallow men at a yawn. She desires a man who can live without her, in other words, a man to whom she would be a slave. From her love of luxury and power, however, it is an easy matter for the reader to deduce that she would never stand such a situation. When she does meet a man who can command her respect in that he does not need the sanction of love ultimately to justify his existence, namely Rowland, she respects him and is attracted, but, in the end, she recognises his superiority and breaks off the one-sided relationship. Indeed we feel that she is incapable of love, (an impression by no means altered when we read the Princess Casamassima). Roderick, on the other hand, is naive enough to hope that mere self-assertion could satisfy this bored, confused, but deeply searching woman. His command to her to sit, though obeyed, fails to make the

1 Ibid, Ch. XIII

desired impression. His proposed attempt to bring her the blue flower merely upsets her.

The Colosseum, ominously described as Alpine, is a symbol for Italy, massively splendid, decayed and treacherous. Like Christina, it and Italy are corrupt, corrupting, corruption. The sense of vertigo afforded by the treacherous supports which Roderick must use to gain the blue flower is not purely physical but moral as well. Italy is old and beautiful and its tradition, old as that of the Caesars, is summed up by Mary Garland when she says later in the book:

> Beauty stands there and it penetrates one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man was not made to suffer but to enjoy. This place has undermined my stoicism, but - shall I tell you? I feel as if I were saying something sinful - I love it.[1]

Sinful here is not a joke as when attributed to Mrs. Hudson on the subject of sculpture, but plainly indicates the aesthetic values of Europe as opposed to the moral values of America. I use aesthetic and moral in the full Kierkegardian sense and they are not inapposite. That is to say that for Henry James European life is directed towards the enjoyment of exquisite sensations regardless of their moral value, while in America sensations now exquisite are rejected when in discord with the puritanic moral code. Indeed, pleasant sensations were to be feared as inventions of the Devil. The aesthetic-hedonistic code of Europe was to appear even more sinister in the later novels. Here it simply provides no moral aid to the artist in search of beauty. Beauty is an end in itself, and if you fail, you fail and fall into a vertigo of mere sensation. It is the moral code which puritan New England has given to Rowland, and

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1 Ibid, p. 348

to his descendant Strether, that enables them to leave Europe ravaged but still men. Roderick, accepting Europe at a stroke, has no such core, and slips into the vertigo both physically and morally.

James loves Italy. Apart from Roderick Hudson we have, as further testimony, The Last of the Valerii, William Wetmore Story and his Friends, and his travel sketches. Its antiquity and beauty enchanted him; for him Italy appears drenched in a gold autumnal glow. The autumn of corruption, even if lovely. Italy, which at first sight seems so right for an artist, such as Roderick, is seen as suspect, perhaps downright vicious. Italy was, for James, something which had to be renounced, just as marriage had to be renounced.

In a book written 30 years after Roderick Hudson James propounded a startling solution:

> The truth . . . is that the 'picturesque' subject for literary art, has by no means all its advantage in the picturesque country; yields its full taste, gives out all its inspiration, in other words, in some air unfriendly to the element at large.[1]

William Wetmore Story, while resembling Roderick superficially, did not have the reach to be destroyed and James's biography is a monument to piety rather than admiration. James, however, withdrew himself from that rich ambiguous aesthetic air and worked in the cold chastening climate of England. Italy could be absorbed, not lived with. The mediocre Story might be able to survive but the genius must opt for a more monastic life. In Italy, as Mary Garland remarked, life was not lived by the puritanic concept of duty but for enjoyment. This latter, which James suggests by means of Roderick's fate, is an insufficient guiding principle for a man's life.

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1 William Wetmore Story and His Friends, London, (1957)

It is far too dangerous. The great periods of Italian culture - Roman times and the Renaissance - were marked by a pursuit of experience and sensation which often took more than dubious forms. Story, on the other hand, James felt, failed because the extraordinary richness of Italy obscured its greatness to him and he fell into insipid rococco. In England the past could be more fully savoured, as the modus vivendi was less abandoned to sensation than in Italy. England was something of a half-way house between Europe and America. It had a rich past but one not so deeply saturated with memories of Caesars and Borgias.

The blue flower for which Roderick proposes to risk his neck is a very interesting symbol. The German poet Novalis (1772-1801) used the blue flower to symbolise the state of Romantic longing, the possession of perfect beauty and ultimate felicity. Such great longing, as Novalis realised a century before, leads finally to the wish for death. It is impossible to ascertain whether James read Novalis or not. The German has always been rightly popular in England for his verses, but his novel, Heinrich von Ofterdingen,[1] where the symbol is most fully exploited, has been little read. However this may be, the brilliant blue flower lodged in its inaccessible niche, symbolising his hope of Christina, is palpably there to the reader, and as a symbol its function is the same as in Novalis. That is to say the possession of Christina represents to Roderick a state of complete bliss, a sort of paradis artificiels where sorrow cannot enter, a state of happiness as pure and remote as the blue flower, a state so desirable that nothing else seems of value to him.

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1 Novalis (alias Frederich von Hardenberg) Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Stephen Spander, Anchor Books

Roderick can be dissuaded from breaking his neck for the symbol but Christina ultimately is his destruction as a man. He lives for her alone and under the most humiliating conditions, and so, following his vision of her in the Alps, he slips and falls to his death. Neither Christina nor the blue flower are to be won by mere physical strength.

This is not to say that James places the whole burden of Roderick's destruction on Italy and Christina Light. He could never be as blunt and as unsubtle as that. Roderick defines James's conception of an artist, both by what he is and what he is not. In certain respects he comes off rather badly in comparison with Singleton, Gloriani and Rowland Mallett, despite his incomparable genius. This arises partly out of his refusal to do hack work - notably the Allegory of Culture, for the *noveau-riche* Mr. Leavenworth.[1] Here, admittedly, the question is two-sided. Both Mr. Leavenworth and the times he represents are against Roderick, for Mr. Leavenworth is no Lorenzo de Medici. Perhaps had Mr. Leavenworth ~~had~~ not had such precise ideas for a piece of cultural junk Roderick might have been able to express and objectify his sufferings as Michelangelo did in executing the Medici tombs. Mr. Leavenworth, lacking eminently as he did the intelligence of a Lorenzo, might at least have had the negative virtue of allowing Roderick a free hand. Mr. Leavenworth's limitations are brought out in the passage arising from his seeing the beginning of Roderick's statue of an 'ideal lazzarone' (beggar) 'an image of serene, irresponsible sensuous life.'

> "Something in the style of the Dying Gladiator?" he sympathetically observed.

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1 For which he was offered $ 5,000 (£1,000). A considerable sum in those times.

"Oh no," said Roderick seriously, "he is not dying, he is only drunk!"

"Ah, but intoxication, you know," Mr. Leavenworth rejoined, "is not a proper subject for sculpture. Sculpture should not deal with transitory attitudes."

"Lying dead drunk is not a transitory attitude! Nothing is more permanent, more sculpturesque, more monumental!"

"An entertaining paradox," said Mr. Leavenworth, "if we had time to exercise our wits upon it. I remember at Florence an intoxicated figure by Michael Angelo which seemed to me a deplorable aberration of a great mind. I myself touch liquor in no shape whatever. I have travelled through Europe on cold water. The most varied and attractive lists of wines are offered me, but I brush them aside. No cork has ever been drawn at my command!"

"The movement of drawing a cork calls into play a very pretty set of muscles," said Roderick. "I think I will make a figure in that position."

"A Bacchus realistically treated! My dear young friend, never trifle with your lofty mission. Spotless marble should represent virtue, not vice!" [1]

Not that the lazzarone is held up to our unqualified praise, the ideal lies somewhere between him and Mr. Leavenworth, the one lacks moral sense, the other aesthetic. Indeed, it is felt, as throughout almost the whole Jamesian canon, that the major artist today is not in a society where he can give fully of himself and still produce work that is considered socially valuable. The patronage afforded by Mr. Leavenworth is surely (as it cannot escape being so) meant to be contrasted with the whole system of noble patronage which made Roman and Italian art so great in Augustan times and in the Renaissance. In those times the artist had a job to do and a great latitude in which to do it, and the certainty that if the job was well done there was a society which would recognise him for what he was. The complementary suggestion is James's implication that, had Roderick had the plain strength of character to apply

1 Henry James, Roderick Hudson, p. 233, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, (1961)

himself to the commission, he might have executed it without undue aesthetic prostitution and gained a sum of money which any artist would be a fool to despise. We may dislike Mr. Leavenworth but we deplore Roderick's inability to use him. Rowland, in seeing the work in progress, considers it to have promise but Roderick, despite the indicated ability to finish, abandons it with proud romantic notions about 'inspiration'. It reminds one of the Romantic and post-Romantic poets despising the useful and fruitful habit of translation in favour of their own brilliant outpourings. It is a lack of discipline, a lack of discipline not present in Gloriani. One sees Gloriani patiently creating clever if slightly vulgar erotica somewhat close to Carpeaux. Gloriani knew he had to live and regulated his talent accordingly and, while Roderick did not have to abuse himself, he could have learnt to apply himself to tasks not instantaneously congenial. Again while Singleton is not held up as an example for precise emulation it is still clear that much could have been learnt from him. His quiet ability to work hard and consistently, albeit at low pressure, has its favourable aspects in contrast to Roderick's sporadic, if brilliant, creation. It should be clear that James is not saying that in this cruel world the artistic prostitutes and minor talents flourish while the geniuses are doomed to extinction. Indeed, Gloriani and Singleton have their own problems which they overcome efficiently enough. The suggestion is that Genius cannot spurn such an acquisition of patient merit. Roderick never learned to discipline his talent. An even more striking contrast is provided with his friend Rowland. Rowland, as has already been observed, withstands the corrosive influence of art and

enjoyment; he is able to enjoy them as much as anyone can, but he remains himself despite that, and his very real affection for Mary Garland. He is like Strether, in that the beauties of Europe are not lost on him. He does not see art as <u>per se</u> immoral; he can absorb them and be the greater for them, but he does not lose his self control as Roderick did. He does not succumb to passion of living purely for pleasure. He says little about his God but the effect of his faith and moral sense is seen in the disparity between his fate and that of Roderick. In him puritan America finds its justification, and that despite its faults of aesthetic appreciation. Rowland has a moral core which enables him to receive the most dangerous experience remaining both manly and alive. It may be argued that Roderick, as an actual creative artist, cannot partake of such an excellence. This is a 'romantic' notion which the novel fails to confirm, and which James's own life so magnificently refutes. Roderick is judged along with the others in the novel as a man and is found wanting. Indeed, through Roderick's failure James seems groping towards Mr. Eliot's strip of platinum wire.[1] Roderick is disastrously involved in the experiment and is destroyed by it - he has no impersonal 'mind that creates' that can dissociate itself from 'the man who suffers'. Roderick's mind, his governing faculties, are too easily unbalanced by his experiences. Instead of controlling them, maturing through them, and being enriched by them, he is controlled, debilitated and devastated by them. By means of Roderick's inability, James seems to be suggesting an artist who possesses executive faculties, an ability to think clearly and

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1 T.S. Eliot, <u>Collected Essays</u>, Faber and Faber (1960) Essay on 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

control himself would remain unimpaired by any personal experiences however shattering. An artist should create impervious to his personal fate.

Rowland is the first example of that peculiarly Jamesian artist who does not compose in words or paint but in the very stuff of life itself. This activity was later to assume many forms both infinitely sinister as in the 'Wings of the Dove' and angelic as in 'The Golden Bowl'. James was to remain throughout his life deeply suspicious of the use of other human beings for purely aesthetic and selfish ends, that is to say as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. This accounts for the ambiguity which Dr. Leavis notes, even as late as the 'Golden Bowl'.[1] Rowland, however, like Ralph Touchett acts with the best will in the world and puts just enough wind into the sails of his protégé for him to come upon the rocks. In giving him enough scope to give his talents full range Rowland could not give him the wisdom for its use. He realises this with a deep misgiving and doubts the advisability of his whole venture. In this we have the first, as yet not fully developed, indication of James's doubts concerning the use of life as if it were the inanimate expressive material of art. Here no shred of blame attaches to Rowland as it is Roderick who misuses his rich opportunity; the doubt arises when we consider whether or not such gifts ought to be given. In Ralph Touchett's case he is magnificently rewarded in an unexpected way. Rowland and Ralph, on account of their altruism, are to be sharply differentiated from such beings as Madame Merle and Kate Croy.

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1 F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition,
The Common Pursuit,

Roderick Hudson is peculiar among James's works in that it is a novel of passion. Passion, that is, in the sense in which the novels of Stendahl could be called passionate. We witness a glorying in passion for its own sake that superficially places the novel beside those of Stendahl rather than those of his English exemplars, Thackeray, Dickens and George Eliot. To say, however, as one critic has done, that James is being 'romantic about romanticism' is surely untrue. For Stendahl to have felt a violent passion, however destructive, was a sign that one had lived at least a little while. Like Thackeray he has the two women, the woman of violent and destructive passion and the woman who brings peace and more fruitful passion. Both Thackeray and James waver between the two and finally choose the latter. James, like them, is fascinated by the fatal women. Christina Light is his Duchess Sanservina, his Beatrix Esmond, and like the others he is fascinated by his creation. James nevertheless dismisses all passion from the life of the artist. Roderick is destroyed by it, and, while there is undoubtedly romantic beauty in his destruction, James does not feel the passion to have been its own reward. Roderick and Christina do not assume the superhuman proportions which fictional characters possessed by passion sometimes do in novels. Both are observed as human beings and weak and vacillating to boot. Both are the children of their passions. Both, in the end, recognise Rowland as their moral superior. The manner in which Rowland emerges as the strongest character in the book refutes the criticism of James being 'romantic'. It should be noted that Rowland achieves his eminence without any defect of sensibility. He is partly the Pandarus figure, the staid and controlled man who watches

the vivid disintegration of his brilliant friend, but he far transcends this function. For James passion, explosive emotion, was, as we shall see, always suspect and completely to be abjured by the artist. A later artist of his was intended for an intellectual rather than a human passion and, like Thomas Mann, he felt that an artist should have nothing to do personally with the matters depicted in his art. Again this could be illustrated from James's own life in which Roderick Hudson seems to stand as a memento abstinere.

On the whole the work under discussion is a very fine book, and one can see no reason to reverse the favourable judgments of Turgenev and Matthew Arnold.[1] Certain coincidences are far-fetched and there is no explanation of how Roderick learnt what he did of sculpture in his small American town, but these matter little. A slight blemish is the rhetoric surrounding Roderick's death. To use a much abused word with justice, it is chiselled. (Also, as Dr. Leavis has pointed out there are passages of concrete and civilised observation which remind us of James at his greatest.) It tells a good story well and with point. The plot is vivid and involves the reader, providing him with a just and satisfactory resolution of the feelings it arouses. It is not merely the promising apprentice work of a master, but an achievement in itself.

Roderick Hudson might be compared to two other works of artistic statement by important modern novelists. Art has increasingly become the subject of art, poets such as Mallarmé (1842-98) and Valéry (1873-1946) wrote increasingly of the creative act, while poets from Keats to Eliot have

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1 c.f. Leon Edel, Introduction to Roderick Hudson, Rupert Hart-Davis (1961)

written much concerning their struggles with language. Poetasters have since adopted the theme, treating them with far less ability. In the novel itself Tonio Kröger and The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man are akin to Roderick Hudson in being early statements by great novelists on the fate of the young artist. Joyce's novel is purely introspective, Mann and Joyce are introspective almost to the point of Dostoevsky. By this I mean that both Stephen Daedalus and Tonio Kröger are described through their inner worlds (which both cultivate assiduously) and both lack self-confidence when faced with others. Roderick's inner world is hidden from us, indeed he is so impulsive (as in the scene at the Colosseum) as to make one doubt whether he has a highly developed reflective faculty. Certainly he does not lack self-confidence.

The Portrait of the Artist is perhaps a dead end. After it comes what some might call the unsignificant virtuosity of Ulysses and the gibberish of Finnegan's Wake. James, like Mann, was not prepared to experiment for the sake of experiment and so their early works stand at the beginning of monumental achievements. The two comparisons also help to define James. Both are marvellously explicit on all matters and, as we have said, very introspective. James was never introspective. Roderick is a dangerous extrovert, and his artists always deal with some concrete problem in hand. Even Gabriel Nash is so, only in The Lesson of the Master and The Beast in the Jungle is James content to theorize. He does not allow introspection even when the hero of The Sacred Fount or the Governess in The Turn of the Screw realise that they may have been wrong, there is no soul-searching. James's novels in addition are eminently not novels of ideas, and even in essays he seldom publicly philosophised. While this may have led

him to ignore certain aspects of human experience we might consider important, it never allowed him to cease dealing with concrete dramatic situations, and he became as consummate a presenter of such scenes as the novel has known.

The two women in Roderick's life have much to do with his downfall; one through her beauty and caprice, the other through her inability to help him. Mary Garland (how close her name is to Mary Garth - and the similarity is more than one of name) is the first of the two to be introduced and not entirely the failure in presentation she is generally taken to be.[1] She embodies the American virtues and limitations just as Christina Light embodies the European vices and freedoms. The one set is so necessary for the maintenance of society and the contract on which it is based, the other so necessary to the artist. This is not to suggest that the artist is a moral or social anarchist - far from it. But Mary lacks the sheer physical beauty of Christina while Christina lacks the moral worth of Mary. The artist must pay regard to the social virtues in order to exist at all, as is shown by Roderick's destruction. Mary, as an American, has been brought up to be a good woman, a pious, dutiful wife and mother. Christina enjoys a dangerous freedom comparable to that of the women of the late Roman Republic. She can, within some limits, make of herself what she wants, and use her beauty and the power it gives her in the way that pleases her most. Significantly, one has a plain exterior and great moral beauty while the other has great physical beauty with a corrupt interior. The one is infinitely appealing to a moral nature, the other to an 'artistic' nature. The beauty of Christina Light is to Roderick a

1 c.f. Leon Edel's introduction to <u>Roderick Hudson</u> cited above.

concrete realisation of the goal of an artist's striving. It is fleshly beauty perhaps but Keats had some truth when he stated that the artist must serve Mammon. James, however, in giving an exposition of this idea provides something more, a critique; Romanticism was dying out on account of the excessive demands it made upon the artist. James was concerned with taking its emotional and spiritual lesson and remaining, if not unscathed, at least substantially intact.

We first see Mary Garland as a quiet, seemingly colourless girl, terrified by Roderick's semi-satanic exuberances. Later she becomes very real to us through the affection she arouses in Rowland. Indeed, despite her inferior beauty, she begins to attract the reader.

> It seemed strange that she should please him (Rowland) so well at so slender a cost; but please him she did, extraordinarily, and his pleasure had a quality altogether new to him. It made him restless and a trifle melancholy; he walked about absently, wondering and wishing. He wondered among other things why fate should have condemned him to make the acquaintance of a girl whom he would make a sacrifice to know better, just as he was leaving the country for years. It seemed to him that he was turning his back on a chance of happiness - happiness of a sort of which the slenderest germ should be cultivated.[1]

Her effect on Rowland succeeds in conveying an effect of great charm to the reader.

It is sufficient testimony to her attractions that a man such as Rowland should be so attracted to her. He has a keen appreciation of moral values and he is a man of the world in the very best sense. Mary Garland is a lady, always decorous in her actions, and with a great fund of human feeling, and her tolerance of Roderick's misdemeanours is quite admirable. It is perhaps, melancholy that virtue should be so easy to adumbrate while Christina's vice should be so complex and take so much

1 *Ibid*, p. 68

space. Mary, however, is an appealing figure, eliciting infinitely more warmth of response from the reader than her commonplace looks would lead him to expect. She is a not insufficient counterpoise to Christina Light. However, when Christina appears with her poodle, her mother and the grotesque Cavalieri (ugliness allied to beauty as in Gloriani's sculptures) she sweeps Mary away as if she were no more than a film of dust. To begin with it is her beauty which dements Roderick, this beauty which James has taken such care should live for us upon the page. So great is this care that Professor Edel has suggested that James was in love with the original - in this case a certain Elena Lowe who took little interest in him. Christina is partly the La Belle Dame, the fatal woman, her pedigree is as long in literature as her husband's is in history. She has something of Swinburne's fatal woman,

> Could I hurt those lips though I hurt you,
> Men touch them and change in a trice
> The lilies and langours of virtue
> For the roses and raptures of vice.[1]

Though Roderick never, as far as we know, touches her lips, his dissolution is there, and he is left wan and palely loitering as the knight in Keats's ballad. Christina is all this and yet more for she is no graven image to be adored by a Poe or a Baudelaire. She is a human being, a strange one to be sure, but still human. By a turn of the high art she is observed through the eyes of Rowland Mallett, a man with the moral strength to judge her as a human being and even to pity her. This quality differentiates him from Roderick and gains him a touching respect from Christina, a respect she could never have given to anything so hopelessly boring as a man slavishly in love with her. She is no mere Juggernaut. Roderick worshipping Mammon represented by the amoral beauty of her

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1 A.C. Swinburne, 'To Dolores, Our Mother of Pain'

magnificent looks, must, by his very nature worship her, so much is inevitable. Mary Garland, who, as Cecilia observed, does not have the looks to please a sculptor is unable to reach Roderick in any way when he is desolate at losing such beauty.

