

The key to patience:
Endings and completeness in Henry James's novels

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations, given in **bold**, have been used in the text for ease of reference.

AF - Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' (1884), reprinted in *The Art of Fiction and other essays by Henry James*, introd. by Morris Roberts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 3-23

Blackmur - *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James*, introd. by R.P. Blackmur (New York and London: Scribner's, 1962)

CH - *Henry James: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Roger Gard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968)

Letters - *Letters of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1974-1984)

Notebooks - *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. and introd. by Leon Edel and Lyall Powers (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Titles of James's novels have been abbreviated to the following:

RH	<i>Roderick Hudson</i>
Amer	<i>The American</i>
P	<i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>
WMK	<i>What Maisie Knew</i>
AA	<i>The Awkward Age</i>
SF	<i>The Sacred Fount</i>
W	<i>The Wings of the Dove</i>
Amb	<i>The Ambassadors</i>
GB	<i>The Golden Bowl</i>

Note on the texts used

The issue of completeness in James's work also bears on the texts used. There are losses and gains made whenever a specific version of a text is chosen for discussion; fortunately Philip Horne's *Henry James and Revision: The New York Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) has taken on the awesome task of providing a comparative examination of James's various texts. While the New York edition is not fully inclusive, it is nevertheless the authorised edition (in more than one sense) of James's novels, providing not a complete collection of his work, but what James determined to be the least incomplete one.

I have, therefore, used the New York edition of the novels referred to in the thesis, with two exceptions. The first and unavoidable one is *The Sacred Fount*, which is the only novel I discuss here in detail that was excluded from the New York edition; all references are to a reprint of the edition published by Scribner's (New York) in 1901. The second instance, which required careful thought, was that of *The American*. The texts where a decision between early and late has most consequence for this study are the early novels I discuss: *Roderick Hudson*, *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. Of these, the two major versions (1879 and 1907) of *The American* differ more significantly than is the case for other novels. Moreover, in considering issues of 'completeness' and references to this aspiration, the first editions of all three novels use the term and refer to the topic frequently. While this aspect of *Roderick Hudson* and *Portrait* remains largely unchanged, the revised *American* is missing a great deal of the vocabulary of 'completeness' it originally shared with its contemporaries. Therefore, while both versions have much to recommend them, and a great deal of comparative interest - which is explored in an appendix to the Oxford University Press edition (ed. by Adrian Poole, 1999) - the 1879 edition represents greater consistency within the early group of novels, in relation to my argument. References to *The American*, then, are to the Penguin text (ed. William Spengemann, 1981) based on this edition; I have provided variant readings (within chapter five) of passages where James's revisions are particularly striking.

Introduction

On the title page of the first volume of *The Portrait of a Lady*, in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, someone has added, in pencil, 'The neverending story'. I can only assume that they did not go on to the second volume; however, this illustrates the common sense of frustration with Henry James's endings which inspired me to begin this research. It developed from an awareness that most people who have ever attempted to read Henry James have an extreme reaction to his work either violently disliking or ardently championing his fictions, which became focused, in any more detailed discussion, on the disappointment these readers experienced on finishing a James novel, focused specifically on its ending.

The anticlimactic effect of the endings of James's novels constitutes a familiar gripe, perennially so, from his time to ours. In novel after novel, the trail of marriages that do not happen, protagonists that die young, potential friendships and partnerships that end in separation, all seem to defy expectations in often refusing to provide even pessimistic closure. My starting point, then, is to explore why James chose to end his novels in ways that he might well have known readers would dislike: finding answers to this question is more difficult than it might seem. James is obviously not just out to please a potential audience, but, conversely, neither did he wish simply to upset his audience: a complex relationship, fraught with misunderstandings and inconsistencies on both sides, exists between James and his readers.

The need for a satisfying end to a fiction is often associated with non-scholarly ways of reading; it is regarded as somewhat unlitrary to prefer an optimistic conclusion to a pessimistic one, or to prefer not to have details of how

a novel ends revealed before reading it. Such a characterisation of these preferences produces ensuing assumptions about the canonicity and literary status of fictions which end in a certain way. In other words, since happy endings are perceived to be the choice of the indiscriminating reader, novels which end unhappily (or, some would say, not at all) like James's might be said to enjoy an enhanced status as canonical works *because* of their refusal to conform to a popular stereotype. R. H. Hutton hints as much in a review of *Roderick Hudson*:

Mr. Henry James delights in dismal stories. He thinks, apparently, that it is flying in the face of his own genius to let any story fall out happily. But still, in most of them, though he insists on making you dismal in the end, he contrives to amuse you very much in the interval. But in this book he makes you dismal almost from beginning to end.¹

However, James insisted that his endings were artistically consonant with the rest of each specific narrative, that they were composed for that reason, and that he would not pander to readers' requirements of neatly tied-up narrative threads. This position is further complicated, then, by James doing exactly what he vowed he would not, in altering his novels to give them happy, marriage-focused endings when he adapted them for the stage. The result is that, firstly, unsettling endings can be read as both an indicator and a product of high cultural status; and secondly, James's choices, decisions and revisions usually derive from a combination of motives, including issues of financial remuneration, popularity and artistic credibility, all bearing on his literary productions in different degrees. There is no simple explanation for his choice of endings, but an exploration of them provides insights into innumerable other aspects of his career.

The concept of completeness in James's novels is similarly important, and similarly brings with it the difficulty of determining what is expected of a

'complete' novel or a 'complete' character in one. Discussions of this kind about characters, their potential for completeness, and how best they can achieve it are common in James's work: Isabel Archer, Roderick Hudson and Nanda Brookenham are all subject to speculation of this kind by their peers and relations. As he explores this issue on behalf of his characters, James is simultaneously exploring its implications for the possibilities of narrative completeness, about which he is sceptical, and for the role of a 'complete' author; again, however, there are unresolved tensions and contradictions surrounding the inflections he gives to 'completeness', depending on its context. Applied to other writers or to the role of a writer, it is clearly a term of praise, as in his description of Balzac as 'the reflective observer that aimed at colossal completeness'.² However, when used by his characters about one another, it often has less favourable connotations; some, like Roderick Hudson, seem doomed by the very excesses of talent, luck and enthusiasm that appear to make them complete. Other protagonists, like Madame Merle, are almost sinister in their completeness; Gilbert Osmond, too, is signified as dubious by his expectations of completeness in others. In contrast, those who achieve a realisation of their own *in*completeness are more likely to be valorised; Lambert Strether gains in stature as he continues to discover how much he has yet to learn and experience. Completeness seems to be a shared goal for every James character, yet one which is seldom, if ever, achieved by them. It seems important, then, to examine the importance of completeness and the reasons for its presence as an unattainable but still fascinating aim in his texts.

¹ R.H.Hutton, review of the English edition of *Roderick Hudson*, in *Spectator*, July 1879; reprinted in *CH*, pp.76-77.

² Henry James, 'Honoré de Balzac', *Galaxy*, December 1875; reprinted in *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Roger Gard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.89.

References to these problems of endings and completeness are made in the midst of many other topics of Jamesian criticism, major studies devoted to it have not been undertaken. It is frequently regarded as part and parcel of James's approach to and philosophy of fiction, which it is, but it also has a distinct field of importance to and influence on other aspects of his work. James was obsessed by the difficulties of finishing his work, and doubtful about the value of closure, factors that have a considerable influence on his work as a whole. The desire for closure, and the problems of closure in fiction has been explored by Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1966) as a central cultural anxiety. Similarly, D. A. Miller has examined the presence of troubled closure in Victorian novels in *Narrative and its Discontents* (1981), but there is an absence of critical studies on James, of greater length than essays or articles, that examine his engagement with the problem. Marianna Torgovnick's *Closure in the Novel* (1981) comes closest to such a study, devoting two chapters of her book *Closure in the Novel* on James, in which her discussion is limited to *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*. My thesis, then, attempts to go some way towards filling that gap. It aims to give a broad overview of the role endings and closure played in James's writing career as a whole.