As I have said, Christina is, by means of Rowland, realised as a human being. We sense this in the scene coming directly after the Colosseum scene analysed above. The decaying beauty of Italy is again sounded ominously.

> No part of Rome seemed more historic, in the sense of being weighted with a ponderous past, blighted with the melancholy of things that had had their day. When the afternoon sunshine slept on the sallow battered walls and lengthened the shadows in the courtyards of small closed churches, the place acquired a strange fascination.[1]

A man must be strong indeed to withstand such things. Rowland then enters the significantly deserted church of St. Cecilia, the religion that animated the past is dead and the lovely forms remain without the belief that made them morally elevating. Here he finds Christina Light, who declaims concerning religious feelings she claims once to have had. To Roderick this would have been the tantalising revelation of a fascinating woman. Rowland sees deeper, and in a passage of reflection crystalises her whole character, that weak perverse changeable thing that seems so interesting and strange and remote when endowed with such physical attraction, but which Roderick would hardly have tolerated in a girl who looked like Mary Garland. It is a long passage, but on account of its importance it deserves to be quoted in full.

> Rowland had already been sensible of something in this young lady's tone which he would have called a want of veracity, and this epitome of her religious experience failed to strike him as absolutely historical. But the trait was not disagreeable, for she

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1 Ibid, p. 215

> herself was evidently the foremost dupe of her inventions. She had a fictitious history in which she believed much more fondly than in her real one, and an infinite capacity for extemporised reminiscence adapted to the mood of the hour. She liked to idealise herself, to take interesting and picturesque attitudes to her own imagination; and the vivacity and spontaneity of her character gave her really a starting-point in experience, so that the many-coloured flowers of fiction which blossomed in her talk were not so much perversions as sympathetic exaggerations of fact. And Rowland felt that whatever she said of herself might have been under the imagined circumstances; energy was there, audacity, the restless questioning temperament.[1]

The reader could hardly ask for more. She is an actress in search of a master but no man who loves her can be her master. She enslaves men, and when they are slaves she treats them as such. This not out of any conscious evil but because it is her nature. Rowland is quite unaffected by her charms and she has an almost childish desire to please him. The secret of his religion, a moral principle which he holds and which upholds him, is beyond her understanding but gains her respect. She agrees to reject Roderick because it may be 'magnanimous, heroic, sublime', in other words pleasing to Rowland. Later when, she can no longer live up to such an image she terminates her friendship with Rowland. This desire to appear well, coupled, with her confused ideas of the man she wants, makes her a weak and human woman, but all the more dangerous on account of her beauty, and a treacherous object for Roderick's love.

The theme of the novel is crystallised in Chapter 111 with a conversation between Cecilia and Rowland. Here we find expressed the conscious limitations of America, the dangers of Europe, and James's own personal solution. The solution is emphasized by Roderick's subsequent melancholy fate.

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1 Ibid., pp. 217-218

Cecilia speaks:

> "It seems to me that we have a right to ask more (than a masterpiece) to demand that you guarantee us not only the development of the artist but the security of the man."
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> Rowland became grave again. "His security?"
>
> "His moral, his sentimental security. Here you see it's perfect. We are all under a tacit compact to keep him quiet. Perhaps you believe in the necessary turbulence of genius and you intend to enjoin upon your protégé the importance of cultivating his passions."
>
> "On the contrary, I believe that a man of genius owes as much deference to his passions, as any other man, but not a particle more, and I confess I have a strong conviction that the artist is better for leading a quiet life. That is what I shall preach to my protégé, as you call him, by example as well as by precept."[1]

Rowland fails, but through the perverse will of Roderick rather than any moral deficiency in himself. The phrase to be noted, however, is 'any other man'. The artist has a job to do, and if its materials are more dangerous than most, it is all the more reason for him to control himself and regulate his life.

Coeval with Roderick Hudson was a short story or rather a small allegorical romance , 'Benvolio' (1875). In some ways it is, while being a far smaller work, complementary to Roderick Hudson. A young poet Benvolio has great charm and a good appearance. He also has the means to pursue his muse in comfort. Unfortunately his muse takes the shape of two women, both loved and loving. One, a countess, leads him to a life of the senses, of rich material pleasures, the pleasures of society and the world. The other, Scholastica, is the daughter of a philosopher and leads him in her turn to a life of meditation and contemplation; and a delight in the viewing of

1 Ibid., p. 53

abstract ideas. He vacillates between the two, for long periods he is content with the company of one to the exclusion of the other. For a while he writes well. Sooner or later, however, he becomes bored, feels constricted, and is unable to write and so returns to the other. He weaves his shuttle to and fro but cannot bind the two into a single yarn and both ladies naturally desire him to clarify his intentions. Forced to choose he marries Scholastica, and afterwards writes but boring verses. Thus Roderick Hudson, in abandoning himself to the world, destroyed himself; Benvolio, in choosing philosophy, destroys his ability.

There is a further moral to this for which we must probe. Moral the tale certainly intends to point, the characters, charming as they are, are obviously counters arranged and re-arranged to illustrate a point. Benvolio in many ways has a double nature. At times he will appear in the very flush of youth with all its wantonness, at others he will appear old and austere with a gravity suitable to age. Again he will at times adore solitude and become recluse, at others, he will be the most gregarious of men and seek the pleasure of society. In his apartment there are two rooms, one tricked out in richness and luxury, the other a cell of almost monastic simplicity. By such devices James suggests the all-embracing nature of his poet's sensibility, he contains within himself many contradictory possibilities. He can realise many states of being and it is suggested that such a nature is necessary to the writer. The width as well as the contradictions of his approach to life are expressed by his two loves. The countess, a proud woman of changeable moods and great beauty, offers him the best of worldly living. Mistress of a miniature court, she offers him the life of town society and country gentry. Under her influence he

writes frothy poetry and plays. Scholastica, on the other hand, is a maiden steadfast, sober and pure. She lives quietly with her old father - a philosopher - devoting her life to the delights of thought and abstract contemplation. She can offer Benvolio the pleasures of understanding. Under her influence he writes meditative poetry 'after the manner of Penseroso'. In the company of one he will be content for a time, but then will grow bored and desire the other. As I have intimated neither lady, not the changeable countess nor the steadfast Scholastica appreciates his dilemma. Between them they force him to commit himself to one or the other. Deprived of the worldly life so necessary as a source for the sensory stuff of poetry Benvolio's verse becomes, presumably, intolerably sententious and abstract and lacking in vitality. Presumably, had he married the countess his verse would have been intolerably frivolous and cloying.

Leon Edel has claimed "that the story is an international allegory with the countess as Europe and Scholastica as America.[1] While some elements of this doubtless exist in the story we must not allow a ruthless hunt for biographical data to obscure from us the fact that James is discussing an artist and his sources of spiritual nourishment. It is interesting to note that Mr. Anderson in approaching the story from the same angle arrives at the conclusion that Benvolio is a young American poet, with the implication that the point of the story is valid for Americans only. This would be hard to deduce from the internal evidence of the story, and Mr. Anderson's realisation of the point that "to multiply one's relations with life . . . . was the wise man's aim," does not entirely efface the impression that an axe is

1 Henry James, Collected Stories, ed. and intro. L. Edel, Vol. 111 (1962)

being ground.[1]

His misfortune resides in the fact that he cannot have both. If we may consider Benvolio as a developed character, however, we may consider that the reason for his failure lies deeper than his not being able to have two women in one. Even when he enjoyed the favours of both he was unable to unify the two halves of his experience. He wrote two different kinds of poetry and was unable to synthesize the disparate sensations into a greater whole. In a sense his being forced to choose a single way of life was a mere accident. As it was there was no commerce between the two, yet without the other the one remaining shrivels.

James, as in Roderick Hudson, suggests that the artist's nature must be a precarious balance of forces. First there must be forces for creativity to exist at all, and for creativity to be maintained and raised to its most fruitful pitch there must be discipline, unification and order. The sad effects of the dissociation between thought and the life of the senses seems to look forward to Mr. Eliot's pleas for the unification of the sensibility. Certainly Henry James is suggesting that within the artist's nature feeling and thought must not be strangers to one another, for, if they are, either the artist or his art will perish.

1 Quentin Anderson, The American Henry James, John Calder (1958) pp. 38-9.

CHAPTER 111.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY
(1881)

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THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

(1881)

In this most popular of Jamesian novels the artist is a downright villain, perhaps the vilest and least sympathetically observed of James's villains. Gilbert Osmond, an American expatriate of long standing and man of supremely refined taste is the means whereby Isabel Archer, the heroine, is brought to perfection.

A girl of great looks, charm, and moral potential, Isabel Archer is left a great deal of money. Having refused several offers of marriage she chooses an ageing expatriate American dilettante, Gilbert Osmond, in the belief that he will induct her to the world of beauty, and that her money will enable him to live more fully. The marriage is a failure on account of the husband's complete lack of human feeling. The novel ends with the two separated, but we are to believe that Isabel will return to her husband.

We first meet Osmond living in somewhat reduced circumstances at his villa near Florence. Work being soiling, he has retired and lived quietly, devoting himself to his collection of art treasures, compiled with impeccable taste, and the education of his daughter Pansy. That both are very'fine' is conceded by all. Madame Merle, his ex-mistress, persuades him to acquire something new for his collection. As she interests him in Isabel they talk about her as if she were an object.

> Mr. Osmond . . . simply looked colder and more attentive, "Did you say she was rich?"
>
> "She has seventy thousand pounds."
>
> "En écus bien comptés?"
>
> "There is no doubt whatever about her fortune. I've seen it myself, as I may say."

"Splendid woman . . . . "

(. . . .) "Did you say she had looks?" Osmond demanded.[1]

Thus Isabel is discussed not as if she were a human being, but a thing to be acquired. Such is Osmond's attitude to Isabel. This becomes more apparent after he has met her. He is impressed with her looks, her charm, and her accomplishments. She also has a fine mind, which, while furnished with foolish ideas, when properly redecorated will be able to reflect him. While her very choice of him proves her ideas erroneous, he has even less to offer. He reflects, however:-

> If an anonymous drawing on a museum wall had been conscious and watchful it might have known this peculiar pleasure of being at last and all of a sudden identified - as from the hand of a great master - by the so high and unnoticed fact of style. His 'style' was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble. She should do the thing _for_ him, and he would not have waited in vain.[2]

He regards himself as a precious masterpiece. Isabel is, for him, the exquisite piece which will set him off to the world and by its election of him alone prove him to be a masterpiece. His fastidious dislike of ordinary human feeling allows him to give a good facsimile of it.

> The elation of success, which surely now flamed high in Osmond, emitted meanwhile very little smoke for so brilliant a blaze. Contentment, on his part, took no vulgar form; excitement, in the most self-conscious of men, was a kind of ecstasy of self-control. This

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1 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (Introduction by Graham Greene), Oxford University Press, The World Classics. Double Vol. London (1956).

2 Ibid., p. 261

> disposition, however, made him an admirable lover; it gave him a constant view of the smitten and dedicated state. He never forgot himself, as I say; and so he never forgot to be graceful and tender, to wear the appearance - which presented indeed no difficulty - of stirred senses and deep intentions. He was immensely pleased with his young lady; Madame Merle had made him a present of incalculable value. What could be a finer thing to live with than a high spirit attuned to softness? For would not the softness be all for one's self, and the strenuousness for society, which admired the air of superiority? What could be a happier gift in a companion than a quick, fanciful mind, which saved one repetitions and reflected one's thought on a polished, elegant surface? Osmond hated to see his thought reproduced literally - that made it look stale and stupid; he preferred it to be freshened in the reproduction even as 'words' by music. His egotism had never taken the crude form of desiring a dull wife; this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one - a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. He knew perfectly well, though he had not been told, that their union enjoyed little favour with the girl's relations.[1]

Like other objects in his collection he hopes Isabel will reflect his fineness and add to his lustre. Constantly in this passage he is thinking of her as though she was an inanimate reflector, artistic but subsidiary in the way that furniture is. Curiously he does not appreciate her because she is beautiful or charming or intelligent in herself, but because such qualities will give him added lustre both in the eyes of others and his own. He does not love beauty for its own sake, but for his own.

His attitude to his daughter Pansy is another case in point, In his conversation with Madame Merle, quoted earlier, he says 'she's as pure as a pearl' and elsewhere, 'she is a saint in heaven' to which he adds significantly, 'she is my great happiness'. Again, his care of her turns

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1 Ibid., pp. 379-80

out not to have been for her own moral benefit but that she might be an asset to him. It is as if he regarded himself as a precious stone of great value surrounded by a cluster of pendant stones of lesser worth composed of people and things close to him. Isabel is most impressed to register:

> Isabel was impressed by Osmond's artistic, the plastic view, as it sometimes appeared, of Pansy's innocence - her own appreciation of it being anxiously moral.[1]

His 'plastic view' becomes markedly unpleasant when Pansy is denied marriage to Edward Rosier, whom she loves, because he is too poor to be a son-in-law of Osmond's, and almost forced to marry Lord Warburton, whom she does not love, because Osmond respects his wealth and prestige. Finally Pansy is forced into indefinite seclusion in a convent until she 'can see the world the right way'.

The fiasco of his marriage to Isabel Archer proves the insufficiency of his 'aesthetic attitude'. In a brief study of this scope and aim it is impossible to give a detailed account of Isabel's character. This is a pity, especially as Osmond, from the point of the novel's structure, gains from his relation to Isabel. Suffice it to say, however, that she possesses all the merits Osmond attributes to her, including her 'remarkable mind'. She has the ability to see a great deal and understand much. Osmond appears to her at first as he would wish. A man of culture and refinement and harmonious living, existing finely in distinguished poverty on his hill above the world, but of great potential, should he be able to descend into the world. A conceited young woman for all her merits, Isabel feels that here is a task worthy of her and her money. She marries

1 Ibid., p.383

him in the hope both of being able to help him, and of learning from him. Her failure purifies her of conceit, but leaves Osmond disappointed. In a sense Isabel is also at fault here because she marries Osmond not because she particularly loves him but because of what he can do for her and, in a way, she seems to accept the position of being an adornment to his collection of fine things. In this it can be said that the motive of each in marrying the other is the same - vanity. Isabel's motive is far purer, however, for she has a genuine concern for him and a wish to enrich his life. These feelings of her's find no counterpart in Osmond.

The earlier part of their marriage is hardly rendered at all but in a remarkable passage of reflection Isabel realises the deficiencies of Osmond's nature. Reflections arise from a conversation in which he coolly asks her to use Lord Warburton's love for her to induce him to marry Pansy.

> She knew of no wrong he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel: she simply believed he hated her. That was all she accused him of, and the miserable part of it was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime he might have found redress. He had discovered that she was so different, that she was not what he had believed she would prove to be. He had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself - she couldn't help that; and now there was no use pretending, wearing a mask or a dress, for he knew her and had made up his mind. She was not afraid of him; she had no apprehension he would hurt her; for the ill-will he bore her was not of that sort. He would if possible never give her a pretext, never put himself in the wrong. Isabel, scanning the future with dry, fixed eyes, saw that he would have the better of her there. She would give him many pretexts, she would often put herself in the wrong. There were times when she almost pitied him; for if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was.[1]

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 462

In other words he has attempted to mould Isabel to what he would like her to be without regard to her nature. Her nature has been simply unresponsive to his efforts and, baffled, he devotes his cunning to their mutual unhappiness. She reflects upon the finesse of his mind and how it is used against her.

> She had not been mistaken about the beauty of his mind; she knew that organ perfectly now. She had lived with it, she had lived <u>in</u> it almost - it appeared to have become her habitation. If she had been captured it had taken a firm hand to seize her; that reflection perhaps had some worth. A mind more ingenious, more pliant, more cultivated, more trained to admirable exercises, she had not encountered; and it was this exquisite instrument she had now to reckon with. She lost herself in infinite dismay when she thought of the magnitude of <u>his</u> deception. It was a wonder, perhaps, in view of this, that he didn't hate her more. She remembered perfectly the first sign he had given of it - it had been like the bell that was to ring up the curtain upon the real drama of their life. He said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them.[1]

> He had really meant it - he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance.[2]

Foiled in his hopes he has concentrated all his finesse against her because she could judge and think for herself and could not be a mere ornament. For all his beauty of mind and the money she has brought to him, their life together is intolerable and his mind assumes the aspect of a medieval jailer.

> It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind indeed seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. Of course it had not been physical suffering; for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a

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1 and 2 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 465

serpent in a bank of flowers.[1]

She reflects upon the life given her by 'the first gentleman in Europe' and finds it vulgar in its flight from vulgarity.

> It implied a sovereign contempt for every one but some three or four very exalted people whom he envied, and for everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own. That was very well; she would have gone with him even there a long distance; for he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life, opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things and of the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or covert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard. Osmond had talked to Isabel about his renunciation, his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual aids to success; and all this had seemed to her admirable. She had thought it a grand indifference, an exquisite independence. But indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen anyone who thought so much of others. For herself, avowedly, the world had always interested her and the study of her fellow creatures had been her constant passion. She would have been willing, however, to renounce all her curiosities and sympathies for the sake of a personal life, if the person concerned had only been able to make her believe it was a gain! This at least was her present conviction; and the thing certainly would have been easier than to care for society as Osmond cared for it.[2]

This is reflected in his famous parties, the chief pleasure of which to him is that he can omit people from his invitations. His whole life is lived with the purpose of presenting a surface, an appearance to others of beauty and felicity. By a paradox he has no life of his own and he is the slave of the world. He has forgotten that composition reflects inner life as well as surface. The beauty of a Rembrandt, for instance, arises from the

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 466

2 *Ibid.*, p. 467

life it reflects, from the experience of the sitters and the humanity of the artist. Osmond, on the other hand, if one may be permitted a vulgarism, has tried mentally to beat his sitters into saying cheese in order to impress others with how much better his life is than theirs. He has not realised that beauty is a result, not a thing, and so the life he creates is squalid, narrow and mean. By a paradox, in pursuing art he has escaped it.

> Her notion of an aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious calculated attitude.[1]

For all his fastidiousness and artistry he makes life unbearable for his wife, and, presumably, for himself as well. Isabel has resisted him, pleading for freedom, and he has turned on her. For him her mind and its intelligence was to be useful in so far as it was subservient to him and his preserve. As she is, she is useless to him.

Osmond's utter callousness comes to the fore in his last scene with Isabel. Significantly enough she comes upon him engaged in an act of painting - art, to which he had given his life.

> "Excuse me for disturbing you," she said.
>
> "When I come to your room I always knock," he answered, going on with his work.
>
> "I forgot; I had something else to think of. My cousin's dying."
>
> "Ah, I don't believe that," said Osmond, looking at his drawing through a magnifying glass. "He was dying when we married; he'll outlive us all."
>
> Isabel gave herself no time, no thought, to appreciate the careful cyncism of this declaration; she simply went on quickly, full of her own

1 Ibid., p. 468

intention:

> "My aunt has telegraphed for me; I must go to Gardencourt."
>
> "Why must you go to Gardencourt?" Osmond asked in the tone of impartial curiosity."
>
> "To see Ralph before he dies."
>
> To this, for some time, he made no rejoinder; he continued to give his chief attention to his work, which was of a sort that would brook no negligence. "I don't see the need of it," he said at last. "He came to see you here. I didn't like that; I thought his being in Rome a great mistake. But I tolerated it because it was to be the last time you should see him. Now you tell me it's not to have been the last. Ah, you're not grateful!"
>
> "What am I to be grateful for?"
>
> Gilbert Osmond laid down his little implements, blew a speck of dust from his drawing, slowly got up, and for the first time looked at his wife. "For my not having interfered while he was here."
>
> "Oh yes, I am. I remember perfectly how distinctly you let me know you didn't like it. I was very glad when he went away."
>
> "Leave him alone then. Don't run after him." [1]

His utter callousness with regard to her cousin Ralph Touchett and his quite unjustified jealousy in regard to him should be noted. He is completely possessive with regard to Isabel, she is his property, the mirror that should have no regard for anyone except himself. In the discussion which follows she insists on travelling to England to see her cousin and the possibility of their marriage coming to an end is mentioned. He appeals to Isabel on the most sacred grounds, and she realises,

> He had spoken in the name of something sacred and precious - the observance of a magnificent form. They were as perfectly apart in feeling as two disillusioned lovers had ever been; but they had never yet separated in act. Isabel had not changed; her old passion for justice still abode within her; and now, in the very thick of her sense of her husband's

1 Ibid., pp. 583-4

> blasphemous sophistry, it began to throb to a tune which for a moment promised him the victory. It came over her that in his wish to preserve appearances he was after all sincere, and that this, as far as it went, was a merit. Ten minutes before she had felt all the joy of irreflective action - a joy to which she had so long been a stranger; but action had been suddenly changed to slow renunciation, transformed by the blight of Osmond's touch. If she must renounce, however, she would let him know she was a victim rather than a dupe.[1]

She threatens Osmond with leaving him for ever but we know she will not. She will return, however, because it is right that she should; Osmond will accept her back for the sake of 'appearance'. For him honour and sacred duty boil down to appearance. Such is the despair Osmond's 'aesthetic' approach causes to those around him.

His stature as an executant does not seem to exceed his as a man. We are told concerning his ideas (P.300)

> He uttered his ideas as if, odd as they often appeared, he was used to them and had lived with them, old polished knobs and heads and handles of precious substance, that could be fitted if necessary to new walking sticks - not switches plucked in destitution from the common tree and then too elegantly waved about.[2]

No judgment could be harsher than that. Osmond is pretentiously ordinary. Earlier he shows a water-colour of his own execution to Madame Merle and her comments are significant.

> ". . . . They're really so much better than most people's."
>
> "That may very well be. But as the only thing you do - well, it's so little. I should have liked you to do so many other things: those were my ambitions."
>
> "Yes; you've told me many times - things that were impossible."
>
> "Things that were impossible," said Madame Merle. And then in quite a different tone: "In itself your little picture's very good."[3]

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1 Ibid., p. 586

2 Ibid., p. 300

3 Ibid., p. 261

> Madame Merle's, "But as the only thing you do - well its so little", speaks volumes.

The impression is given of something small, well done and quite dead. (The reader should also notice his criterion for judging the painting. His aim is not to achieve perfection but to be better than most other people). Consider as well the painting he is working at when Isabel interviews him for the last time in the novel,

> Osmond was seated at the table near the window with a folio volume before him, propped against a pile of books. This volume was open at a page of small coloured plates, and Isabel presently saw that he had been copying from it the drawing of an antique coin. A box of water-colours and fine brushes lay before him, and he had already transferred to a sheet of immaculate white paper the delicate, finely-tinted disk.[1]

Anything more useless would be hard to imagine. It is well done but small and derivative. In the end a fine drawing of a coin is perhaps a good symbol for Osmond's soul. Finally, there is his choice of Italian poets - Machiavelli, Vittoria di Colonna, and Metastasio. All three are poets of great technical perfection but singularly little passion or even human feeling. His choice from a literature that includes Dante, Tasso and Leopardi shows even his fine taste to be a narrow affair.

In Osmond we see a man who lives purely for fine taste and who by the very act of doing so fails to achieve it. His withdrawal from the world is merely a gesture against the world and nothing more. Osmond is almost like the Beatnik of today, in that he is the slave of society and convention and, his opposition to them is a mere reaction, and does not arise from any fundamental wish to achieve higher values than those offered by society. He wishes to present a beautiful front to the world but does not realise that a beautiful picture must

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1 Ibid., p. 583

represent either some worthy subject or some noble conception or some deep insight into life, all of which he has not troubled himself to acquire. In striving for perfection without a true understanding of its nature he has only succeeded in creating moral squalor, misery and ugliness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRINCESS CASSAMASSIMA

CHAPTER 1V.

THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA.

In what is commonly known as his middle period (the period comprising the works written between the Portrait of a Lady (1881) and his commencement of play writing (1890) James came to consider more and more the position of the artist. This was perhaps caused by the recession in his popularity after its high water mark with "Daisy Miller" (1878) but by now the nature of his consideration was subtly altered. In Roderick Hudson he had observed the effect of violent passion on an egoistic and artistic nature. In Gilbert Osmond, the effect of a highly developed aesthetic sense uncombined with any moral sense of humane feeling is seen as deeply unpleasant. This is not to say that the positions of Roderick Hudson and Osmond in society were not considered. Roderick was lost in America and found a dearth of sympathetic patrons, while Osmond's artistic activities had been concentrated on his appearing well to others. Hyacinth does not, one would suggest, suffer from the same moral deficiencies as his predecessors. Roderick's failure had been of uncontrolled emotion, Osmond's of having no emotion at all. Hyacinth Robinson, on the other hand, is held up to our approval as being a highly organised man of feeling with an ability to think clearly and perceptively. Indeed, it could be argued that of all James's artists he comes most near to fulfilling an ideal conception. His position is far more extreme than that of his predecessors. The upper classes take little notice of him on account of his poverty and humble station, while the lower classes undervalue him precisely because of his virtues. Now James came to wonder not so much as to the nature of the artist as to wonder what place he held in a

largely materialistically orientated society. This doubt was to continue and deepen after the failure of his middle novels and again his failure in the theatre. If the picture of the Princess Cassamassima is tragic it is child's play beside that of The Sacred Fount, however much better a novel the former may be.

Uniquely in the Jamesian canon the hero is distinctly a member of the lower orders, though symbolically i.e. in regard to his being an artist, he is a bastard of the aristocracy. Hyacinth Robinson was born as the result of an illicit union between an English lord and a French seamstress. His mother had murdered his father before he was born and she died in prison in time for a ten-year old Hyacinth to be present at her death-bed. Hyacinth is reared by Amanda Pynsent, a spinster dress-maker and friend of his mother's with the advice of a fiddler of advanced political views called Vetch. He shows artistic capacities and, on growing up, he is given the best opening that can be procured and is apprenticed to a bookbinder. At his work he makes the acquaintance of M. Poupin and through him of Paul Muniment, both men of revolutionary aspirations. The latter is a young man of apparent parts and Hyacinth reposes affection and trust in him. Hyacinth desires admittance to the inner circles of revolution and Muniment leads him to believe he is undergoing a period of probation. He also forms an attachment with a vulgar yet good-hearted girl of the people called Millicent Henning. One night at a play he is invited to meet the most remarkable woman in Europe, the Princess Casamassima. This lady, still young and beautiful, had left her husband, and tiring of the high life she had known, had decided to befriend the poor and join in revolutionary activities. She dazzles and befriends Hyacinth and shows him for the

first time in his life, gracious living and the pleasures money can provide.

At this time he attends a political gathering, and, stung by charges of inaction, he rises and pledges himself to act. Muniment leads him to pledging himself before Hoffendahl, a leading revolutionary, to commit unquestioningly some act of violence. It is not specified to him what form this act will take, but he is told to hold himself in readiness for orders. Later on, when living at the Princess' country house, and on a trip to France and Italy sponsored by a bequest from Miss Pynsent, he comes to see the aesthetic advantages of aristocracy and to re-think his whole position. Slowly his friends see this in him and one by one they fall away. One day an order to assassinate comes and Hyacinth cannot do it. He turns to the Princess, who is now living in middle class poverty, (professedly in order to show solidarity with the poor). She is polite to him but now seems to prefer his more active friend Muniment. He turns to Millicent and finds her entertaining a loutish dandy whom he has long suspected to be her lover. Both women have meant much to him and both fail him. He is still enough of a proletarian to recognise his obligations to his own class while being sufficiently educated in his sensibilities not to desire a revolution. He commits suicide, and the Princess arrives too late to prevent him and assume the deed herself, as she had wished. It is to be presumed that, being devoid of money, she will return to her husband.

That Hyacinth Robinson deserves to be called an artist is beyond question, and this on several counts. He is an admirable binder of books, he receives recognition both from his employer and from the Princess. At the end when death is near him Mr. Vetch pays him a tribute which the reader is meant to believe,

". . . I recognise your work when I see it,
there are always certain finer touches.
You've a manner . . . . like one of the masters.
With such a hand and such feeling your future's
assured. You'll make a fortune and become famous.[1]

It is also intimated to us that Hyacinth's 'feelings' are too great to find expression in book-binding alone and he contemplates writing something which could well be good. The question of feeling however brings us to the core of the matter, for James being an artist himself, considered that it consisted not only in mere technical skill (important as it was) but in acute sensibility and humane feelings as well. Hyacinth is described as a 'highly organised being' and earlier he is held up for lucidity, his composure, his good humour. He is a 'highly organised youth', upon whom nothing is lost. These are great compliments in the Jamesian canon.

The compliment, 'on whom nothing is lost', is a high one and gives Hyacinth's constant receptivity to impressions both in London and on his travels. Like James himself he observes and absorbs all around him. He is also sensitive to and deeply attracted by the sensible world. Also he is highly organised in not being a mere sponge of his impressions, but can order them and consider their moral implications. For Hyacinth, beauty and morality are not so far apart, for he could not draw, as easily as the Princess does, a distinction between God and Mammon. The Princess, when she uses these words, is crudely drawing the distinction between poverty (God) and wealth (Mammon). She implies that the lower classes are godly, ugly and righteous, and that the upper classes are given to the world, beauty and the devil. Hyacinth, much more of the

1 The Princess Casamassima, Introduction Clinton P. Oliver Harper Torch Books, (1959), p. 483.

aristocrat both by birth and by sensibility, and so much more wedded to the lower classes than she, for all her affectation, can ever hope to be, has too fine a perception to see things brutally. He is able to see the accumulated spiritual riches of privilege, yet to feel the unjustness of the class system. He has too fine a moral sense either to abandon his class or commit a senseless atrocity. This ability of his to see clear and deep, to comprehend the many-sidedness of a complex problem, combined with his suggested talent to express himself in words, stamp him as an artist. Indeed, as we shall see, James is pessimistic as he sees such perceptivity as incapacitating Hyacinth for any action except suicide. Certainly if thinkers and men of action <u>are</u> completely different beings, Hyacinth would belong to the first category.

Hyacinth has the bents and capacities of an artist but is born a member of the lower classes, as we have said. Mr. Vetch says of him with a bitterness and irony that show high approval,

> He's a thin skinned, morbid, mooning, introspective little beggar, with a good deal of imagination and not much perseverance, who'll expect a good deal more of life than he'll find in it. That's why he won't be happy. . . . One sees he has a mind and even a soul, and in that respect he's - I won't say unique - but peculiar.[1]

Hyacinth, being possessed of such a sensibility, does not at first realise that this marks him off as being peculiar in any way. As is natural in the ardour of his youth, the repressed aspirations of his sensibility find a vent in revolutionary talk. He has decidedly been deprived of the opportunities he deserves and he does feel the poverty of his class to be wrong. In his desire to achieve something of practical value

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1 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 41

he is led into his rash promise, which, rash as it was, at least stamped him as being more genuine in his aspirations than his fellow revolutionary windbags. Hyacinth, wanting so much the good things of this world, is drawn to the belief that the world's goods should be shared equally among all. The exact type of socialism advocated is never quite specified but it seems from the constant suggestions of violence to have been social anarchy. Hyacinth finds such talk inspiring and tends to hero worship those who give vent to it. Eventually, one evening, excited by talk of "doing something" instead of talking he rises to the occasion and delivers a heated speech. Muniment strikes, and Hyacinth is sworn to a desperate act. This represents the zenith of his revolutionary zeal; he believes both his aims and his comrades to be noble.

Just previously he had met the Princess Casamassima, now separated from her husband and still alluringly beautiful. Like Beatrix Esmond in the Virginians she has mellowed with the years, but, unlike her, has not lived long enough to see how complete her errors were. Through her despising of her husband and the society he stands for, she has come to have a more definite aim in life - to join the lower orders in the class war. To this end she befriends Hyacinth. Knowing him to be involved in the class war she hopes he will introduce her to his companions. A friendship independent of politics springs up between the two, and despite the Princess' democratic intentions, she leads Hyacinth to dwell a little while in the Arcadia he sought to overthrow. This is why her name is given to the novel. Just as she did to Roderick Hudson, she represents to Hyacinth Robinson the beauty and acquired subtlety and finesse of Europe. She is still a consummate actress, and this he admires. Soon after

Hyacinth's vow to Hoffendahl his aesthetic education commences. The Princess invites him to her country home in order to discuss the revolution. He wakes up on the Sunday morning, and, looking out of his window, he sees a landscape which causes him even to give especial care to his appearance. He sees:

> an old garden with parterres in curious figures and little intervals of lawn that seemed to our hero's cockney vision fantastically green. At one end of the garden was a parapet of mossy brick which looked down on the other side into a canal, a moat, ... and from the same standpoint showed a considerable part of the main body of the house. . . . . . which was richly grey whenever clear of the ivy and other dense creepers, and everywhere infinitely a picture: with a high piled ancient russet roof so broken by huge chimneys and queer peepholes and all manner of odd gables and windows on different lines with all manner of antique patches and protusions and with a particularly fascinating architectural excresence where a wonderful clock-face was lodged, a clock-face covered with gilding and blazonry but showing many traces of the years and the weather.[1]

We have it in the metaphor of the picture; this is art, the way life is gracious. James uses the 'delicate vessel' of Hyacinth's consciousness to great effect in evoking the charming vastness of the place and Christina's aristocratic way of life in it. And yet this has been built with centuries of unjust privilege. This is Hyacinth's tragedy. James, it is true, shows us the Marchants who have no appreciation of the arts and whose mentioned interests are hunting and tennis. They are mentally undeveloped and dull and as such an indictment of the privileged class. Nevertheless their very dullness emphasises Hyacinth's superior sensibility in extracting so rich an experience from the fruit of privilege.

This house and the way of life of which it is at once part and symbol made Hyacinth waver, but his visit to Europe caused his defection. There his starved sensibility,

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 247

already alerted by Medway, gorged itself on so much beauty accumulated by ages of despotism. James speaks of the intensity of Paris, and this is absorbed by Hyacinth, but it is the great Renaissance art of Italy that captures him, as it did his creator. He writes a long letter to the Princess, showing great perceptivity and skill in the use of language, where he crystallises the doubts he felt before and the very great doubts he now feels concerning the revolution.

Extracts must suffice:-

> "Dear Princess, I may have done you good, but you haven't done me much. I trust you'll understand what I mean by that speech and not think it flippant or impertinent. I may have helped you to understand and enter into the misery of the people - though I protest I don't know much about it; but you've led my imagination into quite another train. Nevertheless I'm not wholly pretending it's all your fault if I've lost sight of the sacred cause almost altogether in my recent adventures. It's not that it hasn't been there to see, for that perhaps is the clearest result of extending one's horizon - the sense, increasing as we go, that want and toil and suffering are the constant lot of the immense majority of the human race. I've found them everywhere but haven't minded them. Forgive the cynical confession. What has struck me is the great achievements of which man has been capable in spite of them - the splendid accumulations of the happier few, to which doubtless the miserable many have also in their degrees contributed. The face of Europe appears to be covered with them and they've had much the greater part of my attention. They seem to me inestimably precious and beautiful and I've become conscious more than ever before of how little I understand what in the great rectification you and Poupin propose to do with them. Dear Princess, there are things I shall be too sorry to see you touch, even you with your hands divine; and - . . . - I feel myself capable of fighting for them. You can't call me a traitor, for you know the obligation I supremely, I immutably recognise. The Monuments and treasures of art, the great palaces and properties, the conquests of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilisation as we know it, based if you will upon all the despotism, the cruelties, the exclusions, the monopolies and the rapacities of the past, but thanks to which, all the same, the world is less of a 'bloody sell' and life more of a lark - our old friend Hoffendahl seems to me to hold them too cheap and to wish to substitute for them something in which I can't somehow believe as I do in things with which the yearnings and the tears of

> generations have been mixed. You know how extraordinary I think our Hoffendahl - to speak only of him; but ifthere's one thing that's more clear about him than another, it's that he wouldn't have the least feeling for this incomparable, abominable old Venice. He would cut up the ceilings of the Veronese into strips, so that every one might have a little piece. I don't want every one to have a little piece of anything and I've a great horror of that kind of invidious jealousy which is at the bottom of the idea of a redistribution. You'll say . . . . during the last three months there has crept over me a deep mistrust of that same grudging attitude - the intolerance of positions and fortunes that are higher and brighter than one's own; a fear, moreover, that I may in the past have been actuated by such motives, and a devout hope that if I'm to pass away while I'm yet young it may not be with that odious stain upon my soul."[1]

Slowly Hyacinth comes to see that he approves of the existence of a 'happy few' and even the conditions of his exclusion. It was at the price of cruelty and despotism that great princes could commission the works of the Renaissance masters. Like the heroes of Stendahl he comes to see that a rich full life can only exist as a result of privilege. In this respect James even comes quite close to Nietzsche. He wavers and much is crystallised in chapter XXXV111.

> He had plunged into a sea of barbarism without having any civilising energy to put forth. He was aware the people were direfully wretched - more aware it often seemed to him, than they themselves were; so frequently was he struck with their brutal insensibility, a grossness proof against the taste of better things and against any desire for them. He knew it so well that the repetition of contact could add no vividness to the conviction; it rather smothered and befogged his impression, peopled it with contradictions and difficulties, a violence of reaction, a sense of the inevitable and insurmountable. In these hours the poverty and ignorance of the multitude seemed so vast and preponderant, and so much the law of life, that those who had managed to escape from the black gulf were only the happy few, spirits of resource as well as children of luck; they inspired in some degree the interest and sympathy that one should feel for survivors and victors, those who have come safely out of a shipwreck or a battle. What was most in Hyacinth's mind was

1 <u>Ibid</u>., pp.334-335

> was the idea, of which every pulsation of the general life of his time was a syllable, that the flood of democracy was rising over the world; that it would sweep all the traditions of the past before it; that, whatever it might fail to bring, it would at least carry in its bosom a magnificent energy; and that it might be trusted to look after its own. When this high, healing, uplifting tide should cover the world it would float in the new era, it would be its own fault, (whose else?) if want and suffering and crime should continue to be ingredients of the human lot. With his mixed, divided nature, his conflicting sympathies, his eternal habit of swinging from one view to another, he regarded the prospect in different moods with different intensities. In spite of the example Eustache Poupin gave him of the reconcilement of disparities, he was afraid the democracy wouldn't care for perfect bindings or for the finer sorts of conversation. The Princess gave up these things in proportion as she advanced in the direction she had so audaciously chosen; and if the Princess could give them up it would take very transcendent natures to stick them. At the same time there was joy and exultation in the thought of surrendering one's self to the wash of the wave, of being carried higher on the sun-touched crests of wild billows than one could ever be by a dry, lonely effort of one's own. That vision could deepen to ecstacy; make it indifferent if one's ultimate fate, in such a heaving sea, were not almost certainly to be submerged in bottomless depths or dashed to pieces on immovable rocks. Hyacinth felt, that, whether his personal sympathy should rest finally with the victors or the vanquished, the victorious force was potentially infinite and would require no testimony from the irresolute.[1]

He feels a nausea for his own kind and sees no hope that his mob might be educated into becoming Caesars, as Bernard Shaw hoped they would. In this he approaches the Nietzschean position.[2] In a passage adjacent to the last he grasps the tragic insoluble nature of the class war, a situation in which he enjoys the focal point.