What my work seeks to establish is a readerly patience with enduring the comfortable discomfort that James's novels generate. It is rewarding, when reading James, to become at ease with the fact that James's writing career and writings are often contradictory, and that while some instances of that are weaknesses, others are instances of the achievement of his works in containing contradictory elements without resolving or reducing them. James's endings represent both a perennial and professional weakness, and a deliberate fictional

and formal aesthetic strategy. James, as in many things, was ahead of his time in his belief that narrative is necessarily incomplete: as he says in justifying to himself the planned ending to *The Portrait of a Lady*, 'the whole of anything is never told'.³ Nevertheless, he urges prospective novelists in his essay 'The Art of Fiction' to 'be complete [...] and pursue the prize' (*AF*, p.23); while the prize of completion may be (and usually is) unattainable, making the attempt to achieve completeness is, for James, a self-justifying activity. To accept his treatment of endings and completeness as an enterprise which is self-contradictory but still worthwhile, is to productively embrace the multiplicity of James, refusing closure on his career or his image as an author.

While wanting to be inclusive and get a broad sense of James's career, there are inevitably limits. The first is that my discussion here excludes (except in terms of contextual reference) James's short stories and tales, focusing only on the novels. To some extent, and for obvious reasons, James's short works did not contribute significantly to (though they were not entirely absent from) James's anxieties about completion. Neither are they usually the spaces in which he chooses to develop and examine fully the difficulties of becoming 'complete' as an individual, through others' society, or through narrative, as he is able to do in full-length novels. Though many of his stories, especially those written in the 1890s, explore the question of writers' searches for completeness, those tales have a distinct character of their own which deserves, and has received, special study. The role of James's shorter productions, both fictional and non-fictional, plays a significant part in my examination of his concept of the complete author

³ *Notebooks*, p.15.

and the 'finished' and 'finishable' text. Nevertheless, discussion of the shorter fictions themselves is unfortunately not within my scope here.

Secondly, James was a prolific writer; so much so that all of his novels cannot be satisfactorily surveyed in the space available to me, though all of them have some interest in relation to my theme. I have chosen to examine, in the final two chapters of the thesis, a selection of his novels in relation to issues of endings and completeness, which give a sense of how those issues impact on his collected body of work. While 'the whole of anything is never told', then, my work here attempts to establish, though a discussion of parts, a sense of James's writing as a necessarily incomplete whole.

Chapter One

'Squeezing the muse tight': James's struggle to finish fictions

The most practical consequence of James's attitude towards endings and completeness is that he found it extremely difficult to finish his fictions – both in terms of determining how they should conclude, and in the most literal sense of actually sitting at his desk and being able to complete a piece of writing. This opening chapter, therefore, documents that difficulty. It functions as an important prelude to the rest of my thesis and particularly the application of my argument to James's fictional texts themselves, for two main reasons. Firstly, by presenting the evidence of James's difficulty in ending his fictions, examining his work practices and the circumstances of production surrounding his writing, a pattern of behaviour and effect can be traced through his career. The most consistent element of this pattern, and one which is central to the thesis, is that for James, the idea of a finished fiction was something to be aspired to, and yet also feared and mistrusted. Secondly, before investigating instances of this problem in the novels themselves, I wish to examine James's articulation of and presentation of this problem in both public and private textual spaces. His frequent references to the subject occur in several contexts: in his notebooks (conceived as a private resource, though they are now in the public domain), in his Prefaces to the New York Edition of his work (unquestionably public statements of intent), and in his letters to family, friends and peers. The statements in his letters negotiate the border between public and private; they have emerged from privacy in being part of a dialogue, yet are directed to an individual or small group rather than a public audience. My task here is to examine James's articulation of his concern with 'finishing' in these diverse forms, in order to establish what he thought, said and wrote about it in those contexts; to examine the contradictions between

and within these representations; and to explore the implications of this for the way James's fictions are constructed.

James's tendency towards narrative attenuation becomes notorious from a very early point in his career. In his letter of 30 March 1877 to William Dean Howells, justifying the ending of his most recent novel, *The American*, he assures his friend that all the things Howells found objectionable about *The American* will be duly absent from his next work, *The Europeans*:

You shall have the brightest possible sun-spot for your four-number tale of 1878. It shall fairly put your readers' eyes out. The idea of doing what you propose much pleases me; and I agree to squeeze my buxom muse, as you happily call her, into a hundred of your pages. I will lace her so tight that she shall have the neatest little figure in the world.¹

Acting as an editor rather than a friend, Howells declared his disappointment with *The American* on two grounds - its running to beyond the expected length, and its lack of a 'cheerful ending' - which, for publishers, were to become common grounds for finding fault with James's novels. James's response is to declare his willingness to comply with the demands of the market by providing a 'joyous little romance'. The tone of the passage suggests that this is done with gritted teeth; the idea of the radiance of James's new tale being able to 'put your readers' eyes out', seems more likely to betray a suppressed resentment of those readers than a unqualified desire to please them, suggesting that James's compositions will be too bright for the common reader. The announced intention to 'lace' the composition 'tightly' sounds similarly aggressive and potentially unpleasant, implying artificial compression for the sake of external form. James's bitterness towards an audience that will not tolerate him taking up so much of their reading time with such ultimately unsatisfactory narratives is apparent behind the forced brightness of this response to his editor. The image of the 'buxom muse', apparently originated by Howells, is the one element of the transaction

¹ *Letters*, vol. II, p.105.

which James seems to take up with genuine enthusiasm. His fondness for this image shows how he envisages the constant struggle to keep his finished works from being massively oversized; James feels himself to be wrestling, like Jacob and the angel, with an entity which has a life and will of its own. Thus, his original compositional plan for any of his fictions is inevitably disrupted in the writing process; many of his novels are begun as short stories or novellas, but quickly grow to the stage where they have to be considered as full-sized novels. James wrote in his preface to *The Awkward Age*, referring to the group of fictions he produced in the late 1890s, that: 'they were projected as small things, yet had finally to be provided for as comparative monsters'.² This could describe almost any of his fictions.

James's dismay at the 'comparative monstrosity' which overcomes his fictions appears frequently in his letters, in the form of rueful admissions that he cannot adhere to his more concise intentions, and half-serious resolutions to squeeze the muse more tightly next time. However, the recurrence of such statements in his correspondence indicate both how much the problem occupied him, and how the struggle with it characterised everything he wrote, in spite of his intention to overcome it. He appears to be both sincerely and constantly astonished at the length to which his literary creations grow. In a letter to Frederick Macmillan, concerning the forthcoming publication of the collection *Partial Portraits*, he proceeds in a businesslike manner before exclaiming, in a postscript, 'I have left out six or seven of the original papers - and still the volume makes 408 pages!'³ He writes to Frederick Edward Norris, in 1896, that 'I will, I think, send you the little magazine tale over which (I mean over whose number of words - infinite and awful) I struggled so, in September and October last, under your pitying eye and with your sane and helpful advice'.⁴ One gets the impression that James's friends, well aware of his compositional foibles, bore with them

² Preface to *The Awkward Age*, in Blackmur, p.98.

³ Letter to Frederick Macmillan, 21 March 1888, in *Letters*, vol. III, p.227.

⁴ Letter to William Edward Norris, 4 February 1896, in *Letters*, vol. IV, p.28.

patiently in the knowledge that they would never be vanquished. James's sense of oppression fluctuates: while on some occasions he jokes almost resignedly about his difficulty with conclusions, on others he seems to feel like a literary Frankenstein whose creatures have wrested control of the situation from him. Writing to H.G. Wells, during the serial publication of *The Awkward Age*, he apologises that he has not been able to visit Wells, who lived nearby, for some time:

The shortening days and the deepening mud have been at the bottom of this affair. I never get out of the house till 3 o'clock, when night is quickly at one's heels. I would have taken a regular day - I mean started in the A.M. - but have been so ridden, myself, by the black care of an unfinished and *running* (galloping, leaping and bounding) serial that parting with a day has been like parting with a pound of flesh.⁵

James seems to have felt, during the process of writing for serialisation and therefore pushing himself to keep up the pace, that his fictions had become the master of him, rather than vice versa. Having finished a work, he could not only vow to be more concise next time, but also regard the formerly tyrannical creature with a more benign eye, believing that the struggle has been worthwhile, as he asserts in this letter to his agent, James B. Pinker:

I send you at last, today, the complete Ms of *The Sacred Fount* - as to the interminable delay of which I won't further expatiate. The reasons for this have been all of the best, and in the interest of the work itself - intrinsically speaking. It makes exactly 77,794 words - say, more roughly, about *seventy-eight* thousand. It won't do for a serialisation - that is impossible, and it has the marks, I daresay, of a thing planned as a very short story, and growing on my hands, to a so much longer thing, by a force of its own - but a force controlled and directed, I believe, or hope, happily enough.⁶

James is clearly aware that 'the interest of the work itself', may not be one sympathised with by Pinker, or anyone involved in the mechanics of publication. Furthermore, he reveals his anxiety that these fiction which extend their planned length bear the stigma of their intended brevity. His near-obsessive concern with the exact numerical length of his work - even his rounded-up figure is a relatively precise one - is perhaps an unconscious attempt to

⁵ Letter to H.G. Wells, 9 December 1898, in *Letters*, vol. IV, pp.85-6.