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1 Ibid., p. 489

2 James and Nietzsche were alike in that for both of them it was art that lent significance to life. In seeing that great art in Classical and Renaissance times was a result of privilege Nietzsche elaborated his intensely aristocratic philosophy. James and Nietzsche are worlds apart, but Hyacinth recognises the same values and causes and the natural result of such ideas would be a not un-Nietzschean position.

> Hyacinth used to smile at this presentation in his night walks to Paddington or homeward; the populace of London were scattered upon his path, and he asked himself by what wizardry they could ever be raised to high participations. There were nights when everyone he met appeared to reek with gin and filth and he found himself elbowed by figures as foul as lepers. Some of the women and girls in particular were appalling - saturated with alcohol and vice, brutal, bedraggled, obscene. "What remedy but another deluge, what alchemy but annihilation?" he asked himself as he went his way; and he wondered what fate there could be in the great scheme of things for a planet overgrown with such vermin, what redemption but to be hurled against a ball of consuming fire. If it was the fault of the rich, as Paul Muniment held, the selfish, congested rich who allowed such abominations to flourish, that made no difference and only shifted the shame; since the terrestrial globe, a visible failure, produced the cause as well as the effect.[1]

Hyacinth is half an aristocrat, perhaps even more of an aristocrat than the people plotted against; not only was his father a nobleman but by virtue of his artistic sensibility he is an aristocrat of the spirit. By a paradox, in helping to exterminate the upper classes, he would be committing spiritual suicide. He avoids this by actual suicide. When the time comes for him to act he feels as if in assassinating the Duke he would be re-enacting his mother's murder of his father. And yet he is of the other camp as well; he has no opportunity to rise as Fabrice and Gatsby did and he feels himself more deeply committed to his class than they. And yet there _is_ something wrong with the class structure. As the Princess says in her final talk with him,

> "I know what You're going to say, "the Princess broke in. "You're going to say it will help them to do what you do - to do their work themselves and earn their wages. That's beautiful so far as it goes. But what do you propose for the thousands and hundreds of thousands for whom no work - on the overcrowded earth, under the pitiless heaven - is to be found? There's less and less work in the world,

1 _Ibid._, p. 410

> and there are more and more people to do the little there is. The old ferocious selfishness must come down. They won't come down gracefully, so they must be assisted."[1]

Hyacinth, caught in the jaws of the savage contradiction, is able to form no happy synthesis, and suicide is the only satisfactory course left open to him. The Princess stamps herself as such by her manners and her breeding and by the air of high living and fine things with which she surrounds herself. She has the intricacy, the style born of much leisure, she is the product of an old culture. The proletariat with no past, no store of culture, cannot engender such creatures. Millicent Henning is young, strong and pretty but she does not possess the refined beauty of the Princess either in accoutrement or breeding. The Princess was a foretaste of what Hyacinth was to find later, in Paris, and, above all, Venice.

We should also note Hyacinth's complete loneliness. Mr. Vetch had noted that his peculiarity in having a mind and soul would make him unhappy, indeed, it renders him as alone as Hamlet. At the end all his friends fail him; they are either false like Muniment or cannot give the understanding he needs like Poupin. He is attracted to Muniment on account of the latter's reserve and seeming strength. He at least seems superior to the common run of gabblers and Hyacinth, quite without the necessary experience for judging men, reposes in him his trust and friendship. Muniment attracts Hyacinth and, later the Princess, because he does not seem to have any emotional need for other people. This does not arise from some deep strength and mysterious resource but from a complete inability to care for anyone else. His callousness towards

1 *Ibid.*, pp. 494-495

both Hyacinth and the Princess emerges clearly in his last conversation with the Princess.

The Princess is by no means innocent. She uses Hyacinth in order to enter the lower world and then loses interest in him when he rejects the anarchist view. Like Muniment she regards the true test of high seriousness as a readiness to shoot somebody or blow something up. Hyacinth, with his refined sensibility and sense of moral nicety, seems a lightweight, and Muniment refers to him as 'poor', while the Princess calls him 'silly'. Perhaps the Princess feels more deeply for Hyacinth than he suspected, witness her covering of his body, but she only realises his manliness at the end, when he does not make the obvious response to her gibe concerning his never being called to act. The Princess is more attracted by a man who can spurn her; only when Hyacinth dies without turning to her does she seem to realise his worth. Of this we cannot be quite sure, but her final gesture of covering his head seems to indicate it.

The third important figure in Hyacinth's life is his young lady, Millicent Henning. She however, as he courageously tells his adoptive mother, will never marry the likes of him; a professional man for her. She is even shocked that he should wear an apron at his trade. That it is a trade is bad enough. Captain Sholto on the other hand has money and is a 'gentleman'. So, by a sad irony, a member of his own class betrays him, not because he deflected from the proletariat but because he was a proletarian. It is suggested that curiously enough the things of the spirit can only be cultivated by those who have money and leisure. Millicent's values are completely materialistic, and as a member of the poor she worships Mammon as fervently as any. She likes him, and has a

certain large goodness of heart which causes her to sympathise with him and wish to help. In the end, however, it is Captain Sholto's money that talks; not only do the upper classes revere money but the lower classes do as well. In the end he turns to Millicent to bury himself in the arms of his truest friend, but she has chosen a wealthy man. Hyacinth's class has betrayed him in ironic fashion. Of the rest his own class is mainly vermin, his fellow revolutionaries are inspired by greed and jealousy. He realises with a shock that Rosie Muniment, who seemed so cheerful and courageous, is as tolerant of the misfortunes of others as she is of her own.

Poupin and Schinkel 'loaf' Hyacinth but have no comprehension of his position, and, while Mr. Vetch can both love and understand, he sees the position in much less complex terms and has nothing to give Hyacinth except love.

Thus Hyacinth is alienated and even despised on account of the peculiarity noted by Mr. Vetch. Hyacinth is parent to a line of 'delicate vessels of consciousness.' In the latter books along with the loneliness a manifestation of the famous Jamesian ambiguity emerges, but here there is no doubt as to Hyacinth's superiority both sensory and moral. Not only does James feel the proletarian artist (a phrase which the novel seems to suggest to be a contradiction) to be in a poor position as he must side with an aristocracy that makes high culture possible, but also that the man who is an aristocrat by virtue of his sensibility and intellect is alone, very much alone, and eyeless in Gaza.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAGIC MUSE

(1890)

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As James's novels became less and less popular he became, in his fiction, more and more inclined to defend the artist's right to exist. The Bostonians (1885) and the Princess Casamassima (1886) had failed to earn anything apart from serial rights and publishers' guarantees.

In the Princess Casamassima the artist had been deeply in question, and Hyacinth Robinson had chosen to die, a martyr for art, rather than for social anarchy. His decision for art is obvious in so far as he could quite easily have died by assassinating the Duke. As a form of protest against anarchy he committed suicide, realising that the destruction of the upper class would lead to the destruction of things he held most precious. He was of the working-classes however, and caught in the unrelenting jaws of "God and Mammon". In his next long novel, The Tragic Muse, James was even more concerned with the question of commitment to an artistic vocation, but this time in relation to a member of the higher class, a would-be portrait painter, and an actress, unattached to any class, who has to learn to live at the pinnacle of success. Both Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth are given a choice, brilliant marriages and successful careers in politics, in exchange for the life of artists; and both choose the latter. The implications of their choice form the subject of the novel.

Miriam Rooth, a poor but exceedingly lovely girl of Jewish extraction, has been coached by her mother to become a great actress. To begin with she is poor but

Peter Sherringham, a young English diplomat with a deep interest in and profound knowledge of the theatre, takes her as his protégé, and with the aid of great ambition and talent for mimicry she begins to rise. Sherringham falls in love with her, and when she succeeds he proposes to her on condition that she abandon the stage. She will only accept him if he abandons diplomacy. They cannot agree and part, Miriam marrying a clever actor who, as Gabriel Nash observes, will make an efficient servant and manager, while Sherringham marries Nicholas Dormer's pleasant and attractive sister Biddy - as a consolation for Miriam. In the other half of the story Nicholas Dormer, son of a politician whom only death had prevented from attaining the highest office, is expected to achieve what his father would have done. In this he is encouraged by his mother and Julia Dallow, a rich, attractive, ambitious widow who loves him, and Mr. Cartaret, a rich old bachelor and Parliamentary friend of his father's. Julia Dallow wishes to marry him, and Mr. Cartaret to leave him his money. He gains a seat in Parliament. Mr. Cartaret is delighted and Dormer becomes engaged to Julia. His friend Gabriel Nash informs him that his painting is excellent and after sore deliberations he resigns his seat, losing both Julia and Mr. Cartaret's much needed money. Later it is hinted that there is a reconciliation between him and Julia and that he will become a popular society painter.

The novel is unusual for James in that the parts of the action, the two plots, appear to be curiously distinct. James relates in the preface that he was inspired to the possibility of doing so by Tintoretto's "Crucifixion" in Venice. Certainly Miriam Rooth, the Tragic Muse, as a dominating and unifying force is not to be compared with the raising of the three crosses in the Tintoretto. The

common choice for Art is there, however, as are certain works of art which demonstrate the value of the artist. These factors give the composition unity. All the muses are perhaps tragic in their demands upon their would-be followers, and it does seem as if the title of the book has a more general application than that to Miriam Rooth alone.

A further device is the presence of Gabriel Nash who talks his way through both stories.

This choice for art and the aesthetic doctrines of Nash form the 'artistic case' of which James spoke.

When Biddy Dormer first sees Miriam she notes her loveliness and great vigour, and a quality about her oddly suggestive of an idol;

> Biddy had a momentary vision of a figure in a ballet, a dramatic ballet - a subordinate, motionless figure, to be dashed at, to music, or to be capered up to. It would be a very dramatic ballad indeed if this young person were to be the heroine.[1]

Her special looks and manner are constantly emphasized and she gives through the glowing quality of the writing which James devotes to her, an impression quite different from the more mundanely attractive Julia Dallow and Biddy Dormer. Sherringham, to take an example, expostulates in a manner that would have pleased Swinburne when Miriam suggests she adopt the comic muse,

> "The Comic Muse? Never, never," Sherringham protested, "You're not to go smirking through the age and down to posterity. I'd rather see you as Medusa crowned with serpents. That's what you look like when you look best."[2]

Later his desire is fulfilled when, in the proposal scene, she turns on him "like a young Medusa." Not only

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1 Henry James, <u>The Tragic Muse</u>, Introduction by Leon Edel, Harper Torch Books, (1960), p. 25

2 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 452

does her great and rather exotic beauty stamp her as a work of art but her talent for learning and mimicry do as well. When she first appears at Madame Carré's her delivery is gauche and insensitive and everyone is pained - Gabriel Nash to the extent of leaving the company. She becomes Sherringham's protégé and forces a great and retired French actress, Madame Carré, to instruct her. She learns avidly both from her and the expert advice of Sherringham. One day Sherringham enters Madame Carré's house and hears Miriam reciting, a speech of Queen Constance's from King John, and so remarkably does she run the registers of passions, that she is magnificent.

> The powerful, ample manner in which Miriam handled her scene produced its full impression, the art with which she surmounted its difficulties, the liberality with which she met its great demand upon the voice, and the variety of expression that she threw into a torrent of objurgation. It was a real composition, studded with passages that called a suppressed "Brava!" to the lips and seeming to show that a talent capable of such an exhibition was capable of anything . . . . . Her voice was enchanting in these lines, and the beauty of her performance was that while she uttered the full fury of the part she missed none of its poetry.[1]

And yet she can give no account of why she is able to achieve such excellence.[2]

> Sherringham often talked of this (her power to calculate and express apparently glowing emotions) with Miriam who however was not able to present him with a neat theory. She had no knowledge that it was publicly discussed; she was practically on the side of those who hold that at the moment of production the artist cannot have his wits too much about him. When Peter told her there were people who maintained that in such a crisis he must lose himself in a flurry she stared with surprise and then broke out: "Ah the idiots."[3]

She is constructed according to Mrs. Kemble's theory that acting is a special talent and implies no necessary

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1 Ibid., p. 262 - 3.

2 Ibid., p. 264

3 Ibid., p. 262

distinction of mind.[1] Her knowledge is practical, intuitive, and unreflective. She has a great faith, however, (partly gleaned from Sherringham, and later used against him), in the theatre, in its power to represent, to thrill, and to elevate. As a human being she is a work of art and Nick Dormer finds her an infinitely rewarding subject; portraying her as the tragic muse he sees her remote and above the troubles of humanity. Not only the muse of tragedy but a compound of all the muses, yet still tragic on account of the life and the vision demanded. To paint the portrait Nick Dormer had to make the supreme sacrifice of worldly renunciation; she is his muse.

> Unfinished, simplified and in some portions merely suggested, it was strong, brilliant and vivid and had already the look of life and the air of an original thing. Sherringham was startled, he was strangely affected - he had no idea Nick moved with that stride. Miriam was represented in three-quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward, with one of her legs crossed over the other, her arms extended and foreshortened, her hands locked together round her knee. Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. She had a grand appearance of being raised aloft, with a wide regard, from a height of intelligence, for the great field of the artist, all the figures and passions he may represent.[2]

Immediately let us quote two other passages which, together with this, express James's supreme belief in art and its power.

> They have come abreast of the low island from which the great cathedral, disengaged today from her old contacts and adhesions, rises high and fair, with her front of beauty and her majestic mass, darkened at that hour, or at least simplified, under the stars, but only more serene and sublime for her happy union, far aloft, with the cool distance and the night.[3]

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1 vide 'The notebooks of Henry James', ed. Murdock and Matheissen, George Braziller (1955) p. 64

2 <u>The Tragic Muse</u>, p. 375

3 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 139

> but he was liable . . . . . liable in particular to want to take a look at one of the great portraits of the past. These were the things that were the most inspiring, in the sense that they were the things that, while generations, while worlds had come and gone, seemed most to survive and testify. As he stood before them sometimes the perfection of their survival struck him as the supreme eloquence, the reason that included all others, thanks to the language of art, the richest and most universal. Empires and systems and conquests had rolled over the globe and every kind of greatness had risen and passed away; but the beauty of the great pictures had known nothing of death or change, and the ages had only sweetened their freshness. The same faces, the same figures, looked out at different centuries, knowing a deal the century didn't, and when they joined hands they made the indestructible thread on which the pearls of history were strung.[1]

Here we find the moral value of art, Notre Dame stands almost eternally, a symbol of religion and comfort to humanity. The pictures in the National Gallery are receptacles of knowledge and beauty, again eternal and expressing 'more of the ideas men live by than all the statutes of Parliament' as Gabriel Nash had put it. These works define the value of the sacrifice made in order to attain art. They are eternal as nothing in the ordinary world of generation can be. They last, and embody the highest thoughts, the most intense sensations and noblest ideals of humanity. These related passages speak eloquently of James's belief in art and its important function, and this at a period when he was entering upon his deepest misgivings.

That Miriam Rooth is a valuable person is never doubted but James clearly saw that such greatness has inherent in itself not entirely pleasant implications. Miriam Rooth is far from being a satisfactory person, as, far indeed as Julia Dallow. Being an actress, she has little room left for a fixed and stable personal identity.

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 581

She is so much the actress as always to be assuming some part or another. She seems to feel affection for Sherringham, perhaps love for Dormer, but her dominating emotion seems ambition, a rather unsatisfactory one. In all this she rather resembles Christina Light, except that her talents and looks are turned into more useful channels. Sherringham is constantly baffled as to what Miriam Rooth might be, her poses succeed one another and he cannot understand her. He taxes her,

> "Do you think I was pretending?"
>
> "I think you always are. However, your vanity (if you had any!) would be natural."
>
> "I have plenty of that - I am not ashamed to own it."
>
> "You would be capable of pretending that you have. But excuse the audacity and the crudity of my speculations - it only proves my interest. What is it that you know you are?"
>
> "Why, an artist, isn't that a canvas?"
>
> "Yes, an intellectual one, but not a moral".
>
> "Oh yes, it is, too. And I'm a good girl: won't that do?"
>
> "It remains to be seen," Sherringham laughed. "A creature who is all an artist - Iam curious to see that."
>
> "Surely it has been seen, in lots of painters, lots of musicians."
>
> "Yes, but those arts are not personal, like yours. I mean not so much so. There's something left for - what shall I call it? - for character."
>
> Miriam stared again, with her tragic light. "And do you think I've got no character?" As he hesitated she pushed back her chair, rising rapidly.
>
> He looked up at her an instant - she seemed so "plastic"; and then, rising too, he answered: "Delightful being, you've got a hundred!"[1]

An instance of this would be her eagerness, evinced slightly earlier in the chapter, to use her Jewish

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1 Ibid., pp. 168 - 9.

identity for effect. Her carefully calculated behaviour when Julia Dallow discovers Nick painting her is an example of this, and an amusing contrast in behaviour is provided between the actress and the non-theatrical woman. In the great proposal scene James hints that she is acting by referring to certain of her movements as though they were enacted upon the stage. Certainly her tone is pitched to reach the back of the stalls, the height of the gods. Contempt, mockery, reasonableness, imperiousness, and sublime weariness follow one another in a majestic display which strikes as a work of art rather than as any natural and spontaneous feeling that she might have felt, had she had any. Sherringham registers that she had never acted more finely. In addition to this, her devotion to her art and her carelessness of others stamp her as being in the great tradition of actresses.

Sherringham remarks to her with a rueful truth.

> "And why, if I *were* cruel, should it be of course?"
>
> "Because you must destroy and torment and consume - that's your nature. But you can't help your type, can you?"
>
> "My type?" the girl repeated.
>
> "It's bad, perverse, dangerous. It's essentially insolent."
>
> "And pray what is yours, when you talk like that? Would you say such things if you didn't know the depths of my good-nature?"
>
> "Your good-nature comes back to that," said Sherringham. "It's an abyss of ruin - for others. You have no respect. I'm speaking of the artistic character, in the direction and in the plenitude in which you have it. It's unscrupulous, nervous, capricious, wanton."
>
> "I don't know about respect: one can be good," Miriam reasoned.
>
> "It doesn't matter, so long as one is powerful," answered Sherringham. "We can't have everything, and surely we ought to understand that we must pay

for things. A splendid organisation for a special end, like yours, is so rare and rich and fine that we oughtn't to grudge it its conditions."

"What do you call its conditions?" Miriam demanded, turning and looking at him.

"Oh, the need to take its ease, to take up space, to make itself at home in the world, to square its elbows and knock others about. That's large and free; it's the good-nature you speak of. You must forage and ravage and leave a track behind you; you must live upon the country you occupy. And you give such delight that, after all, you are welcome - you are infinitely welcome!"

"I don't know what you mean. I only care for the idea," Miriam said.

"That's exactly what I pretend; and we must all help you to it. You use us, you push us about, you break us up. We are your tables and chairs, the simple furniture of your life."[1]

The destructive effect of an artist's life was to be taken up, later, when James wrote stories such as the "Coxon Fund", and "The Figure in the Carpet". Miriam is inconsiderate; she lives off the landscape and if some, like Sherringham, suffer, she will shed no tears.

Then there is the matter of her personal life; to what extent can she gain the normal satisfactions of life, the rewards approved of and desired by society? Sherringham feels that the very Bohemiam surroundings in which she lives are distasteful and messy; he is used to luxury, tidiness and order while Miriam's life of used cigarette-ends and dirty tumblers is distasteful to him. In such a life little matters beside the theatre, and Sherringham, used to the upper class, would preserve some of its decorum.

There is also the problem of whom she could marry. Today the question is far more obvious than when James wrote The Tragic Muse, the marital customs of Hollywood have thrown the acting professions into high relief,

1 Ibid., pp. 279 - 280

while outside so many women adopt professions for which they have great talent, that the question is very widely realised. James's discussion remains as intelligent as it ever was, and has lost little of its impact,as it still seems bitter to most of us that a man should be asked to abandon a great personal future as a sacrifice to his wife's career. Again we feel most definitely that Miriam Rooth should not accede to Sherringham's request for her to leave the stage. James has, perhaps, been unfair to Sherringham in making him appear so poorly in his proposal scene with Miriam Rooth. It is true that he has been a hypocrite, he has defended the theatre constantly against Gabriel Nash, he has, we are assured, a prodigious mature interest in it and a deep knowledge. Yet when asked to abandon his brilliant diplomatic career he shows himself the brother of Julia Dallow. He feels a sudden revulsion from the mere "fables" of the theatre, and looking out of the window into a miserable night he feels:

> What was the meaning of this sudden offensive importunity or 'art', this senseless mocking couch, like some irritating chorus of conspirators in a bad opera . . . . Art be damned. What commission, after all, had he ever given to better him or bother him? If . . . . his humiliation had been translated into words, these words would have been as heavily charged with the genuine British mistrust of the bothersome principle as if he had never quitted his island. Several acquired perceptions had struck deep root in him, but there was an immemorial compact formation which lay deeper still.[1]

He loves the theatre but would prefer to keep it as a 'private passion', a mere passion as opposed to the serious realities of his diplomatic career. As Miriam Rooth says, he would never commit his life to art; she is right; for him, it is, in the end, a hobby. One feels

1 Ibid., p. 555

however that when she implies that he would not 'appear' to do so, implying purely social considerations, she is unfair. One would think less of Sherringham the man were he to beome devoid of normal human emotions. It seems that, paradoxically, in order to portray upon the stage human emotion at its highest, she must live a personal life devoid of it. In this she is related to Wilde's Sybil Vane, but Miriam is at an advantage, being placed in a vastly better novel.

> A useful pet in a world of half-eaten sandwiches - hardly a man's work.

When it is hinted that he may accept such a life we do think the less of him. The whole impossibility of her marrying an equal is summed up by Gabriel Nash. She needs a husband, but,

> "There must always be the man; he's the indispensable element in such a life, and he'll be the last thing she'll ever want for."
>
> "What man are you talking about?" Sherringham asked, rather confusedly.
>
> "The man of the hour, whoever he is. She'll inspire innumerable devotions."
>
> "Of course she will, and they will be precisely a part of the insufferable side of her life."
>
> "Insufferable to whom?" Nash inquired. "Don't forget that the insufferable side of her life will be just the side she'll thrive on. You can't eat your cake and have it, and you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. You can't at once sit by the fire and fly about the world, and you can't go round and round the globe without having adventures. You can't be a great actress without quivering nerves. If you haven't them you'll only be a small one. If you have them, your friends will be pretty sure to hear of them. Your nerves and your adventures, your eggs and your cake, are part of the cost of the most expensive of professions. If you do your business at all you should do it handsomely, so that the costs may run up tremendously. You play with human passions, with exultations and ecstacies and terrors, and if you trade on the fury of the elements you must know how to ride the storm.
>
> "Those are the fine old commonplaces about the artistic temperament, but I usually find the artist a very meek, decent little person," said Sherringham.

> "You never find the artist - you only find his work, and that's all you need find. When the artist's a woman and the woman's an actress, meekness and decency will doubtless be there in the right proportions," Nash went on. "Miriam will represent them for you, if you give her her starting-point, with the utmost charm."
>
> "Of course she'll have devotions - that's all right," said Sherringham, impatiently.
>
> "And - don't you see? - they'll mitigate her solitude, they'll even enliven it," Nash remarked.
>
> "She'll probably box a good many ears: that'll be lively," Peter rejoined, with some grimness.
>
> "Oh, magnificent! it will be a merry life. Yet with its tragic passages, its distracted or its pathetic hours," Nash continued. "In short a little of everything."[1]
>
> "They usually marry the prompter or the box-keeper . . . . don't they?"

He subjoins later when Sherringham postulates a man who must protect her, and, when discussing her affection for Nick Dormer, adds:

> "Fancy his taking that sort of job on his hands! Besides, she would never expect it; she's not such a goose. They're very good friends - it will go on that way. She's an excellent sort of woman for him to know; she'll give him lots of ideas of the plastic kind. He would have been up there before this, but he has been absorbed in this delightful squabble with his constituents. That of course is pure amusement; but when once it's well launched he'll get back to business and his business will be a very different matter from Miriam's. Imagine him writing her advertisements, living on her money, adding up her profits, having rows and recriminations with her agent, carrying her shawl, spending his days in her rouge-pot. The right man for that, if she must have one, will turn up."[2]

Gabriel Nash, while placed firmly enough as a character, explains the novel as it goes along, acting chorus to the action at all available points. No literary critic could better the two passages quoted above. The man turns up in the shape of Dashwood, correct, efficient and innocuous, an efficient manager and untroublesome, useful and colourless companion. Any man who could equal

1 *Ibid.*, p. 439

2 *Ibid.*, p. 442

or even approach her genius would be quite unable to accept her terms.

For Nick Dormer the decision for art is harder; it is not only the question of a brilliant match. His background is not the anonymity of Miriam's past but the glittering world of Thackeray and Trollope. His mother, Lady Agnes, his sister Grace, and his fiancee Mrs. Dallow are Thackerayian figures, though while Thackeray would have shown their self-seeking philistinism little mercy, James is more humane and allows them a point of view and some sympathy. For Lady Agnes, indeed, our sympathy is strong. For James at least they are not only heartless philistines. Mr. Cartaret, on the other hand, could easily be visualised at Gatherum plotting with the great Duke. It is this infinitely rich world that he must reject in order to become an artist, or a world promising wealth, status and even happiness. And yet it must be remembered he is in a happier position than Hyacinth Robinson. Hyacinth had no resources, and the only way in which he could reject the possibilities of a life in the lower classes was by suicide. Nick on the other hand has a small private income, and, despite his defection, a name. The outlook for the upper class artist is not quite so black, but black enough.

Nick Dormer is born to a political career by virtue of his father whom his family are anxious to make us believe death had denied the highest office. It is a sacred family duty both to his mother and his father's friend the bachelor Mr. Cartaret who regards him as a son. There is also the woman in love with him, beautiful, rich and ambitious to be married to a great man in politics. It is not pure lust for power, however, which motivates those who wish him well in the political life. Both Julia and Mr. Cartaret believe in the mission of the liberal party

and its ability to do good. Billy Dormer puts the matter so firmly that even Gabriel Nash is forced to prevaricate a little before capping the discussion with his usual epigram.

> "She raised her sweet voice and enquired of Mr. Nash -
>
> "Don't you think there are any wrongs in the world - any abuses and sufferings?"
>
> "Oh, so many, so many! That's why one must choose."
>
> "Choose to stop them, to reform them - isn't that the choice?" Biddy asked. "That's Nick's," she added, blushing and looking at this personage.
>
> "Ah, our divergence - yes!" sighed Gabriel Nash. "There are all kinds of machinery for that - very complicated and ingenious. Your formulas, my dear Dormer, your formulas!"
>
> "Hang 'em, I haven't got any!" Nick exclaimed.
>
> "To me, personally, the simplest ways are those that appeal most," Mr. Nash went on. "We pay too much attention to the ugly; we notice it, we magnify it. The great thing is to leave it alone and encourage the beautiful."[1]

That Nick has a family and public duty to enter politics is never denied, neither is the fact that the vocation is a high one. Nash, the aesthetic dilettante, considers anything more important than politics, and enters into a battle for Nick's soul on behalf of 'feeling', and basically James agreed with him, though for James there was more to 'feeling' than Nash would dream of.

That those around Nick are hostile to or uncomprehending of feeling is made clear enough. In the very first scene Lady Dormer is seen sitting unperturbed if disapproving among the exhibits of a Parisian salon. Later Nick tells us that she regards art or the aesthetic as "a terrible insidious foreign disease, eating the healthy core out of English life . . . . she believes

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1 Ibid., p. 30

there's a dreadful coterie of uncannily artful and dreadfully refined people who wear a kind of loose faded uniform and worship only beauty".[1] For Lady Agnes, Julia and Sherringham , there is nothing more vile than the talkative, unconventional, 'irrigating', Gabriel Nash. It would be hard for instance to persuade them that,

> he was not most at home in some dusky, untidy, dimly-imagined suburb of "culture", peopled by some unpleasant phrasemongers who thought him a gentleman and who had no human use but to be held up in the comic press, which was probably restrained by decorum from touching upon the worst of their aberrations."[2]

Julia Dallow is quite 'impervious to the beautiful' Nick remarks that "It's a fearful bore looking at fine things with Julia" and later, when commenting on his picture of Miriam Rooth, she significantly says, "I dare say its clever" ('clever' was changed in 1908 to 'like' and it is a pity James felt it necessary to choose between the two readings. 'Clever' carries the implication of mere or even odious slickness, while 'like' conveys a truly narrow view of the function of the visual arts.) Later it is implied that the reconciliation cynically forecast by Gabriel Nash does come about, and that Julia goes more than half way to meet Nick, is implied by the last sentence in the novel:

> It is very true there has been a rumour that Mr. Macgeorge is worried about her - has even ceased to believe in her."[3]

Thus in the end it is hinted that art and life are not complete strangers, but one feels that Julia's conversion is brought about entirely by her affection for Nick quite unaided by any suddenly acquired taste for the beautiful. Mr. Cartaret's relation to the aesthetic is not quite so openly hostile; he has indeed, as Nick feels himself

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1 Ibid., p. 441
2 Ibid., p. 589
3 Ibid., p. 619

forced to admit, some knowledge of it.

> He knew that this would inevitably be one of the topics at dinner, the restoration of the abbey; it would give rise to a considerable deal of orderly debate. Lord Bottomley, oddly enough, would probably oppose the expensive project, but on grounds that would be characteristic of him even if the attitude were not. Nick's nerves, on this spot, always knew what it was to be soothed; but he shifted his position with a slight impatience as the vision came over him of Lord Bottomley's treating a question of aesthetics. It was enough to make one want to take the other side, the idea of having the same taste as his lordship; one would have it for such different reasons.
>
> Dear Mr. Cartaret would be deliberate and fair all round, and would, like his noble friend, exhibit much more architectural knowledge than he, Nick, possessed: which would not make it a whit less droll to our young man that an artistic idea, so little really assimilated, should so be broached at that table and in that air. It would remain so outside of their minds and their minds would remain so outside of it. It would be dropped at last however, after half an hour's gentle worrying, and the conversation would incline itself to public affairs.[1]

Nick here displays a certain preciousness that characterises him and which is not, entirely, becoming. Mr. Cartaret, however, is entirely overcome by Nick's decision for art and has no compunction about omitting him from his will, even while providing handsomely for his butler. We can, however, see Mr. Cartaret's point of view.

It will be seen that Nick Dormer's renunciation partakes of an almost religious aspect. James himself later was to write in his Notebook January 23, 1895,

> I take up my <u>own</u> pen again - the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself today - I need say no more. Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life. And I will XXXX I have only to face my problems XXXXX . . . . .[2]

These words with the substitution of brush for pen

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1 <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 227 - 8

2 Notebooks, ed. Murdock and Mathiessen, George Braziller, (1955) p. 179

would have become the mouth of Nick. James was probably right when he felt that he had not drawn him large and strong enough. He does not even have the monumental unpleasantness of a Milton or a Beethoven or the madness of a Van Gogh. He is little more than a normal educated young Englishman who refuses to be the catspaw of others and follows a natural bent. He has talent, but that, by the very nature of the novelistic medium, can only be suggested. But even compared to a portrait such as that of Arthur Pendennis he is unsatisfactory. We do not see him growing up or gaining experience; it seems he will remain a perpetual young man. And yet as Gabriel Nash remarked, the artist is not the appearance of the man but the art. Nick shares the view of the high vocation of the artist as outlined above and he does make the necessary sacrifices. James also can speak feelingly of the loneliness and devotion required of the artist. Unlike Miriam, Nick must also abandon public fame and the plaudits of men. Miriam visits him and when she leaves, he reflects:

> there were mighty differences in the famous artistic life. Miriam was already in the glow of a glory which moreover was probably but a faint spark in relation to the blaze to come; and as he closed the door upon her and took up his palette to rub it with a dirty cloth, the little room in which his own battle was practically to be fought looked woefully cold and grey and mean. It was lonely, and yet it was peopled with unfriendly shadows (so thick he saw them gathering in winter twilights to come) the duller conditions, the longer patiences, the less immediate and less personal joys. His late beginning was there, and his wasted youth, the mistakes that would still bring forth children after their image, the sedentary solitude, the clumsy obscurity, the poor explanations, the foolishness that he foresaw in having to ask people to wait, and wait longer, and wait again, for a fruition which, to their sense at least, would be an anti-climax. He cared enough for it, whatever it would be, to feel that his pertinacity might enter into comparison with such a productive force as Miriam's. This was, after all, in his bare studio, the most collective dim presence, the one that was most sociable to him as he

> sat there and that made it the right place however wrong it was - the sense that it was to the thing itself he was attached. This was Miriam's case, but the contrast, which she showed him she also felt, was in the number of other things that she got with the thing in itself.[1]

Being his own critic he has to bear his doubts by himself. When he feels that his paintings are merely clever, indeed damned by their facility, there is no audience to reassure, to redirect him. Finally there is no audience to assure him by its very presence - of the value of the art he practises. Even in the National Gallery, the very temple of art, he has his doubts.

> What had happened to him, as he passed on this occasion from Titian to Rubens and from Gainsborough to Rembrandt, was that he found himself calling the whole art literally into question. What was it after all, at the best, and why had people given it so high a place? Its weakness, its narrowness appeared to him; tacitly blaspheming he looked at several world-famous performances with a lustreless eye. That is he blasphemed if it were blasphemy to say to himself that, with all respect, they were a poor business, only well enough in their small way. The force that produced them was not one of the greatest forces in human affairs; their place was inferior and their connection with the life of man casual and slight. They represented so inadequately the idea, and it was the idea that won the race, that in the long run came first.[2]

Thus James chronicles the artist's life, its elation and its despairs, its solitudes and its triumphs. By means of such passages James realises the artistic vocation of Nick Dormer and we feel that even if he fulfills Nash's prophecy by becoming a society painter he will still be a good painter. After all Reynolds and Lawrence were society painters.

In the vanguard of the attack on the philistines is that extraordinary character, Gabriel Nash. Quite apart from his functions as discoverer of Miriam Rooth

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1 Henry James; <u>The Tragic Muse</u>; Harper Torch Books; pp. 579-580

2 <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 487-8

and artistic conscience of Nick Dormer, he is a mouthpiece, a chorus and even an expounder of James's own views. Consider his condemnation of the modern theatre as a vehicle for good literature:

> a play, and a character in a play (not to say the whole piece - I speak more particularly of modern pieces) is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on! The dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is so restricted to so poor an analysis.
>
> "I know the complaint. It's all the fashion now. The raffinés despise the theatre," said Peter Sherringham, in the manner of a man abreast with the culture of his age and not to be captured by a surprise. "Connu, connu!"
>
> "It will be known better yet, won't it? when the essentially brutal nature of the modern audience is still more perceived, when it has been properly analysed: the omnium gatherum of the population of a big commercial city, at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid speculations of the day, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot, before eleven o'clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that! There's not even a question of it. The dramatist wouldn't if he could, and in nine cases out of ten he couldn't if he would. He has to make the basest concessions. One of his principal canons is that he must enable his spectators to catch the suburban trains, which stop at 11.30. What would you think of any artist - the painter or the novelist - whose governing forces should be the dinner and the suburban trains? The old dramatist didn't defer to them (not so much, at least), and that's why they are less and less actable. If they are touched - the large fellows - it's only to be mutilated and trivialized. Besides, they had a simpler civilisation to represent - societies in which the life of man was in action, in passion, in immediate and violent expression. Those things could be put upon the playhouse boards with comparatively little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. Today we are so infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference. What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared with what the novelist does!"[1]

This could have been James himself. He felt strongly

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1 Ibid., pp. 56-58

that the theatre was an entertainment and offered little scope for the literary artist. While Chekhov (whom Somerset Maugham tells us James did not appreciate)[1] achieved exquisiteness and Ibsen and Strindberg profundity, James denied such possibilities. Perhaps what Yeats called 'educated modern speech' stripped of all authorial commentary was too dessicated a medium for the subtleties of Jamesian characterisation but he made little effort to render it otherwise. He expressed himself as having no talent for verse and felt that the prose play was a trifle. Later, in his attempt to write plays, in showing his contempt by withholding his true talents he failed even to write commercial entertainments. The relationship of his playwriting years to this speech has been dealt with exhaustively in several works by Mr. Leon Edel[2] and we need only note here that James felt the contemporary stage no place for literary finesse - an opinion confirmed by the reception of his play 'Guy Domville'. Nash is also similar to James in appearance but is obviously far too ironically dealt with to be taken for James. Today most people, rightly or wrongly, will take him as being a portrait of Oscar Wilde. (1854-1900). His Paterism and his successfully artistic life both remind us of Wilde. Some years earlier however James had referred to Wilde as 'an unclean beast' and 'a fatuous fool and tenth-rate cad', and this, coupled with note-book references to a certain Herbert Pratt, make Wilde unlikely.[3]

1 Essay 'Some Authors I have known' in 'The Vagrant Mood'. Heineman, (1951) An interesting if callous reminiscence and criticism.

2 Leon Edel; Henry James, The Dramatic Years, Introduction to the play Guy Domville; Henry James, The Middle Years all published by Rupert Hart Davis.

3 The Notebooks of Henry James; p. 31

It is perhaps best to regard Nash as a consummate example of a young man who has been to Oxford and heard the great Pater (1839-94). Certainly James, despite his reservations concerning Nash, shows through him how closely James felt the thought of his time and that he must have read The Renaissance as avidly as any. James must have agreed with Pater concerning 'the hard gem-like flame' and the need for experiencing all sensations intensely. He would have differed from Pater in making this the end of existence. In Nash we see the ultimate futility of living so. No man can make his life a work of art to the extent of becoming 'an artifice of eternity'. Through Nash and his failure James suggests that no artist can abdicate the responsibilities of ordinary men without ceasing to be creative. If an artist is not creative his title is indeed a contradiction, as it is an artist's responsibility to create. Furthermore Gabriel's irresponsible attitude towards Nick's career, and his gloating over the prospect of Miriam's career in lechery, marks him as a man scarcely human who has nothing to give the world.

Gabriel Nash's whole emphasis is upon a life of sensation as opposed to action.

> We must feel everything, everything we fear. We are here for that . . . . Merely to be is such a metier; to live is such an art, to feel is such a career.[1]

He has written something by way of a novel which was evidently fine but refuses to write more or waste his time living for others.

> Literature you see is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessiong. It plays such mischief with one's style . . . .[2]

His art is life, and the ordering of his life is

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1 Henry James; The Tragic Muse; Rupert Hart-Davis; pp. 28-31

2 Ibid., pp. 31-2

to obtain the most pleasant impressions in the most harmonious order. He explains style.

> It's my little personal experiment (attempting to find more than dreariness in life). Life consists of the personal experiments of each of us, and the point of the experiment is that it shall succeed. What we contribute is our treatment of the material, our rendering of the text, our style.[1]

He says earlier on

> I drift, I float . . . . my feelings direct me - if such a life as mine can be said to have a direction. Where there's anything to feel I try to be there.[2]

The wish to be where there is something to feel leads him to Spain where he has heard of a certain tree beneath a certain city wall; to Normandy for certain misty landscapes, and to Miriam Rooth's drawing room where he absorbs theatrical sensations. He has a certain ethic; he has no wish to hurt anyone but he refuses to become a 'perceptible force for good'.[3] Pater had urged all experience, a fierce draining of the cup, and Nash differs from him only in that his practice is less violent than the master's preaching would suggest.

Many have taken him for a thoroughly charming fellow, a delightful sinner, a charming Oscar. He has some of these characteristics, but James could see deeper than most into the Oscars of this world. Nash is unable to perceive the genuine relationship subsisting between Nick and Julia, and, as he never does anything, he is eventually a bore. He is also a little nasty in being rather unnecessarily obnoxious to the philistines, and when he would take Nick away from his political career, even if he is a bad painter, he is dangerous. Nick, sacrificing so much for no talent at all, would be aesthetically more pleasing to him than Nick renouncing for a great talent.

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1 Ibid., p. 138

2 Ibid., p. 26

3 Ibid., p. 137

He views Nick not as an end in himself but as a means, something that can be arranged to please himself. As Nick says at the end it would amuse Nash to see him in another pickle. This is a fault of Osmond. He has also so dissociated himself from society, has played so much the observer, has selfishly done so little, that he is the most ephemeral of creatures. This is illustrated at the end when Nick is subjecting him to the painful (for him) process of having his portrait painted. Nick finds it hard to determine any real fixed character.