⁶ Letter to James B. Pinker, 25 July 1900, in *Letters*, vol. IV, p.154.

compensate for the less scientific, excessive growth of the novel. While not master of his narrative, he is at least master of its dimensions.

The composition of James's 1890 novel *The Tragic Muse* generates a sequence of comments in letters that exemplify his frustration. He first mentions it in a letter to Grace Norton, writing: 'I am just beginning a novel which will be about half as long (thank God!) as the *Princess* [...] it will be called (probably) *The Tragic Muse*'.⁷ Writing to Robert Louis Stevenson, he states:

I have just begun a novel which is to run through the *Atlantic* from January 1st and which I aspire to finish by the end of this year. In reality I suppose I shall not be fully delivered of it before the middle of next. After that, with God's help, I propose, for a longish period, to do nothing but short lengths.⁸

In another letter to Stevenson in 1891, a year after the publication of *The Tragic Muse*, he declares, 'I mean never to write another novel; I mean I have solemnly dedicated myself to a masterly brevity. I have come back to it as to an early love'.⁹ This provides a telling insight into James's ideas of what he, as a novelist, should be: brevity is something 'masterly', and therefore something to which he aspires on the broad grounds of professionalism, wanting as he does to be considered a 'master' of his literary craft. This goes some way, I would argue, towards explaining why James insists so frequently on his intention to 'squeeze the muse tight', and just as frequently fails to do so. The tension is parallel to that between a general governing principle and an individual 'case' which does not fit that principle, so often explored in his fictions. Literary masters would not be expected to lose control of their creations. However, the individual circumstances of Isabel Archer, Roderick Hudson, Nanda Brookenham, Lambert Strether and company, often seem to their author to demand, and deserve, a fuller treatment than the cool and detached necessities of magazine serialisation and literary editors will admit. This tension between an external image of himself as the

⁷ Letter to Grace Norton, 23 July 1887, in *Letters*, vol. III, p.198.

⁸ Letter to Robert Louis Stevenson, 31 July 1888, in *Letters*, vol. III, p.240.

literary master capable of brevity and conciseness, and the internal awareness that his literary works invite more extensive treatments, maintains James's position as an author who has given in once again to temptation, but has firmly resolved to tame this impulse from now on. This equilibrium between the two continues, virtually undisturbed, throughout his writing career. Furthermore, his declaration to Stevenson that 'I have come back to it as to an early love', is surely a piece of self-deception, since any early brevity of James's can only be relative. While he began his career as a short-story writer, his habit of expanding on the planned length of any tale dates at least from the composition of *Roderick Hudson*, which James himself considered to be his first real novel. This suggests that, along with (or perhaps as part of) the disparity between what a true novelist should be and what, in practice, he produces, James's letters display a split between his vision of the kind of writer he aspires to be, and the less concise and controlled writer he believes himself to have lapsed into being during the writing of his latest fiction. A comparison could be made with an anorexic who, though extremely thin, looks in the mirror and sees a fat person.

James's wry comments on his inability to achieve 'masterly brevity' are, in his letters, made privately to friends and family members. The Prefaces to the New York Edition of his works acted as a forum for him to acknowledge this trait publicly and to present, in effect, a defence of it. His remarks in this context often apply both to the individual case of the novel he is discussing, and also to his method of fiction in general. The statement in his preface to *Roderick Hudson* on the subject of endings is one of his most well-known:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.¹⁰

This reveals an important aspect of the nature of James's fictions - his wish to demonstrate that the problems of life depicted continue beyond the physical limits of the text. It is also

⁹ Letter to Robert Louis Stevenson, 30 October 1891, in *Letters*, vol. III, p.360.

reminiscent of the narratorial comments made by George Eliot that 'Man can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning' in *Daniel Deronda*¹¹, and the more celebrated opening of the Epilogue to *Middlemarch* which states that 'Every limit is at once an ending and a beginning'.¹² However, James's account of the 'exquisite problem of the artist' is characteristic - not least in his view of it as 'exquisite' - of his particular approach to writing as well as describing one of its general conditions. The image of composition as 'geometry' typifies James's interest in symmetry and balance, which itself will be explored more fully later in the thesis. However, the image of a circle is, perhaps, most revealing; a more obvious, and definite, metaphor would have been 'to draw the line'. A line marking the end of something would represent sharply defined closure, whereas a circle suggests limitation and containment, but defies the idea of a conclusive end - after all, a circle has no end, but is continuous and eternal. James's image of the 'circle' of a fiction, then, foreshadows the formal and thematic concerns which were to characterise his writing career, expressing his interest in completeness and symmetry, and his belief in the falseness of straightforward, unproblematic closure of fiction.

Discussions of the nature of art itself co-exist, however, with references to the more prosaic aspects of literary production, in James's prefaces to the New York edition of his works. He confides, regarding *Roderick Hudson*, that 'the book was not finished when it had to begin appearing in monthly fragments', an image suggestive of shattering the novel's unity in the process of serialisation.¹³ James also confesses his ambivalence towards winding up the communion with the atmosphere of Rome that was facilitated by writing the novel:

¹⁰ Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, in Blackmur, p.5.

¹¹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) p.35

¹² George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1872 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p.890. Eliot's influence on James is commonly acknowledged, and her final two novels the ones to which James is most indebted.

¹³ From Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, in Blackmur, p.6

As having to leave it [Italy] persisted as an inward ache, so there was soreness in contriving, after a fashion, to hang about it and in prolonging, from month to month, the illusion of the golden air.¹⁴

The conflict between James's professional duty to finish his novel in good time, and the double-edged enjoyment and regret at dwelling on his memories of Rome's 'golden air', is one which is to recur in later fictions; James's pleasure in these vicarious experiences of Europe is a powerful disincentive to completing the writings which facilitate this experience. His preface to *The American* describes how, having written much of the novel in Paris, it seemed that he would not have finished his work before he had to leave:

I was to pass over to London [...] to let a loose end dangle over into alien air would so fix upon the whole, I strenuously felt, the dishonour of piecemeal composition. Therefore I strove to finish...¹⁵

James's sense of an appropriate ending for *The American* demands that it should be finished on the scene, inspired throughout by its Paris background. His practice does not seem to require that all novels are written in the location of their setting; rather that having begun the narrative in Paris, it is more likely to emerge as a uniform, coherent whole if he sees the project through before moving to the very different atmosphere of London. Along with his comments on *Roderick Hudson*, these remarks figure composition as a highly delicate process, and the unity of the novels as fragile. However, James is reticent on the matter of whether he, in fact, succeeded in 'striving to finish':

I shall not tell whether I did there bring my book to a close - and indeed I shrink, for myself, from putting the question to the test of memory. I follow it so far, the old urgent ingenious business, and then I lose sight of it: from which I infer - all exact recovery of the matter failing - that I did not in the end drag over the Channel a lengthening chain; which would have been detestable.¹⁶

James's claim to have 'lost sight' of whether he actually finished the novel in Paris sounds like a deliberate clouding of his memories, which in other respects are so vivid and detailed.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp.6-7.

¹⁵ Preface to *The American*, in Blackmur, p.28.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.28.

James's inference that he 'did not in the end drag over the Channel a lengthening chain' itself raises that possibility - it would hardly be untypical of him to find that he could not complete work at the time originally planned - and suggests that this is how he prefers to remember the process. His blissful recollections of Paris, describing how 'through casements open to the last mildness of the year, a belated Saint Martin's summer, the tale was taken up afresh by the charming light click and clatter, that sound [...] of Paris' would only be marred by admitting the possibility that even such pleasing surroundings could not bring him to complete his book.¹⁷ This theory is supported by the recurrence of the same image in another preface, relating to the story 'A Passionate Pilgrim':

A part of that adventure had been the never-to-be-forgotten thrill of a first sight of Italy, from late in the summer of 1869 on; so that a return to America at the beginning of the following year was to drag with it, as a lengthening chain, the torment of losses and regrets.¹⁸

Since the image of 'dragging a lengthening chain' applies here to the composition of 'A Passionate Pilgrim', it seems suggestive that James formulates his memory of the final period of *The American's* composition in the same terms. Both fictions were removed from the scene of their inspiration, as unfinished products awaiting completion.

The preface just quoted is, however, an exception in that James's prefaces to volumes of his short tales are relatively free of anxiety about the completion of those works. When discussing tales such as 'A Passionate Pilgrim', 'Lady Barberina', 'The Death of the Lion', or 'The Lesson of the Master', and whether the tales are early or late compositions, James is generally able to identify the 'germ' of the story, or if not, is untroubled about its origin, stating serenely that it must have derived from the history of his social encounters.

Correspondingly, statements about how difficult the tales were to finish, of the kind made

¹⁷ Ibid, p.28.

¹⁸ Preface to *The Reverberator* and others, in Blackmur, p.195.

about *The American*, are mostly absent, with the exception of this remark about the composition of 'The Middle Years':

[I recall] the number of times I had to do it over to make sure of it. To get it right was to squeeze my subject into the five or six thousand words I had been invited to make it consist of – it consists, in fact, should the curious care to know, of some 5550 – [...] I well remember the whole process and act (which, to the exclusion of everything else, dragged itself out for a month) one of the most expensive of its sort in which I had ever engaged.¹⁹

A month could be considered a long time to spend writing one short story. However, the month was spent not just writing 'The Middle Years', but *finishing* it. James describes the process as being dominated by revision, by 'making sure of it' in order to make the story as complete as possible within the prescribed space. The anxiety James's fictions cause him derives not so much from the prospect of writing them as from the interdependent need to finish them, to present them to editors and publishers as complete, finished products – a concept James found extremely problematic, and which is shown here to be his main difficulty in the writing of 'The Middle Years'. James's complaint is directed not so much against the difficulties presented by the story itself, but at his more usual external target, the limits imposed by magazine editors. This is another instance, too, of James's concern to know the precise length of his writings, as with his exact word-count of *The Sacred Fount*. As in that instance, James wishes belatedly to demonstrate his control over the narrative by way of knowing its exact dimensions. His characterisation of the process of writing 'The Middle Years' as 'one of the most expensive of its sort', is consonant with his frequent use of financial and economic metaphors in his fictions.

The prefaces to James's full-length fictions are dominated by explorations of how a novel should be proportioned, on what it should be centred, and how it can be made 'complete'; this interest in the completeness of the novel is to be discussed, in context, in the following chapter. Any comments about the difficulty of finishing a fiction, though present,

are submerged within a more oratorical and stylised discourse about the art of fiction, and so any confession by James of his own shortcomings is likely to be less candid and specific than the remarks made in his letters and notebooks. Nevertheless, as in the preface to *The American*, the prefaces provide guarded insights into James's attempts at finishing fictions. For example, in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, a comment on the need for economy seems to be echoing personal experience:

There are certainly always plenty of grounds for keeping down the complexities of a picture. A picture it still has to be, however, and by that condition has to deal effectually with its subject, so that the simple device of more and more keeping down may well not see us to our end or even to our middle.²⁰

Though its tone is that of a universally applicable observation, this is strongly reminiscent of James's repeated private articulations of his fear that a planned narrative is too 'thin', and will not prove substantial enough to justify a novel-length fiction. In any case, the fact that this statement is located in a preface to a specific novel (rather than in a general essay like 'The Art of Fiction') means that, in spite of the status of the New York Prefaces as treatises on Fiction, they are simultaneously commentaries on James's own fiction and on a particular fiction among that canon. James's wistful reference to the disadvantages of his cherished method of 'keeping down' hints that he has had his fingers burnt by experimentation with this particular device. Indeed, the continual – and slightly resentful – assertions of the need to keep things simple, to use the simplest possible terms, and to concentrate the narrative, suggests that James tried too forcefully and, with hindsight, unsuccessfully, to construct a concentrated *Princess Casamassima*, simplified for audience approval. Moreover, though, James's comment also implies that the 'end' he had envisioned for the novel – in the sense, often discussed in the Prefaces, of its goal and vision – was not achieved, as he hoped it would be, by 'keeping down'; as a method it did not necessarily produce the perfection he anticipated.

¹⁹ Preface to 'The Author of Beltraffio' and others, in Blackmur, pp.232-33.

²⁰ Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, in Blackmur, p.65.

The difficulty not simply of managing a long novel, but of managing it in terms of its serialised segments, is acknowledged in the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, the novel which became a turning point for James in this and other respects. James explicitly refers to the practical problem of completing the narrative:

I profess a certain vagueness of remembrance in respect to the origin and growth of *The Tragic Muse*, which appeared in 'The Atlantic Monthly' again, beginning January 1889 and running on, inordinately, several months beyond its proper twelve.²¹

The Tragic Muse is considered to be, in both commercial and artistic terms, one of James's least successful works; it is perhaps not surprising, then, that in James's preface to the novel he reveals it to have been marked with practically all the difficulties of composition that dogged his work.²² Not only does he profess vagueness as to his inspiration for the subject, he admits that he could not contain the serial within the agreed numbers of the magazine.

Moreover, as with *The American*, James was forced to finish his novel in a hurry, and in a condition of displacement:

The production of the thing, which took a good many months, lives for me again all contemporaneously in that full projection, upon my very table, of the good fog-filtered Kensington mornings; which had a way indeed of seeing the sunset in and which at the very last are merged to memory in a different and a sharper pressure, that of an hotel bedroom in Paris during the autumn of 1889, with the Exposition du Centenaire about to end – and my long story, through the usual difficulties, as well.²³

It is clear that James would have much preferred to complete his narrative in Kensington, where he seems to have felt confident that he was creating a 'full projection' of the work in hand. This is, after *Roderick Hudson* and *the American*, the third instance on which James has remarked, in the prefaces, of his having finished a novel in a location displaced from the

²¹Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in Blackmur, p.79.

²²Marcia Jacobson's *Henry James and the Mass Market* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1983) among others, discusses the commercial failure of *The Tragic Muse*. She summarises critical views of the novel as 'an apologia with special relevance to the impending changes in James's career' (p.62). Contemporary reviews were, as always, mixed, but the 1995 (London: Penguin) edition of the novel edited by Philip Horne claims to be the first fully annotated edition; Horne also documents the novel's poor financial performance (p.xii). This recent revision of established critical neglect is attested by *The Tragic Muse* being the only major James novel which does not have an individual entry in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature in English*, ed. Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) joining in this category minor productions such as *Watch and Ward*, *Confidence* and *The Reveberator*.

associations of the main body of the narrative. The repetition of this problem in the production of *The Tragic Muse* shows, rather than the greater control that might be expected of a now experienced writer, the increased anxiety that surrounded the composition of this particular novel:

Rereading the last chapters of *The Tragic Muse* I catch again the very odour of Paris, which comes up in the rich rumble of the Rue de la Paix – with which my room itself, for that matter, seems impregnated – and which hangs for reminiscence about the embarrassed effort to ‘finish’, not ignobly, within my already exceeded limits; an effort prolonged each day to those late afternoon hours during which the tone of the terrible city seemed to deepen about one to an effect strangely composed at once of the auspicious and the fatal.²⁴

James is more candid here than he was prepared to be about his efforts to finish *The American*. Although *The Tragic Muse* was completed in an ‘embarrassed effort to finish’, with James self-conscious that it had already overrun its prescribed space, in the Preface he goes some way towards making recompense for his slackness with this painful account of his work. The intense pressure James felt to finish the narrative, which led to this extension of his working day to the ‘late afternoon’, while physically separating him from Paris, also intensified his awareness of his location, to the point of paranoia.²⁵ Paris becomes ‘the terrible city’, portrayed as a Gothic figure both alluring and menacing, which reflects his mingled aversion to and desire for completion. The ‘finishing’ experience is characterised by elements of the uncanny, in the combination of ‘the auspicious and the fatal’, and also the sublime, in James’s simultaneous terror and awe of the situation.