> His impression had been that Nash had a head quite fine enough to be a challenge, and that as he sat there, day by day, all sorts of pleasant and paintable things would come out in his face. This impression was not falsified, but the whole problem became more complicated. It struck our young man that he had never seen his subject before, and yet somehow this revelation was not produced by the sense of actually seeing it. What was revealed was the difficulty - what he saw was the indefinite and the elusive. He had taken things for granted which, literally were not there, and he found things there (except that he couldn't catch them) which he had not hitherto counted in. This baffling effect, being eminently in Nash's line, might have been the result of his whimsical volition, had it not appeared to Nick, after a few hours of the job, that his sitter was not the one who enjoyed it most. He was uncomfortable, at first vaguely and then definitely so - silent, restless, gloomy, dim, as if, when it came to the test, it proved less of a pleasure to him than he could have had an idea of in advance to be infinitely examined, and handled, sounded and sifted. He had been willing to try it, in good faith; but frankly he didn't like it. He was not cross, but he was clearly unhappy.[1]

He is hardly a person at all; he has no emotions. There is precious little to him. He appears not a little pathetic, so while Nick is bored with him, he pities him and questions him sympathetically.

> "But, my dear fellow, what will you do when you're old?"
>
> "Old? What do you call old?" Nash had replied bravely enough, but with another perceptible tinge of irritation. "Must I really inform you at this time of day, that that term has no application to

1 Ibid., p. 595

> such a condition as mine? It only belongs to you wretched people who have the incurable superstition of 'doing': it's the ignoble collapse you prepare for yourselves when you cease to be able to do. For me there'll be no collapse, no transition, no clumsy readjustment of attitude; for I shall only be, more and more, with all the accumulations of experience, the longer I live."
>
> "Oh, I'm not particular about the term," said Nick. "If you don't call it old, the ultimate state, call it weary - call it exhausted. The accumulations of experience are practically accumulative of fatigue."
>
> "I don't know anything about weariness. I live easily - it doesn't fatigue me."
>
> "Then you need never die," rejoined Nick.
>
> "Certainly, I dare say I'm eternal."
>
> Nick laughed out at this - it would be such fine news to some people. But it was uttered with perfect gravity, and it might very well have been in the spirit of gravity that Nash failed to observe his agreement to sit again the next day. The next, and the next, and the next passed, but he never came back."[1]

He never came back. It is almost as though Nick's question had exploded him and his laughter blown the dust away. He had mistaken art for life catastrophically, and left nothing lasting. However well a man organises his life in accordance with aesthetic principles he cannot be eternal. The fading away of Gabriel's picture is a good symbol even though pictures of supernatural habits are apt to be disturbing in naturalistic novels.[2] He was, through seeking the permanence of art, quite ephemeral and all he was must fade as it fades, for all its brilliance, in the memory.

James wrote this novel of affirmation as an antidote to the doubt he began to feel concerning the value of his art. As his personal financial failure worsened

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1 Ibid., pp. 596-7

2 In its ability so surprisingly to tell the truth this portrait resembles the portrait of Dorian Gray - Oscar Wilde, The Portrait of Dorian Gray, Intro. Hesketh Pearson; Everyman Library.) Dorian Gray had however been a perceptible moral force, albeit for evil. Nash, on the other hand, is a moral nonenity, so his portrait having no character to reflect, merely fades away.

his doubts became more and more grave. There are shadows in _The Tragic Muse_ but the full darkness comes later on. The Tragic Muse stands at the beginning of the _fin de siecle_, the 'nineties' are very much foreshadowed in it, a fact we tend to forget because it is so very much a better novel than _A Rebours_ or _The Picture of Dorian Gray_. Indeed only _Marius the Epicurean_ can rival it and then by very different means. _The Tragic Muse_ is a fine novel, James's last in the old leisurely English manner, excellent both for its lucidity and careful scenic presentation.

CHAPTER VI

THE LESSON OF THE MASTER AND OTHERS (1888-1895)

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The Tragic Muse had been an optimistic book, despite certain failings in the characters of the artists; it stated a belief in the value of art and the value of the artist. In certain stories written both before and after however, a different facet is presented. Gabriel Nash had swallowed voraciously those experiences which were pleasing but most of the artists in these stories seem shut out from it, deprived, or so remote from normal humanity that they are unable to understand its feelings.

In 'The Lesson of the Master' (1888) a middle-aged writer advises a younger, on the highest principles of dedication to art, not to marry a young lady. Later, when his wife dies, the older artist himself marries the renounced lady. It is also related that the older artist had, before his first marriage, written finely, while after marriage he had lapsed into mere commercialism. The young man writes a masterpiece. It is strongly suggested that the older writer will never again achieve fineness while the celibate younger will continue to write masterpieces.

Henry St. George, the master, had, at the beginning of his career, written books of a peculiar fineness. Later he married. His wife, is made clear, is, in her way, an admirable woman, rears his sons and regards him as a breadwinner. She drives excellent bargains with his publishers and places him in a windowless room to write pot-boilers. He lives, well-to-do and respected. The pupil, Paul Overt, an admirer of his early work and producer of one good novel, meets a fellow admirer, an attractive young lady Miss Fancourt. He finds her sympathetic and evidently she returns the compliment. St. George,

without having read Overt, advises him to marry Miss Fancourt, or at least to write for her. This fact should, combined with St. George's then married state, be enough to refute F.O. Mathiessen's suggestion that:

> St. George whose first wife had died (marries) Miss Fancourt; but (this) possibly blurs the main point by raising an ambiguity, and distracting the reader into conjectures about how far St. George's advice to Overt was sincere and how far it was dictated by his selfish wish to drive away a rival in love.[1]

Mr. Mathiessen was a great James scholar, but I think he has erred on the side of attributing to James more ambiguity than he actually has. Of St. George's baseness we will say more in due course. He reads Overt's novel and proceeds to give him some remarkable advice. He, St. George, has attempted to enjoy the pleasure of a family and be a fine artist. His plea is that a family costs money and forces the artist into commercialism, and he postulates 'some decent perfection' as a higher value. This he perceives Overt to be capable of and sets out to save him. He dismisses his life equivocally.

> "Do you call it honour?" - his host took him up with an intonation that often comes back to him. "That's what I want <u>you</u> to go in for. I mean the real thing. This is brummagem."
>
> "Brummagem?" Paul ejaculated while his eyes wandered, by a movement natural at the moment, over the luxurious room.
>
> "Ah they make it so well today - it's wonderfully deceptive!"
>
> Our friend thrilled with the interest and perhaps even more with the pity of it. Yet he wasn't afraid to seem to patronise when he could still so far envy. "Is it deceptive that I find you living with every appearance of domestic felicity - blest with a devoted, accomplished wife, with children whose acquaintance I haven't yet had the pleasure of making, but who <u>must</u> be delightful young people, from what I know of their parents?"
>
> St. George smiled as for the candour of his question. "It's all excellent, my dear fellow -

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1 Henry James, <u>The Notebooks of Henry James</u>, ed. Murdock and Mathiessen; George Braziller (1955) p. 87

heaven forbid I should deny it. I've made a great deal of money; my wife has known how to take care of it, to use it without wasting it, to put a good bit of it by, to make it fructify. I've got a loaf on the shelf; I've got everything in fact but the great thing."

"The great thing?" Paul kept echoing.

"The sense of having done the best - the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played. He either does that or he doesn't - and if he doesn't he isn't worth speaking of. Therefore, precisely, those who really know don't speak of him. He may still hear a great chatter, but what he hears most is the incorruptible silence of Fame. I've squared her, you may say, for my little hour - but what's my little hour? Don't imagine for a moment," the Master pursued, "that I'm such a cad as to have brought you down here to abuse or to complain of my wife to you. She's a woman of distinguished qualities, to whom my obligations are immense; so that, if you please, we'll say nothing about her. My boys - my children are all boys - are straight and strong, thank God, and have no poverty of growth about them, no penury of needs. I receive periodically the most satisfactory attestation from Harrow, from Oxford, from Sandhurst - oh we've done the best for them! - of their eminence as living thriving consuming organisms."[1]

The use of the word 'organisms' at the end shows a certain detachment which displays his artistic yearnings and detachment in an unpleasing way. A similar effect is obtained by his avoidance of his wife as a subject almost too painful for discussion. Overt on the other hand considers an aspect which St. George has left out - the denial of the normal satisfactions of sexual love. In discussing this through his characters James becomes almost as explicit as the author of Doctor Faustus.[2]

. . . . The idea of his, Paul Overt's, becoming the occasion of such an act of humility made him flush and pant, at the same time that his consciousness was in

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1 Henry James: The Lesson of the Master; John Lehmann Ltd., London, (1948) p. 61

2 Thomas Mann; Doctor Faustus; Helen Lowe Porter; Seckel and Warburg (1950)

> certain directions too much alive not to swallow - and not intensely to taste - every offered spoonful of the revelation. It had been his odd fortune to blow upon the deep waters, to make them surge and break in waves of strange eloquence."[1]

Miss Fancourt will pretend to understand and care for art but the illusion will soon wear thin; women care for children more than for art and "very proper too", says St. George emphasizing something attractive but morally sound as well. It is not even a religious renunciation; all must be given up for the achievement of a certain fineness which only two or three will notice. What St. George does not say, and Overt hints at, and which becomes clear later, is the suggestion that satisfied sexual love obviates all real need for art. Overt pleads again: what is the artist but a monk without his god?

> "What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disenfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!" Paul went on with a trembling voice.
>
> "Ah you don't imagine by chance that I'm defending art? 'Arraignment' - I should think so! Happy the societies in which it hasn't made its appearance, for from the moment it comes they have a consuming ache, they have an incurable corruption, in their breast. Most assuredly is the artist in a false position! But I thought we were taking him for granted . . ."[2]

St. George makes no bones that he is glad to be out of it, he is like the man who pays the church the service not only of his lips but of his genuine respect but who is equally glad to have missed the calling. Art is against life "a corruption in the breast", a rotting and perversion in the seat of natural feeling. Yet the respect remains; Overt exclaims

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1 Henry James; <u>The Lesson of the Master</u>; John Lehman Ltd., London (1948) p. 64

2 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 66

"I want to live!"
"In what sense;"
"The greatest."
"Well, then, stick to it - see it through!"[1]

And perhaps he is right. Yeats himself said he had seen more poets ruined by wives than by harlots, and it is not the mere use of harlots to which James refers but the love of a good woman. Overt decides to adopt the master's advice, abandons the comfort of Miss Fancourt and spends two years on the continent writing a fine novel. During this period he learns of Mrs. St. George's death and on his return he learns that the master and the beloved are engaged to be married. He meets them. Miss Fancourt is charming to him, complimenting him prettily on a goodness of nature. Yet he senses in her a happiness 'with an aggressive splendour', and declines further parley with her because

> ". . . . it was her old liberal lavish way, with a certain added amplitude that time had brought; and if this manner began to operate on the spot, at such a juncture in her history, perhaps in the other days too it had meant just as little or as much - a mere mechanical charity, with the difference now that she was satisfied, ready to give but in want of nothing. Oh she was satisfied - and why shouldn't she be? Why shouldn't she have been surprised at his coming the first day - for all the good she had ever got from him? As the lady continued to hold her attention Paul turned from her with a strange irritation in his complicated artistic soul and a sort of disinterested disappointment. She was so happy that it was almost stupid - a disproof of the extraordinary intelligence he had formerly found in her. Didn't she know how bad St. George could be, hadn't she recognised the awful thinness - ? If she didn't she was nothing, and if she did why such an insolence of serenity?"[2]

she is fulfilled in love and neither needs nor considers anyone. Her charity (in love) is mechanical. Paul is morbidly sensitive and registers this where most people would not. That is the price and victory of the artist.

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1 Ibid., p. 67

2 Ibid., p. 74

St. George has by now made his peace with life. Overt is 'a comfort, a luxury' and he is prepared to forget the past but Overt rather bad-manneredly perhaps, reminds him of it. St. George defends himself, and we see his crime was of hypocrisy in not practising what he had preached to Overt. Overt is deeply wounded and St. George attempts to cheer him up with

> "Consider at any rate the warning I am at present".[1]

That is cruel, as only the happy can be, and, while not the mocking of a demon that Overt supposes it to be, is the remark of a sinner to a priest; respectful but glad it is not he in charge of redemption, while there _is_ someone to look after these important matters. Life has claimed him for her own. Henry James was later to say of two of the most evil beings he ever created, Kate Croy and Merton Densher in the fulness of their love,

"The selfish gladness of their young immunities".

Certainly St. George and Miss Fancourt are not quite pleasant in their love. Paul Overt retires consoling himself with St. George's 'you are very strong, wonderfully strong' and plans the harmless revenge of his greatness. The greater he becomes, the more genuinely the Master and his wife will appreciate it. They enjoy the fruits for which Overt must pay the fine. The last sentences need be quoted,

> . . . . . Was he really(strong)? Certainly he would have to be, and it might a little serve for revenge. _Is_ he? the reader may ask in turn, if his interest has followed the perplexed young man so far. The best answer to that perhaps is that he's doing his best, but that it's too soon to say. When the new book came out in the autumn Mr. and Mrs. St. George found it really magnificent. The former still has published nothing, but Paul doesn't even yet feel safe. I may say for him, however, that if this event

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1 _Ibid._, p. 77

> were to occur he would really be the very first to appreciate it: which is perhaps a proof that the Master was essentially right and that Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion.[1]

Overt is so disinterested in life, and his aesthetic sense and love of beauty so dominant over human passions, that he could appreciate a fine work written by a happy man who had virtually castrated him, and who took the path so opposite to his own. Paul Overt may seem rather pale, lacking those lovely strong tainted contradictory emotions of humanity, so worth having and so conducive to evil, but we feel that his genuineness and honesty and his disinterested love of something beyond himself all stamp him as finer than St. George.

In "The Liar" (1888) another artist, this time a painter, also fails in the art of life while retaining a moral advantage. Again the artist wavers like a ghost before the strange amoral tactilities of life. A portrait painter named Lyon meets again after a gap of 10 years, a woman he had loved and once proposed to. She is married to a Colonel Capadose, bluff and charming but a congenital romancer and downright liar. Men have little respect for him.

> Lyon perceived after a little that the attention paid to the Colonel's remarks was not in direct relation to the interest they seemed to offer.[2]

Lyon is horrified at his vulgarity. Capadose has even sold a picture Lyon executed of his wife years before, and Lyon is hurt that it should have meant so little. Lyon is determined to expose the man to his wife and wring from her an admission that she would have been better to marry ~~him~~ LYON HIMSELF. To this end he induces

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1 Ibid., p. 78

2 The Complete Tales of Henry James Vol. 6 1884-1888 (ed. Leon Edel) Rupert Hart-Davis, London (1963) "The Liar", p. 392

the colonel to sit for him that he may express on canvas the bluff moral shabbiness of the man. He feels himself succeeding, and one day he comes to his studio, and eavesdrops on the colonel and his wife who have come in to view the painting. In what follows, the wife's recognition of the verity of the portrait should refute the Bewley-Wilson suggestion[1] that the painter has falsified Colonel Capadose with vilification.

> . . . . as if she were overwhelmed with anguish and shame. Her husband remained a moment staring at the picture; then he went to her, bent over her, took hold of her again, soothed her. "What is it, darling, what the devil is it?" he demanded.
>
> Lyon heard her answer. "It's cruel - oh, it's too cruel!"
>
> "Damn him - damn him - damn him!" the Colonel repeated.
>
> "It's all there - it's all there!" Mrs. Capadose went on.
>
> "Hang it, what's all there?"
>
> "Everything there oughtn't to be - everything he has seen - it's too dreadful!"
>
> "Everything he has seen? Why, ain't I a good-looking fellow? He has made me rather handsome."
>
> Mrs. Capadose had sprung up again; she had darted another glance at the painted betrayal. "Handsome? Hideous! hideous! Not that - never, never!"
>
> "Not _what_, in heaven's name?" the Colonel almost shouted. Lyon could see his flushed, bewildered face.
>
> "What he has made of you - what you know! _He_ knows - he has seen. Every one will know - everyone will see. Fancy that thing in the Academy!"
>
> "You're going wild, darling; but if you hate it so it needn't go."
>
> "Oh, he'll send it - it's so good! Come away - come away!" Mrs. Capadose wailed, seizing her husband."[2]

1 Edmund Wilson; 'The Ambiguity of Henry James' Note of 1959

2 _Ibid._, p. 429-430

The painting is an artistic and representational success but to the wife in love with her husband it is an abomination. She perceives its excellence and moral truth but excellence and moral truth are a little thing to her. The Colonel destroys the portrait and they leave. Lyon does not reveal himself however as he still hopes for an admission from the wife. Later when he meets them they lie perfectly to protect each other and even tête-à-tête the wife stands by her husband. Lyon is revolted. She commiserates with him and the end is significant:

> "For a moment she said nothing; then she smiled. "For you, I am very sorry. But you must remember that I possess the original!"
>
> At this Lyon turned away. "Well, I must go," he said; and he left her without any other farewell and made his way out of the house. As he went slowly up the street the sense came back to him of that first glimpse of her he had had at Stayes - the way he had seen her gaze across the table at her husband. Lyon stopped at the corner, looking vaguely up and down. He would never go back - he couldn't. She was still in love with the Colonel - he had trained her too well.[1]

Even when Lyon is ethically in the right his claims mean nothing to her. He at last realises, dimly, that what he had missed in his passionate intellectual consideration of the matter, is the wife's love for her husband, which, while it reduces her moral nature to the depths of vileness, is a source of energy at which he can only guess. He is the uninvolved outsider (in this case his uninvolvement arising from the woman's rejection - significantly she found Capadose the better man for her) who can view the strange animal mutations of human life. The separation of knowledge of good from the vital sources of energy which it could make fruitful and morally beautiful,

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1. Ibid., pp. 440-441

is a frequent theme in James, showing as it does the unhappy cleavage between the artist, as a perceiver of value, and his society, which exalts amoral enjoyment. Both value and enjoyment, which are so necessary to each other, are vastly deprived when separated.

In a much later story, 'Broken Wings' (1903) two artists, a male painter and a female writer come together after a long separation and marry. Both work finely and are therefore neglected by the public. Their marriage accomplished, they agree to give each other the courage to avoid a superficial social life but,

> ~~P. 162~~. He took her in his arms, she let herself go, and he held her long and close for the compact. But when they had recovered themselves enough to handle their agreement more responsibly the words in which they confirmed it broke in sweetness as well as sadness from both together, 'And now to work'.[1]

Their wings are indeed broken, they have been dessicated as humans, despite their affection for each other, they have nothing in their lives except their work. Even in lighter pieces such as 'The Reverberator' (1888) and 'The Real Thing' (1893) the artist appears a little inhuman. The painter in 'The Reverberator'[2] views Francis Dosson's beauty aesthetically and Gaston Probert's affection contemptuously, but it is precisely all the foolish but beautiful feelings that he, an artist, seems to lack. In 'The Real Thing' the painter shows a paralysing lack of humanity. Mainly the story deals with the curious fact that the 'real thing' is unsuitable as a model for its representation. A husband and wife, once ornamental inmates of the most genteel society, but now in most

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1 Henry James: Selected Stories, 'The Artists', Intro. Gerard Hopkins, (The World's Classics), Oxford University Press, Lodnon (1957) p. 162

2 Henry James: The Reverberator; Intro. Leon Edel; Rupert Hart-Davis (1960)

reduced circumstances, apply for jobs as models for illustrations of a novel of high life. The artist finds them far too real and far too magnificent and prefers other models, less than commonplace as people but 'plastic' and adaptable as models. The middle-aged couple, pathetic as they are, strike the artist as a nuisance, and he cannot use them. In desperation they perform some chores around his flat in an effort to be of some use, (P. 113-4)

> ". . . . it was an intense dumb appeal to me not to turn them out. 'Take us on,' they wanted to say - 'we'll do anything.'
>
> My pencil dropped from my hand; my sitting was spoiled and I got rid of my sitters, who were also evidently rather mystified and awe-struck. Then alone with the Major and his wife I had a most uncomfortable moment. He put their prayer into a single sentence: 'I say, you know - just let us do for you, can't you?' I couldn't - it was dreadful to see them emptying my slops; but I pretended I could, to oblige them, for about a week. Then I gave them a sum of money to go away, and I never saw them again. I obtained the remaining books, but my friend Hawley repeats that Major and Mrs. Monarch did me a permanent harm, got me into false ways. If it be true I'm content to have paid the price - for the memory."[1]

Only that can induce a crack in his inhumanity, but even so he dismisses them and the memory is rather aesthetically prized. The detachment of the artist is positively revolting, and would seem to argue that he does not even realise it exists.

Of the four stories grouped with 'The Lesson of the Master' the immediate impression is one of a plea for discrimination. In 1908 James wrote to Howells, discussing the prefaces to the New York Edition,

> They are in general a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for appreciation on other than infantile lines - as against the so almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence of these things; which tends so, in our general trade, it seems

1 Ibid., 'The Real Thing', p.113-114

> to me, to break the heart. [1]

These stories present, in fictional form, a plea for such appreciation and a satire upon the philistine English. We see in 'The Death of the Lion' and 'The Figure in the Carpet' authors who are lionised by society. Society does not actually read their works and prizes them for the prestige their acquaintanceship affords. In 'The Death of the Lion' a very revealing sentence occurs. The manuscript notes for Niel Paraday's final masterpiece are misplaced by the aristocratic guests at a house party, and the narrator remarks bitterly

> They haven't time to 'look over' a priceless composition, they've only time to kick it about the house.[2]

but before this he writes revealingly,

> The conscience of these people is like a summer sea.[3]

Doubtless the image conveys feelinglessness and unreliability but also an extraordinary energy. For a moment the narrator is the hero of The Sacred Fount. These stories, as I have said, illustrate English Philistinism. In 'The Death of the Lion', there are the two authors, of a type popular then as now, 'Dora Forbes' and 'Guy Walsingham' both of a sex opposite to that suggested by their aliases, one a romantic novelist and the other a 'passionate poet'. Significantly both are seen to be more read and valued than Neil Paraday. In 'The Figure in the Carpet', the narrator attempts to find a book of Verecker's in the library of the house in which he is being lionised, and fails. More amusingly in 'The Next

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1 Quoted by Leavis, 'The Common Pursuit', Perigrine Books 1962.

2 Henry James: 'The Lesson of the Master', 'The Death of the Lion'; John Lehman, London (1948) p. 106.

3 Ibid., p. 106

Time' we see Ralph Limbert, possibly an affectionate remembrance of R.L.S., a fine writer by nature, attempting to prostitute himself by writing potboilers. To no matter what genre he applies himself, however, he succeeds in writing well - even in that of the adventure story. Naturally his 'potboilers' turn out to be failures.

Other deep currents are to be noted. Most of the artists stand very much alone, (both Saltram and Paraday are, for example, separated from their wives) except for a small group of loyal friends or (as is also the case in 'The Middle Years') a single young man who alone understands and pasionately admires the master's work.

Again it is significant that the lives of those people of feeling who are involved with the artist almost invariably disintegrate. Some such as Muniment, Dashwood and Miss Fancourt survive but they do not really care for art. We had seen this disintegration in Roderick Hudson and The Tragic Muse but in the smaller scope of the stories, the circumstance stands out far more clearly. In 'The Next Time' the narrator loses his beloved to Limbert while her life with him is not at all perfect; in'The Figure in the Carpet', the searchers either find the secret and die or become enchanted with the possibility of discovering the figure in the carpet and spend their lives as ravished searchers. In 'The Coxon Fund' the Mulvilles, who support Saltram, are left in considerably reduced circumstances, while Miss Anvoy, hypnotised by his possibilities, sacrifices both fortune and marriage in order to support him. In 'The Middle Years' a young doctor sacrifices a vast inheritance in order to comfort a dying author. James seems to suggest that art demands a high price not only of the artist but those who must support him. Generally these sacrifices are made gladly,

and, with the possible exception of 'The Coxon Fund', justifiably.

'The Figure in the Carpet' and 'The Coxon Fund' are heavier in substance than the other two. Both are, however, vitiated by the fact that we have no real evidence of Verecker's or Saltram's artistic quality. In a world where art is debased by commercialism, the artist cannot support himself financially and needs protection from the rough world. In a story of brilliant dialogue Saltram's talk would have shone. In 'The Figure in the Carpet' the fault is much more serious. In this story an author of serious works, Hugh Verecker, informs a young journalist that his works have been entirely misunderstood. There is in them, he claims, a basic figure, some vastly illuminating comment upon life combined with profound moral truth. The nature of this Verecker refuses to reveal. The young man fired by enthusiasm studies Verecker's works and causes others to adopt the same interest. Two friends of his marry and discover the secret but die without revealing it. The young man and another are left at the end disconsolately searching, their lives ruined by the knowledge that they have missed something. Thus art has struck again. The characters are either dead, like Verecker and the married couple, or ravished, like the narrator and his final companion. We also see another plea for discrimination in the fact that a widely admired and lionised author is read with a complete inability to perceive his basic intention. We are prevented from taking the story in full seriousness, however, by the omission of any conclusive hint as to the nature of the figure in the carpet. There is a hint that it has something to do with sexual love - hence the happiness (albeit brief) of the couple who discover the

secret - but Verecker's own marriage has failed, and, as we have seen, James felt that sexual congruity could be dangerous. If the story is intended to be serious we are given insufficient evidence; if a subtle Jamesian joke, it is, for one critic at least, oversubtle.

'The Coxon Fund' suffers in this respect as well. Saltram, despite his fragments and projects, excels in conversation but no conversation of his is given. His effect, however, is well realised, and one is more inclined to accept his prowess than Verecker's. Saltram, the brilliant conversationalist, man of brilliant projects, lechery and general unreliability, never fulfils his actual promise. In a sense he has too much talent for living and talking and he has made _them_ his art. He is like most men who are splendid in these respects, only poverty remains of his riches when he turns himself to production. He produces nothing, and we feel, though the point is lightly made, that this is on account of his lack of discipline and dedication, qualities to the forefront in the other artists of the volume. In this respect he harks back to, though he is very different from, Roderick Hudson.

In his last two major pronouncements, the novel _The Sacred Fount_ (1901) and a story 'The Velvet Glove' (1908), James returns to the theme of the artist's human deprivation, and the corruption of those who have no art. In a recent B.B.C. broadcast Sir Max Beerbohm related an interesting story apropos of 'The Velvet Glove'. When the story appeared, in hurrying to his club to read it, he met James. The latter asked him to conduct him on a tour of the latest exhibition at the Grafton Galleries. Sir Max refused, partly because of shyness before so great a man, but mainly because he wanted to read the story. As Sir Max

observed it was a typical Jamesian plot. Life had imitated art.

In 'the Velvet Glove' a distinguished playwright John Berridge is approached at a sumptuous party (given by Gloriani who has risen greatly in the world since Roderick Hudson) by a young nobleman who wishes him to read the work of a friend of his. This friend, who has little talent, is beautiful and a princess. At the same party she lavishes her attentions upon him, and makes him her captive. She invites him to dinner and they drive through Paris to her house, but his dreams are shattered when she asks him to write concerning her effusive novel,

> 'a lovely, friendly, irresistible log-rolling preface'

which

> 'would do so much for the thing in America'.[1]

The reader would do well to notice the flabbiness of the adjectives and the attitude to her work unveiled in the word 'thing'. Berridge realises that he is being thoughtlessly used. She has dazzled him to use him. In all her beauty and magnificent life she is nasty. Berridge does not quite realise this fully but the unhappy moral flaw in this splendid creature is quite plain,

> It was as if she had lifted him first in her beautiful arms, had raised him up high, high, high, to do it, pressing him to her immortal young breast while he let himself go, and then, by some extraordinary effort of her native force and her alien quality, setting him down exactly where she wanted him to be - which was a thousand miles away from her.[2]

He may be Endymion but she is a cruel Diana. Selfishness and thoughtlessness can hardly go further than that. It has been claimed by many (Dr. Leavis, Dorothea Krook and others) that such stories express James's regret on having 'missed out on Life'. Surely nothing could be more

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1 Henry James: 'The Turn of the Screw' and other stories, Intro. Michael Swan; Collins (1956) pp. 428-9

2 Ibid., pp. 429-30

untrue. The Princess is placed by James's sure insight into her selfishness. Here, as in The Ambassadors, 'Life' as opposed to the life of the sensitive man, is seen as beautiful, it is true, but sadly corrupt. Something is missed by Berridge and Strether, something they are the better without. Berridge refuses, to her great surprise, to allow her to use him and in a last despairing gesture to assert his manhood he passionately kisses her goodbye. She is to be adored and left, his life is different from hers, and one feels finer.

The Sacred Fount, is, in the isolation and perplexity of the hero, reminiscent of Kafka. There is, however, no allegory demonstrating a profound understanding of man's relation to God or his fellow men. The hero in the end is merely defeated. He is an unnamed man, who, symbolically enough, seems to exist in no other capacities than those of novelist and week-end guest. At a week-end house-party he thinks he perceives illicit affairs occurring between two couples. More interesting still, in one couple one partner seems gaining in youth and looks at the expense of the other; while in the other couple a similar transference seems to be taking place with regard to cleverness. He elaborates a theory of vampirism. He attempts to substantiate his perceptions by taking into his confidence Ford Obert, an artist, and a Mrs. Brissenden, a member of one of the suspect couples, who helps him spy on the other couple. At first both seem to confirm his vision but in the end both reject it as unnatural, silly, and not a little unpleasant. The hero retires defeated.

For James the human relationship is always unequal; one party always gives more than the other. From Madame Merle and Osmond to Maggie Verver and Prince Amerigo it is the same, one sacrifices, the other accepts it,

usually as a matter of course. The unnamed observer has perceived this vampirism, this preying of the one on the other's youth; of another upon another's brains. Two are at an advantage, two are sacrificed. Fascinated, the observer has watched himself construct the other's habits; he even pities the sacrificed, but his chief pleasure lies in his detection. No wonder Mrs. Brissenden turns on him. Not only has he violated their animal instinct for privacy; he has named and understood what was happening among them, revealed what was hidden, made conscious what had been unconscious. He has made them aware of what they are doing, he has made them see that they are naked, and he has neither any clothes to offer them nor is he able to absolve them. This would explain his odious obnoxiousness in the eyes of the others. He also appears a simulacrum, what he is observing through guesses and interminable conversations, is at least life in the real, there is blood in it, and his enjoyment of it is vicarious. He himself notes,

> It would have been almost as embarrassing to tell them how little experience I had had in fact as to have had to tell them how much I had had in fancy.[1]

This man who seems to exist only in his capacity as a week-end guest lives only through his observations and fantastications. "Life" to him is something strange and remote

> Consciously they could only want, only intend to live. Wouldn't that question have been .. .. the very basis on which they had inscrutably come together?[2]

Notice the word 'inscrutably'; the way life works is perhaps so but it is very strange to him, it is

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1 Henry James: The Sacred Fount; Intro. Leon Edel, Rupert Hart-Davis (1959) p. 79

2 Ibid., p. 203.

something going on inexplicably behind a window of frosted glass and he tries desperately, feverishly, to understand. In the end he is obnoxious to them, a serpent in the garden of Eden. So fine are his perceptions, no one else can share them. There is no tangible proof, and Mrs. Brissenden can turn on him, refute his ideas and credit her temporary belief in them to his dry eloquence and call him crazy. She leaves him defeated.

> When once I started to my room indeed - and to preparation for a livelier start as soon as the house should stir again - I almost breathlessly hurried. Such a last word - the word that put me altogether nowhere - was too unacceptable not to prescribe afresh that prompt test of escape to other air for which I had earlier in the evening seen so much reason. I should certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together, even though it wasn't really that I had three times her method. What I too fatally lacked was her tone.[1]

"Hang together" is a startling phrase almost as if the Narrator had dissipated like an ambiguous mist. Right to the end he does not quite grasp what he lacks, with pride he takes his superior method as read, and he puts her superiority down to 'tone'. What is this 'tone'? Simply the strength of a vital existence, dubious probably, but vital nonetheless, and his lack of it is fatal indeed.

Then there is the famous ambiguity. A scene concerning a picture illustrates this. In viewing the picture different people see different things to such an extent that they are all seeing different pictures. One man's reality is not another man's. The Narrator sees something strange and unpleasant, the others make conventional interpretations; as with the picture, so with life. Dorothea Krook sums the matter up in a masterly fashion, with reference to James's superdeveloped

1 Ibid., p. 219

consciousness.

> This is the problem inherent in the nature of the fully conscious mind - the kind of mind that belongs to all the late-Jamesian vessels of consciousness, ... It is a mind whose receptiveness to experience and powers of discrimination and analysis that exceed by so much the capacities of the minds that surround it as to make it seem almost of a different species, it is not surprising (James intimates) that a portentious question mark should hang over all its operations, and persistently threaten its peace. How much am I reading out of the situation, and how much am I reading into it? How much of what I am seeing is really ('objectively') there to be seen and how much am I just 'seeing'? And since by definition there is no-one else capable of seeing what I see, even if what I see is there to be seen, how can I ever in any particular situation know for certain which it is?[1]

It is a truly horrible situation, but James, as in 'The Turn of the Screw' has not played quite fair in recounting the story through the narrators alone, and in suggesting their plight he has erred on the side of naturalism as demanded in a first person narrative by giving no objective account. In The Ambassadors Strether is eventually allowed to obtain objective knowledge of Chad's relationship with Madam de Vionnet, but no such grace is granted here and the reader is teased to no purpose. This ultimate avoidance of the problem, this unnecessary naturalism, causes the reader to lose his bearings, and, despite certain not uninteresting points of arrival, to doubt the necessity of his journey. Even in 'The Turn of the Screw' there is evidence: Miles does steal letters and has been expelled from school: the children do wander strangely at night and Mrs. Grose's identification of Quint cannot be dismissed as easily as Professor Goddard and Mr. Silver would have us

1 Dorothea Krook; 'The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James' pp. 132-33.

believe.[1] All this disposes us to regard the governess's perceptions as veridical even if her motives are tainted. In The Sacred Fount we are given no such concrete clues and must refer to the notebooks and certain letters in order to discover that the narrator is a genuinely perceptive creature, a necessity which casts a shadow on the literary value of the novel.

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1 A case Book of Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw' ed.

CHAPTER V11

THE WORK OF ART.

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THE WORK OF ART

In the previous chapter we left the artist in a most unhappy position. It is indeed the position in which James leaves him, for The Sacred Fount is the last work in which James considers his position. An exception would be 'The Velvet Glove' (1908) a story in which the position is no rosier. As James grew to be less read and less understood by those who did read him, a man in his declining years and a recluse, he came to view more and more sadly the 'prospects' of an artistic vocation; but, as I shall seek to maintain, he never wavered in attaching a high moral value to the work of art itself. Unless we realise this we cannot understand the existence of the three last completed novels.

James's belief in the work of art is illustrated in paradigmatic fashion in an early story 'The Story of a Masterpiece' (1868). This carefully planned, written and constructed story is written with no other aim in view than the provision of intelligent entertainment. That the assumption concerning art displayed is taken as axiomatic, however, is surely significant. A well-to-do widower Lennox becomes engaged to an attractive young woman Marian Everett. Lennox meets a vastly talented young artist Baxter, and, on the strength of a previous representation of his beloved, engages him to execute a portrait of her. Unknown to him Baxter and Miss Everett had been engaged some years previously. The engagement had been terminated by Baxter on his discovering that she was a flirt. Thus Baxter is in a position to plumb her character, and the picture reveals a truth Lennox has

suspected but, by an evasion common in such matters, refused to face.[1]

> Miss Everett had distributed her heart impartially throughout her whole organism, so that, as a natural consequence, its native seat was somewhat scantily occupied . . . . It seemed to Lennox that some strangely potent agency had won from his mistress the confession of her inmost soul, and had written it there in firm yet passionate lines. Miriam's person was lightness; could it be her soul was levity too? Was she a creature without faith and without conscience? What else was the meaning of that horrible blankness and deadness that quenched the light in the eyes and stole away the smile from her lips. These things were less to be elucidated because in so many respects the painter had been just. He had been as loyal and sympathetic as he had been just.

That the questions raised are to be answered in the affirmative the story allows no doubt. Lennox marries Miss Everett and like the characters in a later story he cannot face the truth and destroys the portrait. James leaves us in little doubt that he has not destroyed his wife's moral deficiencies.

Works of art appear in James's novels throughout his career. They do so however more richly as his work matures. They no longer are part of the machinery of a clever plot, but cast more light and have a more humane significance. To illustrate this one could quote a passage from The Wings of the Dove where Lord Mark has shown Milly Theale a portrait by Bronzino, which resembles her,

> . . . . she found herself . . . . looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears which made it just then so strange and fair - as wonderful as he had said: the face of a young woman, all magnificently drawn, down to the hands, and magnificently dressed: a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with

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1 Henry James: Collected Stories Vol. 11; ed. Leon Edel; Rupert Hart-Davis (1961) p. 255

> her slightly Michelangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage - only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognised her in words that had nothing to do with her, "I shall never be better than this."[1]

She is reduced to tears and reflects,

> It was perhaps as good a moment as she would have with anyone or in any connection whatever.[2]

From the description one would be tempted to identify the portrait as that of Laura Panciatichi hanging not in London but in the Uffizi. The great haunted portrait of an austerely beautiful, spiritual and unhappy woman, almost modern in its despair, would provide an infinitely better illustration to the story than any professional illustrator could. In this Milly recognises her own fate, "" I shall never be better than this,"" and it is her fate. The portrait is one of an exile because of superior sensibility (if one may be permitted to 'read' a picture in such a way) and such is Milly Theale, for sorrow is the only lot of the aristocrats of the spirit. Merton Densher is also placed neatly by the comparison of him to the young man holding the cup in Veronese's 'Marriage at Cana.' In this picture (hanging then, as now, in the Louvre) we see a young man holding up a richly decorated cup, regarding it with admiration. His back is turned upon Christ and he is even more oblivious than the other guests to the miracle taking place. The relevance of this to Densher, who, in his love of money, is led into mortal sin, is obvious.

Works of art can appear, however, in contexts which would cause the reader to view them in a more dubious

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1 Henry James; The Wings of the Dove; Intro. R.P. Blackmur; Dell (1958) p. 171

2 Ibid., p. 171

light. Before completing our survey it is necessary to turn our attention to them. The reader will remember Madame Merle playing Schubert exquisitely and thus, by using the beauty of the music and skilled technique, lulling Isabel Archer into the belief that her moral qualities will be commensurate with her taste. Again he will remember Milly Theale's exaltation at the pictures in the National Gallery (so highly prized by Gabriel Nash and Nick Dormer) which leaves her a defenceless prey to Kate Croy and Merton Densher. To understand these things more fully, however, we will take an example from The Ambassadors. Towards the end of the novel Strether wanders in the French countryside. He is now convinced that the relationship between Chad Newsome and Madame ~~Merle~~ de Vionnet is not the clandestine adultery as imagined by Chad's family, but a pure and beautiful platonic relationship. He is searching for the landscape by Lambinet, cheaply priced, which he had seen in a Boston art dealers long before, but, out of a timidity natural to him, had not bought. Stepping into the French landscape he seems to enter the lost picture and capture, even if too late, the experience he had missed. He enters the experience he had been too timid and socially constricted to grasp in his youth. He is completely happy,

> He walked and walked as if to show himself how little he had now to do; he had nothing to do but turn off to some hillside where he might stretch himself and hear the poplars rustle and whence - in the course of an afternoon so spent, an afternoon richly suffused too with the sense of a book in his pocket - he should sufficiently command the scene to be able to pick out just the right little rustic inn for an experiment in respect to dinner.[1]

So delightful is the effect that:

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1 The Ambassadors; Intro. Frank Swinnerton; Everyman Library; p. 323

> He really continued in the picture - that being for himself his situation - all the rest of that rambling day;[1]

There is no confinement in the composition, however; life and art seem to have joined hands in the most pleasing way and become at one.

> The frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please; but that was just his luck.[2]

The Idyll continues until something occurs which seems to complete the composition. A lady and gentleman in a punt glide into view. They are, however, Chad and Madame de Vionnet. Neither is pleased to see Strether as his seeing them would give their secret away, and they even attempt to avoid him. When he meets them they are charming but slowly Strether is forced to realise that a relationship he had imagined so fine, is, in the end, just another common or garden adultery. When he sees the splendid Madame de Vionnet for the last time she is like a servant maid deserted by her lover.