However, *The Tragic Muse* can be seen, especially in the content of its Preface, to mark a turning point in James’s career. In one sense it represents the nadir of James’s efforts

²³ Preface to *the Tragic Muse*, in Blackmur, p.85.

²⁴ Ibid, p.87.

²⁵ James’s reaction to arriving in a city where, for whatever reason, he feels ill at ease, often leads to his personification of it as this kind of ambiguous figure with the potential to attract him, but also the power to threaten and crush him. Perhaps the best example is his account in ‘London’, the first sketch in *Essays in London* (1883) and in *English Hours* (1905) of how, shortly after his arrival, London became a ‘dreadful, delightful city’ to him, the slums and commercial areas evoking a terrified fascination and revulsion in him, before he entered

to produce the perfect novel; not only was it judged to be a critical disappointment, but its sales were poor, and by James's own account it seems to have caused him more trouble to compose and complete than any fiction he had produced to date.²⁶ Yet James's boldness in focusing, in his preface, on these difficulties, suggests that he is by then able to assert, almost defiantly, the subsequent value of the experiences. In short, the intense anxiety suffered by James over the composition of *The Tragic Muse* produced a kind of baptism of fire, which motivated him to re-vision his problems with ending fictions as more than merely a professional deficiency. The result can be seen in the preface's concern with the 'unequal halves' of James's novels, with the idea of a novel's 'centre' and the displacement of that centre, and with the weight carried by the final part of any narrative. The recollection of James's experiences at his desk in the late Paris afternoons demonstrates, I would argue, that his increased difficulty with finishing - and the way it influenced his daily life, altering the structure of his working day, and colouring his whole perception of Paris - became something of which he was conscious in a critical sense, as an authoritative commentator, rather than a harassed author. This is not to say that James's difficulty with endings was instantly translated, with the publication of *The Tragic Muse*, from a personal weakness to an innovative challenge of fictional conventions. Nor did it alleviate his practical difficulty in physically completing and limiting the length of his texts; excerpts quoted throughout this chapter show that this difficulty was a consistent presence until the end of James's career. Whatever his feelings towards any fiction once it was complete, during their production he always experienced the usual anxieties about them. What I wish to argue is that in the prefaces, with the benefit of hindsight, and through taking on a critical role with respect to his

into a more intimate and temperate relationship with his new home. The importance of the sublime, especially in James's later fiction, will be discussed in chapter six.

²⁶ Michael Anesko, *Friction with the Market: Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; hereafter referred to as Anesko) documents the sales and profits from James's novels, of which *The Tragic Muse* is the third in a run of bad performances, succeeding *The Bostonians* and *The*

own work, James displays a more tolerant, relaxed, and critically inquisitive (as opposed to merely censorious) awareness of these elements of his writing. While this awareness manifests itself most confidently in the prefaces, its beginnings and development can be traced through the evolution of James's professional practices as documented in his letters and notebooks.

Like the notorious aftermath of *Guy Domville's* failure in the theatre, this particularly stressful composition accelerated a learning curve in James's understanding of his own work. As Paris became both fearsome and fascinating to James, he became aware of this response as enacting his ambivalent feelings towards completion – projecting them onto the environment by the sheer intensity of the need to finish his novel. The preface to *The Tragic Muse* is dominated by James's attempt to address the way in which his deferred completion of the text distorts its whole shape. Moreover, he embarks on a critical recognition of deferral, and of completion as a desirable but difficult goal, as an important element of his work. This is enlarged upon in both the prefaces to his later fictions and the fictions themselves, which are explicitly concerned with ideas of shape, form, centre, and symmetry, to an almost obsessive degree. These concepts will be explored further in the next chapter, which examines James's theory of the novel and completeness in context; the issue here is that James benefited from the trauma of completing *The Tragic Muse* in realising the importance of these difficulties for his writing. Like someone with a loose tooth who cannot stop themselves probing it, James pursued a conscious and professional interest in the problem which daunted and fascinated him.

The fictions James wrote after *The Tragic Muse* continue to be marked by problems of completion, yet James seems to become progressively more at ease with his inherent difficulties with endings. In his preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, for instance, James is able

to serenely acknowledge the novel's faults, while also asserting that, even though prey to the usual slippages, its structure is an artistic success:

The Wings of the Dove happens to offer perhaps the most striking example I can cite (though with public penance for it already performed) of my regular failure to keep the appointed halves of my whole equal. Here the makeshift middle – for which the best I can say is that it's always rueful and never impudent – reigns with even more than its customary contrition, though passing itself off perhaps too with more than its usual craft.²⁷

In spite of asserting that the faults of his narrative are 'always rueful and never impudent', a certain level of impudence rivals the professed contrition and ruefulness in this statement. James's breezy apology for his 'regular failure' is tempered with an urbanely defiant pride in passing off these faults with 'more than [its] usual craft; in asserting the value and meaning of what, in this novel, is left out, he effectively repackages his vices as virtues. James's confidence in this ability is proclaimed throughout the Preface. Rather than apologising for the misplacement of the narrative centre, as he does with *The Tragic Muse*, he describes how *Wings* is structured around 'successive centres [...] parts in the shade as true as parts in the sun'.²⁸ This willingness to devolve from the governing concept of a single fixed centre – which, since it is inevitably 'misplaced', condemns the narrative to failure on its own terms – is the basis of James's faith in his own success with the novel:

The thing has doubtless, as a whole, the advantage that each piece is true to its pattern, and that while it pretends to make no simple statement it yet never lets go its scheme of clearness. Applications of this scheme are continuous and exemplary enough, though I scarce leave myself room to glance at them.²⁹

James's assertion that he does not have space to provide too many examples of his success is disingenuous; he is only a little over halfway through the preface at this point. The significance of his statement, therefore, is not so much that it can be proved, but that James is confident enough to make it, and in these terms. The novel 'as a whole' (a phrase James uses

the novel, for which they paid £250, James owed them £170.

²⁷ Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, in Blackmur, p.302.

²⁸ Ibid, p.296.

²⁹ Ibid, p.299.

frequently and in almost every form of writing, from colloquial letters to fictions and reviews) is supported by the strength of its individual elements rather than by the brilliance of a single centre; though the novel is conceived as Milly Theale's, she does not have to bear its weight throughout, as Isabel Archer does in *Portrait*. James's justification of his scheme is distinctly less defensive than in other discussions of his own work. The phrase which demonstrates this most aptly is 'exemplary enough', itself an oxymoron. For James to judge his novel as being 'exemplary enough' marks a change in his attitude towards the construction of his fictions, away from the obsessive pursuit of brevity as the key to a perfect narrative, and directed instead towards an acceptance of a 'finished' narrative as being something more like *The Wings of the Dove*, which is, by necessity, flawed and incomplete. The idea of the exemplary, complete narrative emerges as a narrative which is exemplary *enough*; one which achieves completion in accepting its inherent incompleteness.

When faced with the presence of his own *bête noire* in the work of other writers, James was not always so forgiving as might have been expected. His study of Hawthorne for the Macmillan English Men of Letters series included criticism on these grounds:

He cannot have been in any very high degree ambitious; he was not an abundant producer, and there was manifestly a strain of generous indolence in his composition [...] He had waited till he was lapsing from middle-life to strike his first noticeable blow [with *The Scarlet Letter*]; and during the last ten years of his career he put forth but two complete works, and the fragment of a third.³⁰

This remark seems a little hypocritical - while James himself was far more prolific and ambitious than Hawthorne, he had his own difficulties with both composition and striking the successful 'blow'. It is also ironic, in the light of the last years of James's career, in which he began two novels, *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past*, which were abandoned and remained unfinished at his death, and in which his level of production decreased considerably. As Michael Anesko remarks, however, James's patronising attitude towards

Hawthorne seems to be engendered by a recognition of many similarities between them, and a fear on James's part of falling into the same trap. Hawthorne's uncertainty about his own abilities and difficulty in establishing a professional role for himself as an author – he continued to be financially and creatively dependent on his publisher without any formal agreement of terms, which after his death left his family severely impoverished – were traits James was particularly anxious to avoid. There is a further irony, then, in the fact that not only did the last phase of James's career emulate the pattern he himself had criticised in Hawthorne many years earlier, but that the circumstances of the production of James's *Hawthorne* exhibited many of the faults for which James berated Hawthorne in that same text. Having reluctantly signed a contract to write the book in January 1879, he consciously put off beginning it until the end of the summer, and then, as Michael Anesko observes, continued to evade finishing it:

Want of money, however, was hardly James's chief motive in writing the book. If it had been, he would have completed the manuscript promptly. Instead, James kept putting it off. Other publishing projects intervened, but he clearly was not eager to pursue the biography. In August James mentioned to his sister that he was writing his long-delayed *Hawthorne* 'slowly and laboriously, for I don't interest myself in the task', though within a month he would claim (to his publisher) that the book was all the better for his having been long about it.³¹

Though Anesko is correct in his judgement that James's motive for writing *Hawthorne* was not primarily money, his assertion that it would have been finished more quickly if this was the case seems uncharacteristically short-sighted. Rather, James often used the excuse of financial need for taking on projects which had more complex motivations. He could genuinely have turned to shorter-term projects, such as an article or story for periodical publication, as a quick and ready source of income (as Anesko himself argues elsewhere), since the income he could expect from *Hawthorne*, though larger, would take significantly

³⁰ Henry James, *Hawthorne*, 1879, originally published in Macmillan's English Men of Letters series (reprinted London: Macmillan, 1967), p.49.

³¹ Anesko, p.64.

longer to be realised. Nevertheless, James is certainly being specious to a certain degree in his declared attitude to *Hawthorne*. His apparent lack of interest in the work is hardly credible; James experienced these same difficulties, and made the same complaints, when occupied with the work that interested and stimulated him the most. In short, most of James's book-length works were written 'slowly and laboriously'; *Hawthorne* is not an exception but an example of the general rule that James found it difficult to conclude and complete his works, a task which was naturally more difficult with regard to a relatively long and complex work, such as a novel or sustained critical text, than it would be in the case of – for instance – a review for a periodical.

Another of James's objections to writing *Hawthorne* was that he had too little and inadequate material to work with; having initially rejected Macmillan's offer, he wrote to his father:

I have declined, on acct. of insufficient material for a Life. One can't write a volume about H[awthorne]. But the proposal will please you and attest my growing fame.³²

This again seems disputable, given the number of times James commented, in letters or notebooks, that the germ of an idea he was working on was perhaps 'too thin', but that he was attempting to make a narrative out of it anyway (and how often, in those cases, the narrative in question ultimately grew to be much longer than James's original projection). The potential meagreness of material is not necessarily (in fact, rarely) something which dissuades him from pursuing a particular idea. However, the letter presents a certain, initial concept of what the book would be, which James eventually rethinks. Here he speaks of it as a 'Life', yet it is intended to combine the qualities of a biography with a critical appreciation of Hawthorne's art. If James did not accept the project solely for financial reasons, then its attraction must have been the potential for constructing something more ambitious than a 'Life', and even more so than a critical work. By way of assessing Hawthorne, James saw it as an opportunity

to assess the culture of American letters. This aspect of the work was ultimately the least well received; James's well-known remarks on the shortcomings of American culture became notorious. Yet it seems clear that James's change of heart about taking on the book must have proceeded from a change in his own view of the book's scope and the opportunity it offered for him to enhance his own authority as a cultural spokesman and man of letters. He avoided undertaking another full-length author study; noticeably his biography of William Wetmore Story (another project he accepted reluctantly, under pressure from the Story family which would have made a refusal awkward) was composed on similar lines to *Hawthorne*, accompanied by complaints about the limited material, and final dissatisfaction with the 'completed' text. As in the case of novels such as *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Tragic Muse*, James's ambition to produce a major work produced, in turn, a sustained and magnified dose of his endemic anxiety over how to complete a piece of writing.

In a letter to Rudyard Kipling, James concludes with a description of his painful progress on *The Wings of the Dove*, which he was currently writing:

Till Christmas I shall be occupied grinding my teeth and breaking my heart over the finish of a book promised for January 1st, and on which my already oft-perjured life depends. Please take this ugly scrawl, meanwhile and plead with your wife to take it, as my issue from the longest tunnel in the world.³³

James's gloominess may have been exacerbated by his response to the success of Kipling's novel *Kim*, which he discusses earlier in the letter. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that even at this advanced stage of his career – a stage where he was able to respond enthusiastically to new developments in fiction and to introduce considerable innovations into his own work – the pattern exhibited in the composition of his early works prevailed. The images describing his occupation with *Wings* are passionate and, in 'grinding his teeth', almost diabolical.

³² Letter to Henry James, Senior, 18 October 1878 (held in the James Papers, Harvard), quoted in Anesko, p.63.

³³ Letter to Rudyard Kipling, 30 October 1901, in *Letters*, vol. IV, p.210.

Characteristically, too, the novel is figured both as James's last chance – in the hyperbole of 'on which my already oft-perjured life depends' - and as his big chance, the potential 'something really *great!*' which James habitually imagines to be just around the corner. The burden of finishing is both alleviated and worsened by the opportunity to produce the work that would 'finish' and crown his career.³⁴

The notebooks in which James recorded his creative ideas and plans are perhaps the most revealing with regard to his anxiety over 'finishing' work, probably because they were constructed as entirely private documents, in which he felt secure about articulating his sense of his own misadventures and inadequacies.³⁵ The most noticeable aspect of them – even to a reader not concerned, unlike myself, with his endings – is the astonishing regularity and frequency with which James insists that his fictions will be, and need to be, short. In almost every entry he makes, he states that the idea he has had must become the shortest possible narrative. The following represents the most typical opening for a notebook entry: 'One might write a tale (very short) about ...'³⁶ James often goes further, either setting himself a limited number of words in which to conclude his narrative, or sternly admonishing himself that the fiction in question must be strictly controlled, small and compact - words he frequently uses as terms of the highest praise. It appears (perhaps ironically to anyone familiar with James's prose) that verbosity is the worst possible fault in a narrative; it is certainly the one he seems to fear the most.

³⁴ A tangential point is that since the text had been promised for January 1st, one wonders whether James's habitual anxiety over finishing a novel was exacerbated by its conclusion coinciding with another psychological border, the end of the year. (I can imagine that James would have been profoundly affected by recent anticipation of the end of the millennium.) The multiplied sense of imminent conclusions and the need to respond to them may have heightened his usual reaction to this problem.

³⁵ These documents have now been brought into the public domain through being published as *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. and introd. Leon Edel and Lyall Powers (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), hereafter referred to as *Notebooks*. However, as a reader of this text there is a distinct sense of penetrating (I use the image deliberately) a private sanctum – something encouraged, to my mind, by Edel's narrative of how he discovered the notebooks, in an old chest in the basement of Harvard's Widener Library in 1937: 'Now I knew the sensations of the tomb-openers and the diggers in old cities' (*Notebooks*, p.x).

³⁶ Entry on 'The Liar' (1888), in *Notebooks*, p.28.

James's notebooks periodically defend this need for brevity, on various grounds. One of the reasons he often uses in more public musings – the demands of the market and other commercial and financial considerations – is invoked less frequently in the private notebooks, but is still present. In this entry from 1884, he considers the potential gain of reworking an earlier success in a shorter form:

I don't see why I shouldn't do the 'self-made girl', whom I noted here last winter, in a way to make her a rival to D[aisy] M[iller]. I must put her into action, which I am afraid will be difficult in the small compass (16 magazine pages which I now contemplate). But I don't see why I shouldn't make the thing as concise as *Four Meetings*. The concision of *Four Meetings*, with the success of *Daisy M.*, that is what I must aim at! But I must first invent the action!³⁷

James's primary hope for this fiction is clearly that it will reproduce the popular success he earned from *Daisy Miller*, a hope he regularly entertained about new projects. The difficulty in doing this – the 'small compass' that the story must fill – is, however, also its element of saleability. While brevity is obviously a virtue to the editors of periodicals who might publish these fictions, James here is constructing it as a virtue in itself for him personally. Though he often writes of its difficulty in this vein, he also seems to relish its challenge – the difficulty of working in this 'small compass' becomes a strong element of its appeal. It becomes the case, then, that James chooses to work within these confines, anticipating the challenge it offers as well as appreciating its financial rewards:

In pursuance of my plan of writing some very short tales – things of from 7000 to 10,000 words, the easiest length to 'place', I began yesterday the little story that was suggested to me some time ago...³⁸

'Placeability' is a frequently cited strategy in James's discussions of his work; moreover, it is often applied to works which have ostensibly been produced as mere potboilers, but which also function as a productive artistic exercise for him.³⁹ The 'little story' referred to became 'The Real Thing', and further consideration of it in the same notebook entry leads James into

³⁷ Entry on 'Pandora (1884), in *Notebooks*, p.24.