One should not conclude from such incidents that art, even at its best, is a form of deception, of betrayal, or a distortion of life. Veronese's 'Marriage at Cana' not only tells the truth about Merton Densher, it is also a thing of beauty. As has been shown earlier James was convinced that art could tell the truth. He also felt that it could be so beautiful as to lull the unsuspecting into having a higher opinion of life (a la Leavis) than ~~it~~ life really deserved. Chad and Madame de Vionnet do not invalidate Strether's sensitive and marvellously rendered impressions of the landscape, but are a blot upon them. In the end one feels that through his ability to register both the landscape's beauty and their moral indelicacies,

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1 _Ibid._, p. 325

2 _Ibid._, p. 325

Strether has lived far more than they. He may have missed out on adultery, but in the peculiar Jamesian sense 'he knows', he is an artist in that he can see and knows what is beautiful and true; he thus enjoys a richer life than a life of mere sensual gratification, however refined, can provide. Again, it is Madame Merle who abuses Schubert by turning him into a parlour trick to gain herself acceptance into society. She uses him almost as it were to lull Isabel into thinking that someone who plays something excellent so well must partake of good qualities. Again, it is not the fault of the pictures in the National Gallery that Milly is betrayed; they lend wings to her spirit and it is Merton and Kate alone who are base in taking advantage of her innocence and exaltation. In The Spoils of Poynton[1] (1897) the exquisite furniture of the house is not morally dubious because of the baseness it arouses in men; its value is undoubted; it is human cupidity which is to blame. Far from art coming off a second best to life in James's work, as is generally supposed, it is the common life uninformed by art and ethics (for James, inseparable) that comes off so poorly when compared with art.

From this faith in the work of art Henry James was never to waver. In his literary criticism an unfailing criterion is the truth of a novel to experience. In an essay on Trollope, shocking in its commendation to his more narrow readers, he praises Trollope on the grounds of his sure and truthful rendering of the English. Again his criticism of Flaubert, reflecting as it does, but little credit on James, is motivated by the fact that he felt Flaubert had drawn on specimens too miserable

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1 Henry James; The Spoils of Poynton; Penguin Books (1963)

for tragedy in Emma Bovary and Frederick Moreau. (A full discussion of the erroneousness of this view will be found in Edmund Wilson's essay, "The Ambiguity of Henry James" in the 'Triple Thinkers' and should be read in conjunction with the essay on Flaubert in the same volume.[1]) There is of course a famous passage in the preface to The Tragic Muse which is often adduced as indicating an arid formalism in the late James's conception of art. Let us quote it more fully than is the usual critical wont. James is discussing the difficulties of the fusing of the book's two plots,

> A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is, moreover, not composed at all unless the painter knows how that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may be in its absence the life, incontestably, as The Newcomes has life, as Les Trois Mousquitaires, as Tolstoy's Peace and War have it; but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitary artistically mean? . . . . There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from 'counting', I delight in a deep breathing economy and organic form. My business was accordingly to 'go in' for complete pictorial fusion, some such common interest between my two first notions as would, in spite of their birth under quite different stars, do them no violence at all.[2]

Surely we have it in the ~~first~~ LAST clause: 'no violence at all'. James is protesting (though one feels his first and last examples to be unfortunate) against a mere representation; the hearty merry England pot-pourri of a J.B. Priestly is not for him. And yet the formalist principle is, for him, a principle of 'health', because the organism needs no superfluous weight (life as waste). The implication is that far from distorting the truth of an action the imposition of form and selection will clarify it. Even when two disparate halves are in need

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1 Edmund Wilson; 'The Triple Thinkers'; Penguin Books (1962)

2 Henry James; The Art of the Novel; Ed. and introduced by R.P. Blackmur; Scribners (1934) p. 84

of unification they must suffer no distortion, there must be no mannerist elongation of forms in the interest of abstract design, no untruthful and violent suppression in the demands of order. An order which demanded such suppression James would have felt to be a false order. It is the mistaken impression that this occurs in Flaubert's naturalistic novels which led to his reservations concerning his friend and master.

In the light of this it might be possible to grasp the reason for the great elaboration of James's late style. If we see these late novels in the light of what has gone before we will perhaps better understand their style. The constructional method was to reduce solid blocks of commentary - which can be so abstract and unconcrete - to short comments on speeches. His 'divine principle of the scenario' was basically aimed at making his characters more vivid and actual by presenting them as acting, talking, and all the while reflecting. In short, his aim was to present rather than to talk about them. The style as a concomitant to this attempts to render every inflection, change of tone, subtlety of feeling. One only has to read the opening chapters of The Ambassadors to see with what precision Strether's tremulous middle-ageing reaction to Europe is conveyed. One could take the passage already quoted from The Ambassadors[1] to illustrate this. "Just the right little inn, for an experiment in respect to dinner." How well it renders Strether's timidly growing awareness and delicate excitement. James, as those who knew him recall, constantly strove to achieve the precise word to express what he wished.

1 Henry James; The Ambassadors; Intro. Frank Swinnerton; Everyman Library; p. 323

In conversation this led him into his famous and barren circumlocutions; in his own time and with his own subject, however, James failed far less often. Far from being an arid formalist and word spinner, the late James constantly strove for fidelity to his subject - to present it truthfully and fully - This would certainly be a more fruitful approach to the late style than the belief of such as Dr. Leavis that it represents an attempt at evasion. Far from evasion it is an attempt to come to grips with the subject.

Certainly Henry James never lost faith. His letters to Henry Adams (1914) and H.G. Wells (1915) show no wavering. In a letter to H.G. Wells 10th July 1915 he wrote:

> It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know no substitute whatsoever for the force and beauty of its process. [1]

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1 Henry James and H.G. Wells; ed. Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray; Rupert Hart-Davis (1959) p. 267

CHAPTER V111

CONCLUSION

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James's position on the matter of art should by now be clear. For the artist there was self control, abstinence and hard work. He was also to be humane and compassionate in dealing with humanity,[1] and that the more so for his lack of immediate involvement. For the work of art his regard seems almost neo-Platonic. Selection and simplification of forms are not to take place in the interests of an isolated symmetry, but to illustrate the truth of the situation. When Gabriel Nash says, with James's approval, that the pictures in the National Gallery embody more of the ideas men live by than all the statutes of parliament, is he not being a neo-Platonist? The similarity is surely clinched by Milly Theale's exaltation before those same pictures.

In these beliefs James shows himself as being of his time. Were we to accept an account of him popular at the present time, we would see him as a follower of George Eliot with a penchant for civilised observation, a deep concern for moral values, and an immunity to foreign literature and thought. The first two assumptions are as obviously true as the third is obviously false. The classification of Dr. Leavis, by placing James in the same box as Jane Austen and George Eliot (while it is valuable in enabling us to see one facet of James's work more clearly) serves to obscure or

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1 It is this compassionate observation that has deceived Dr. Leavis into finding Kate Croy a 'sympathetic' character.
Essay 'The function of criticism' in The Common Pursuit; Chatto and Windus; Peregrine Books (1963)

cause to be dismissed certain other aspects of his work. In doing this the tendency is to make Jamesian morality a very narrow and rather unattractive business. It could, for instance, be argued with great cogency that in James's moral preoccupations, exists a spirit closer to Hawthorne and Poe than to Jane Austen and George Eliot. No English novelist of note, for instance, has been as critical as James concerning the notion of 'Romantic Love'. As Shaw noted time and again in the prefaces to his plays (and in his review of <u>Guy Domville</u>[1]) nothing is so dear to the English heart as 'Romantic Love'. Shaw perceived that Guy Domville was hissed off the stage because it suggested that a religious vocation could be more worthwhile than a grand passion. James's doubts, as we have seen in our discussion of 'The Lesson of the Master' above, concerning the value of a romantic tie, even between intelligent and charming people, were such as to put him at odds with such disparate writers as Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrance. The belief in higher values than 'Romantic Love' is a comparative stranger to the English novel, but is found in American novels such as <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> of Nathaniel Hawthorne. It could also be argued that it is not quite as secular as the exegesis from Downing College would have us believe.[2] A proof of James's non secular morality would be his belief in the immortality of the soul as evidenced by his ghost stories and a now unobtainable essay.[3] More germain to our purposes, such a reading of James causes us to forget that

1 Shaw on the Plays and Acting; World Classics (1961)

2 F.R. Leavis; <u>The Common Pursuit</u>; Chatto and Windus.

3 This Essay is discussed by F.O. Mathiessen in Henry James <u>The Major Phase</u>; Oxford University Press (1946)

he had connections with the European tendency of art becoming self-reflective. This tendency has been no movement; great artists have worked out their own destinies and solutions while poetasters have formed groups and issued manifesti. The problem has been to see what place great art can have in a society largely insensitive to aesthetic and moral values. There had been a time when a madonna of Cimabue (1240-1302) could be carried in triumph through the streets of Florence to its destined church. Such practices had died out, or, if there were remnants, the art was almost certain to be bad. To see James's work and originality it is necessary to sketch a context. It is too often held that James was hermetically sealed to the influences of his time.[1] James knew some of the leaders of the French Decadence (Flaubert (1821-1880) and his circle) and years later watched the disintegration of many English talents, minor both in art and vice (The Rhymers Club). No approver of such matters, James, by his reaction of calling for order in an artist's life, shows his cognisance of them. It is a tribute to his powers that we do not normally associate him with 'art for art's sake', but we should not be blinded to the fact that he felt its influence, and, as we have seen, absorbed some of its doctrines into his own truer and richer <u>weltanschauung</u>. As can be seen from the passage quoted above from the preface to <u>The Tragic Muse</u>,[2] he fully learned to apply their demanding criteria of form, but this was fused in him with a desire to see that the truth was spoken.

Much ink has been spilt both in fiction and in criticism over the self-reflective tendency of modern writing, and it is necessary here to suggest a few considerations of the ideas current in James's life-time.

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1 F.R. Leavis; Introduction to <u>The Great Tradition</u>; Chatto and Windu (1948)
2 Henry James; <u>The Tragic Muse</u>; Harper Torch Books (1960) p.88

The tendency of art to deal more and more with itself began with the Romantic movement at the beginning of the last century. The main reason for this was the extremely high value attached by Romantic aestheticians such as Hölderlin, (1770-1843) Novalis, (1772-1801) Coleridge (1770-1832) and Shelley (1792-1822) to the creative act. The supreme philosopher of the Romantic Movement, Schopenhauer, (1788-1860) gave these claims their most vigorous expression. For him art was a means of cognition superior to that of the senses and capable of grasping the truth of things. The artist had, however, to pay for this; as knowledge increased, so did suffering, for to know the truth is to enter into the abiding sadness of the human lot far more than the man incapable of creating or understanding works of great art. Through the imposition of form and the clarification of human experience which took place in art, the serene contemplation of human life was enabled. With regard to human suffering the attitude of the good man was to be one of compassion. The true artist was almost raised to the status of a saint, and his qualifications were to be high indeed. The relevance of this to James is obvious. James's knowledge of Schopenhauer does not seem to have been profound but his ideas were 'in the air' during James's early manhood. The admiration held for him by Baudelaire, Tolstoy and Wagner is evidence of this. These claims, shorn perhaps of their insistence on suffering, would not have greatly surprised Aeschylus and Horace, Milton and Bunyan. The difference resided in the fact that, for some reason, the general public no longer assented to such claims. The artist who made them was ignored, ostracised, or, worst of all regarded as mad.

Schopenhauer and the others, in stating the writer as musarum vates, were also making a defiant gesture.

The writer began to make war on society. The cases of Byron and Shelley are too well known to need elaboration. Perhaps the supreme example was Baudelaire (whom James did not admire) who, from a feeling that there was more to life than bourgeois happiness rather than any deeply held satanism, ruined his life with drugs and women. His life can be regarded as a magnificent gesture against materialistic values, by a man who preferred degradation to a submission to superficiality. In the light of this his satanism becomes an ironic gesture to force men into realising the possibilities of salvation and damnation inherent in human life. Such action was magnificent as a gesture but disastrous as a programme, especially when adopted by those (e.g. Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) who did not share his spiritual concerns. This James felt as early as Roderick Hudson - in this respect an anti-Romantic novel. Confronted with these and similar cases he never doubted the artistic vocation. What he did do, however, was to call the artist to his proper business of creation. art was discipline, and if discipline was absent from the life, the art would suffer. Perhaps Baudelaire's solution was the only right one for him, but it was a dangerous precedent, and while James was not reacting necessarily against Baudelaire, he was reacting against the spirit of the age. James's call to self-discipline for the artist took place against this background and the personal influence of Flaubert must have operated here. James, as I have said, regarded highly the vocation of the artist, but, for this reason, felt, for reasons of self-preservation if no others, that sanity and order should prevail in his life.

This remained his platform throughout his life; he kept faith with art. On the other hand, James kept faith with life, as well.

In Gilbert Osmond and Gabriel Nash we see the failure of mere aestheticism uninformed by any vigorous moral sense. The failure of both men in life, as well as in art, exemplifies James's belief that life, morality and artistic form are the stuff of art. The true artist, for James, had not only to be a disciplined and dedicated manipulator of techniques, but a compassionate and humane man as well. If such a man was an outcast such as Hyacinth Robinson and Paul Overt were, it was, James clearly shows, the fault of a materialistic society and not themselves.

It is in his fusion, both in theory and practice, of a desire to achieve both fullness of vision and formalistic perfection that makes James so eminent. It is an achievement rare enough in any literature and especially rare in the English novel. The two strands we have been following, the <u>ars poetica</u> and the <u>ars vivendi ad poetam</u> combine to show that, far from art and life being strangers, each of these is necessary to the other. If most men deny this, as James admits they do, it is their fault and their loss. It is strange that a man who strove for such things should have gained the popular reputation of being a mere arid formalist and wordspinner.

After James's death the situation began to worsen. Valery, (1873-1946) for instance, the last French descendant of Baudelaire, devoted his slender <u>oeuvre</u> to the act of creation itself. While Valery's act of poetic creation was an exceedingly complicated and interesting one, it was a thin subject for a poet of such talent. In Thomas Mann, (1875-1955) a novelist curiously akin to James, the problem of the artist's place was to receive even more exhaustive

treatment. Mann was to bring to bear on it an apparatus which included Freud, Schopenhauer, Marx, Nietzsche and Spengler. While the lucid results obtained with such equipment sometimes cause us to regret James's comparative lack of information, the equipment itself sometimes causes Mann to forget he is writing a novel and not a journal of popular science. In Mann's early novels the artist's position is similar to that in the late James. Young Johan Buddenbrook and Tonio Kröger are painful misfits, the first of whom chooses death in preference to the agony life is for him. The hero of 'Death in Venice', (1911) a novelist Wolfram von Aschenbach (ironically a namesake of Germany's greatest medieval poet) watches a beautiful young boy in the hope that he will die and inspire him to greater literary efforts. The author, however, contracts cholera and himself dies. The Sacred Fount pales beside this. After this Mann attempted to become affirmative. In The Magic Mountain (1924), not only is art disease, but life itself is a form of disease. The hero Hans Castorp, however, while not an artist, is granted upon the slopes of the magic mountain a vision of the good life. This vision places him so far in advance of his fellows that he has no more means of putting it into practice than Leonardo da Vinci with his dreams of a flying machine. The reader leaves him for dead in the fields of Flanders. In Joseph and his Brothers (1933-44) Mann attempted to use the biblical story to suggest that the artist and thinker could be of use to his fellow men, could lead them and give them the benefit of his wisdom. A fine work, it did not convince Mann himself. In Doctor Faustus (1949) he saw art not only as a result of disease, physical and mental, but of a union with the powers of darkness. From the sickness

and despair of the novel no hope emerges. His last works are governed by this spirit, even the picaresque gaiety of _Felix Krull_ (1954) arises from a belief in the irremediable stupidity of human beings. The artist is a dubious person, who, even if he has something to teach will not be heeded. Perhaps the greatest novelist of this century left his last artist crazed at the piano, unable to perform his last and greatest work, his soul taken by the Devil. Mann's despair was probably induced by the disasters which overtook his beloved Germany. Certainly, like James, his dedication to the novel allowed no personal disintegration, and his faith is illustrated by his continued production.

In the English speaking world at any rate the artist has today begun to take one of two ways out of his situation - becoming an academic or a bohemian. The terrors of the first course are illustrated in a recent novel by a writer whose great gifts have still to gain full recognition. In '_Pale Fire_' (1960) Vladimir Nabokov has given us in John Shade a picture of the modern American academic poet. Shade writes with a certain formalist perfection, but without real feeling for his own family. In the course of his last poem (which Nabokov with his flair for writing _in persona_ has given) he constantly promises to give us some startling revelation and shattering truth but always evades doing so. In the end the reader is left only with an impression of his having had great thoughts while shaving. Nabokov, who spent twenty years teaching in American universities, should understand this type pretty well.

On the other hand there are the followers of Henry Miller, (1893-) another expatriate American novelist, the beatniks and angry young men. Miller himself was a

phenomenon. His honest picture of an artist as tramp and fornicator will survive for its very honesty. His imitators, however, without the strength of his truthfulness provide merely formless verbosity. Neurosis and psychopathology and filth, used for their own sake, have become the business of the artist. The beneficial results of sentencing Kerouac to ten years of Henry James are self-evident.

In his insistence on both form and feeling James's truest disciple has perhaps been T.S. Eliot. His spiritual heirs, those who share his preoccupations, such as Salinger, seem to have forgotten that in the novel ideas must be expressed dramatically, or the writing will lapse into popular philosophy. Today, with artistic activity in the state it is, the lesson of the master is in need of being listened to. James's example and preaching, with their sanity, dignity, inclusiveness and demand for high standards, remain of inestimable value.

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In choosing texts a great difficulty presented itself. Despite the fame of Henry James no complete uniform edition of his works exists. Thus it was necessary to select texts where they could be found with the one guiding principle that the text should be the nearest to the one James wrote at the time. This was advisable as James's works dealing with art were considered in their chronological order.

I have been able to discover little written on the aspect of James considered in this essay and works cited in the third section of this bibliography are largely tangential.

(A) WORKS GERMAIN TO SUBJECT OF THESIS.

A LANDSCAPE PAINTER	(1866)	(S.S.)
THE STORY OF A MASTERPIECE	(1868)	(S.S.)
TRAVELLING COMPANIONS	(1870)	(S.S.)
THE SWEETHEART OF M. BRISEAUX	(1873)	(S.S.)
THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE	(1873)	(S.S.)
EUGENE PICKERING	(1874)	(S.S.)
BENVOLIO	(1875)	(S.S.)
RODERICK HUDSON	(1876)	(N)
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY	(1881)	(N)
THE AUTHOR OF BELTRAFFIO	(1884)	(S.S.)
THE PRINCESS CASSAMASSIMA	(1886)	(N)
THE REVERBERATOR	(1888)	(N)
THE LESSON OF THE MASTER	(1888)	(S.S.)
THE LIAR	(1888)	(S.S.)
THE ASPEN PAPERS	(1888)	(S.S.)
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THE REAL THING	(1893)	(S.S.)
GREVILLE FANE	(1893)	(S.S.)
THE DEATH OF THE LION	(1894)	(S.S.)
THE COXON FUND	(1894)	(S.S.)
THE NEXT TIME	(1895)	(S.S.)
THE MIDDLE YEARS	(1895)	(S.S.)
THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET	(1896)	(S.S.)
THE SPOILS OF POYNTON	(1897)	(N)
THE TURN OF THE SCREW	(1898)	(S.S.)
THE SACRED FOUNT	(1901)	(N)
THE WINGS OF THE DOVE	(1902)	(N)
THE AMBASSADORS	(1903)	(N)
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THE VELVET GLOVE	(1909)	(S.S.)
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THE IVORY TOWER	(1917)	(N) (unfinished)

KEY

N Novel

SS Short story or Novella

(B) NON-FICTION WORKS BY JAMES GERMAIN TO THIS THESIS.

French Poets and Novelists	1878
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<u>ABBREVIATIONS.</u>

P.M.L.A. - Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.

P.Q. - Philological Quarterly

N.C.F. - Nineteenth Century Fiction.