³⁸ Entry on 'The Real Thing' (1892), in *Notebooks*, p.55.

a more extensive exploration of both the drawbacks and the advantages of his plan for brevity:

Frankly, however, is this contrast enough of a *story*, by itself? It seems to me Yes – for it's an IDEA – and how the deuce should I get more into 7000 words? It must be simply 50 pp. of my manuscript. [...] I probably shall find that there is much more to be done with this than the compass will admit of. Make it tremendously succinct – with a very short pulse or rhythm – and the closest selection of detail – in other words *summarize* intensely and keep down the lateral development. It *should* be a little gem of bright, quick, vivid form. [...] But in how tremendously few words I must do it. This is a lesson – a *magnificent* lesson – if I'm to do a good many. Something as admirably compact and *selected* as Maupassant.⁴⁰

Having formulated an idea, James immediately and typically doubts the substantiality of his material. It is also characteristic of James to underestimate the length to which his narratives will eventually run; in this instance he is more than usually foresighted in admitting that he 'probably shall find that there is much more to be done with this than the compass will admit of'. The solution to the problem of a small idea is to keep the fiction itself as compact as possible, though ironically, having articulated anxiety about the limited potential of his idea, James unconsciously seems to envision it as bigger – troublingly so – than its proper form. Just as in his earlier letters, James feels he is wrestling with a large, sublime potential narrative which threatens to escape his precarious control, and which he must repress and keep 'compact and *selected*' from the very beginning, even if it seems in conception to be deceptively slight.

However, the strategies apparently employed by James to counter any slightness of material begin, here, to become a pursuit in themselves as well as an element to balance the form of the narrative. Remarking that 'this is a lesson – a *magnificent* lesson – if I'm to do a good many', James seems to be revising the motives behind his desire for brevity. At first, it was treated as the penalty to be paid in order to secure publication and to correct his own

³⁹ In spite of his verbosity, James continues to be a prolific producer of short stories throughout the 1890s, and to some extent after this. See chapter three for a discussion of 'placeability' and James's periodical publications.

⁴⁰Entry on 'The Real Thing' (1892) in *Notebooks*, pp. 56-7.

tendency towards narrative attenuation. Now the idea of compressing a narrative as much as possible, reducing ‘lateral development’ to a minimum, is presented as the supreme virtue of a fiction - the ultimate test of the skill of the writer. James’s long-standing admiration for French authors surfaces in his citing of Maupassant as the exemplar of this technical proficiency; the pursuit of fictional brevity, then, is defined as the sign of true artistry, the practice of a literary master.⁴¹ In contrast to this, though, the projected plan of ‘writing a good many’ suggests quite the opposite; that brevity represents the path to a condition of mass production, where having learnt the trick of constructing a small, perfectly formed fiction, James is able to grind out such tales on demand and for the appreciation of a popular audience, rather in the spirit of Noémie Nioche’s copying of Louvre paintings in *The American*. The combination of these two aims – to achieve artistry, and yet mass production of that artistry – result in James’s aspiration to be a kind of literary Houdini, who, having mastered the art of escape from confinement, perfects the practice of doing so under more and more difficult conditions, and then repeats this performance routinely for the eager consumption of the paying public.

This aim of mastering the ‘trick’ of brevity is perpetuated by James in his next notebook entry – yet he seems to have found it harder to master than anticipated, and as a result equivocates over the degree of conciseness that is strictly necessary:

I must hammer away at the effort to do, successfully and triumphantly, a large number of very short things. I have done ½ a dozen, lately, but it takes time and practice to get into the trick of it. I have never attempted before to deal with such extreme brevity. However, the extreme brevity is a necessary condition only for some of them – the others may be of varying kinds and degrees of shortness. I needn’t go into all my reasons and urgencies over again here; suffice it that they are cogent and complete. I must absolutely *not* tie my hands with promised novels if I wish to keep them free for a genuine and sustained attack on the theatre. That is one cogent reason out of many, but the artistic one would be enough even by itself. What I call *the* artistic one par excellence is simply the consideration that by doing short things I can do so many,

⁴¹ An example of James’s pride in this and his obsession with the fault of an overly long narrative is his remark that Daudet’s *L’Immortel* ‘is, to speak vulgarly, upwards of eighty thousand words long. *The Reverberator* is less than 30,000’ (*Notebooks*, p.100) demonstrating obvious pride in his comparative conciseness, while apparently unaware that he himself is frequently guilty of a ‘vulgar’ interest in the word-count of his narratives.

touch so many subjects, break out in so many places, handle so many of the threads of life.⁴²

The image of James ‘hammering away’ at his narratives is reminiscent of his emphasis, in early fictions and reviews, on the necessity of a work ethic to being an author, and of his frequent imaging of writing as a physical, demanding task.⁴³ The element of craftsmanship in this type of work is, at first, dominant in James’s description of it; he admits that he is still trying to perfect his technique.⁴⁴ Moreover, his wish to ‘keep his hands free’ for theatrical work implies that these ultra-short tales are meant to serve as bread-and-butter, providing an income by way of their placement in periodicals, whilst also extending James’s technical capabilities. Yet James ultimately promotes artistry above craftsmanship; he states that his artistic motive for producing short tales ‘would be enough in itself’, without the other reasons which, in spite of being ‘cogent and complete’, he significantly does not articulate here. The so-called ‘artistic’ reasons cited by James actually represent a combination of artistry and craftsmanship; as is often the case in his writing, even when one is apparently prioritised, the two are interrelated. While the ability to ‘touch so many subjects ... handle so many of the threads of life’ might be part of the artist’s vocation, the other two objectives cited by James - ‘I can do so many ... break out in so many places’ – are more comfortably attributable to the role of the craftsman, its characteristic awareness of the need to produce, and its measure of success as being to consistently produce for the market. James’s desire is not just to produce short narratives, but a ‘large number of short things’, a remark which shows him to have one

⁴² Entry dated 13 July 1891, in *Notebooks*, p.57.

⁴³ See my discussion in chapter three of James’s portrayal of the novelist as physically drained by his work, and of that work as being legitimised on the grounds of the hard work it involves, in his first publication, a review of W. Nassau Senior’s *Essays on Fiction* (1864).

⁴⁴ For the purpose of my argument here, my distinction between artistry and craftsmanship (without wishing to represent them as binary opposites) is based on the necessity of *repetition* to the craftsman’s work, that is, the ability to perform the tasks of that craft routinely *and* to a high standard (which would distinguish it from hack- or unskilled work). That element of repetition is absent from characterisations of the artist who, while sharing other attributes with the craftsman, aims to create works of art, each of which are individual. The craftsman is therefore more attuned to commercial requirements and the demands of the market, and unlike the artist, is aware of products as commodities. James demonstrates the characteristics of both here.

eye on the rewards of mass production, and which undermines the apparent purity of his commitment to his personal artistic development.

While James eventually justifies his pursuit of brevity on as many grounds as possible, his earlier equivocation must be noted, too. His statement that, ‘the extreme brevity is a necessary condition only for some of them – the others may be of varying kinds and degrees of shortness’, again reveals his anxiety over excessive narrative length. According to James himself he never writes long novels, only ones that are more or less short novels than others. Remarks like this, and those made in his 1891 letter to Stevenson about his return to a ‘masterly brevity’ as an ‘early love’ suggest both that in some respects James demonstrates a Bloomian ability to misread his own narrative career, and also that he has some kind of phobia about describing his narratives as anything other than short, compact, little and brief. At this point James’s insight is in fact limiting – he can envision his fictions only in terms of ‘varying kinds and degrees of shortness’, and establishes this as the governing principle of his writing. This has the unfortunate effect, as the notebooks show, of heightening the potential anxiety attached to the creative process. When dealing with proper short fictions, stories intended for periodicals, James at least had external limits by which to discipline himself; moreover, even when a short story overruns its predicted length, it can still be relatively short. When composing a novel, on the other hand - where instalments will be appearing over a period of a year or more, and where the later stages of the novel may be vague or completely unplanned even while the early parts are being published - the need to be brief is less immediately present. It thus has much greater potential to overrun, and to be ‘less short’ to a far greater degree, than was anticipated by the author, as James’s notebook entries on his novels show.

Though James experienced difficulties with the overexpansion of many of his novels, *The Bostonians* is notorious for its particularly troubled history of composition. James first

presented the idea for the novel to James Osgood, his publisher, as a projected five-part serial. In a letter to Osgood from April 1883, which he partially transcribes into his notebook, he had already expanded his plans without even beginning to write the novel:

I propose that the story shall be of the length of 150 pages of the 'Atlantic'; and I desire to receive \$4500 for it. (This means that I shall definitely make it of the length of what I called six 'parts'. I first spoke of five, that is 125 pages of the 'Atlantic'.) As regards the period at which I should be able to give it (or the greater part of it) to the printers, I am afraid that November first is the earliest date.⁴⁵

Even in his planning of *The Bostonians*, James finds the narrative growing out of his control. As with his precise word-count of the length of *The Sacred Fount* in his letter to James B. Pinker, James's decision at this early stage that he will need to extend his projected narrative by twenty-five pages, a relatively modest amount, illustrates his obsessive concern with the length of his fictions, and with the details of that length and any excess. This statement may have been intended to function as a professional show of confidence; James perhaps wished to appear firmly in control of his writing plans for the benefit of his publisher, and this is supported by the fact that James did not transcribe this portion of the letter into his private notebook, but stopped after his outline of the novel itself. (Edel and Powers provide this extra section of the letter as an editorial footnote in the *Notebooks*.) It might also be argued, though, that James did not transcribe these remarks precisely because he did not want to be reminded of them in the context of actually writing *The Bostonians*; while consulting his private notebooks about the structure of the plot, reminders of the space in which he had committed himself to bring it to a conclusion were unwelcome. However, it is not only the conclusion of *The Bostonians* but its opening, too, that James wishes to avoid. Having told Osgood that he could not deliver the first section of the manuscript until November 1st, one of James's reasons was that he wanted to write something else first: his short story, 'Lady Barberina'.

⁴⁵ Letter to James Osgood, 8 April 1883; quoted in a footnote in *Notebooks*, p.19.

Further notebook entries on various other texts follow, until on August 6th 1884 James returns to the subject of *The Bostonians*:

Infinitely oppressed and depressed by the sense of being behindhand with the novel – that is, with the *start* of it – that I have engaged, through Osgood, to write for the *Century*.⁴⁶

James's emphasis that he is behindhand with the *start* of the novel invites several interpretations. It could be a mitigating addition, asserting that since he is only at the beginning of the novel, this ground can be made up without too much difficulty. This kind of assertion occurs relatively frequently in James's notebooks or letters – he often records, for example, that he has more to squeeze into the last instalments of a novel than expected (as with *Portrait*), or remarks wearily to a correspondent that he must get on with the current fiction whose deadline is imminent. However, the anguish of his opening statement suggests that this is doubled, for James, by the fact that, at the beginning of this novel – which he has projected as being large, in all senses, and which thus represents a formidable amount of work – he is already behind schedule. Having delayed the start of the novel in favour of other, shorter work, it seems that James was rightly apprehensive that a 'large' narrative, though challenging, would prove painfully difficult to control.

Why did James decide to put off starting *The Bostonians* in favour of 'Lady Barberina', given that the plans for the novel sent to Osgood were so enthusiastic and ambitious? The daunting size and complexity of the narrative seem to be a major factor. The same letter's discussion of 'Lady Barberina', which James plans to complete before beginning *The Bostonians*, demonstrates why, even when James's enthusiasm for the longer work was at its peak, he preferred to delay it in favour of something else. 'Lady Barberina' is conceived, and described to Osgood, as a reworking of the plot featured in *Daisy Miller*, 'An International Episode' and 'The Siege of London', with the gender roles reversed so that an

⁴⁶ *Notebooks*, p.30.

American man pursues an English woman – James emphasises that it will be of the same length as these earlier tales, and that there will be potential for Osgood to collect several of these for a printed volume. ‘Lady Barberina’, then, is an early example of the intention James expressed in his 1891 notebook entries - that is, to repeat (with necessary slight variations) a successful formula in the most compact and saleable form. The reassurance provided by the completion of such a narrative provides a reason for James’s insistence on producing ‘Lady Barberina’ before beginning work on *The Bostonians* – which, unlike its well-plotted predecessor, was as yet untitled:

I haven’t even a name for my novel, and fear I shall have to call it simply *Verena*: the heroine. I should like something more descriptive – but everything that is justly descriptive won’t do – *The Newness* – *The Reformers* – *The Precursors* – *The Revealer* etc. – all very bad.⁴⁷

James’s ambition to move away from an explicit focus on his heroine (in contrast to the title of *Portrait*) is impeded by the inadequacy of any title to fully convey the nature of his subject. He recognises that the suggestions are all disappointingly vague descriptions of what was intended to be a fictive rendering of a distinct social group at a precise historical moment. Lists of names are a common element of James’s notebooks; they appear at intervals, interrupting the narrative of the notebooks, often at points such as the entry on *The Bostonians* where James feels himself to be in difficulties, or at an impasse. They provide a sense of details with which to anchor a potential, as yet unformed narrative, while also allowing a selection of alternatives – characteristically, in an entry on his 1880 novel *Confidence*, he pronounces his protagonists to be ‘Harold Stanmer and Bianca Vane – their names are perhaps provisional’ (as indeed those names prove to be).⁴⁸ James’s inability to find a title for his large project, in contrast to the promptly and simply-titled ‘Lady Barberina’, betrays an uneasiness about his own ability, in this instance, to *select* with the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

necessary incisiveness. Having announced his intention to do something large, temporarily relinquishing his usually declared rule, the control which often evades him when writing shorter tales is even more elusive here; presumably, too, the right title for something so large is especially difficult to determine. His final word on *The Bostonians* in his notebooks is that the novel was 'born under an evil star'.⁴⁹

The most marked tendency of the notebooks, with regard to the actual ends of James's novels and the details of their denouements, is to assert the chosen ending to be both impossibly difficult to produce, and, in its inevitability, impossible to escape. He describes the final actions of his heroine in 'A London Life' as follows:

She feels that [marriage] now to be impossible – she only wants to get away from it all, and she refuses him and goes off – vanishes, returns, as best she can, to America. That must be my denouement – it will be vulgarly judged – but it is the only possible one.⁵⁰

One of the central elements of how James constructs his fictions (and one that is similarly central to this thesis) is his recurrent desire to end them in a way that will defy the expectations of the 'vulgar' audience. A favoured tactic in combating the disappointment expressed by reviewers and editors - with whom, unlike individual anonymous readers, James was compelled to engage in dialogue on the subject - was that used here; the assertion that, in artistic terms, James's chosen ending was 'the only possible one'. Even when James records some uncertainty about how to end a fiction, he declares that the conclusion will be chosen on grounds of artistic coherence (rather than to pander to readers' preferences). This comment about *The Reverberator* is typical:

The end is a little difficult to determine. I think the truest and best and most illustrative would be this: [...] they [the European family] 'come round' – forgive, conciliate, swallow their grievance, etc., so that the marriage takes place. The newspaper dictates and triumphs, which is a reflection of actual fact.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Entry dated 7 November 1878, in *Notebooks*, p.6. Harold and Bianca become Bernard Longueville (the name originally intended for the protagonist's best friend and foil) and Angela Vivian.

⁴⁹ *Notebooks*, p.31.

⁵⁰ Entry on 'A London Life' (1888), 20 June 1887, in *Notebooks*, p.40.

⁵¹ Entry on *The Reverberator* (1888), 17 November 1887, in *Notebooks*, p.42.

While this end is unusual among James's novels in actually delivering the promised marriage, it contains the characteristic element of one party 'coming round'; having to 'swallow their grievance' and live with the disappointment of being permanently deprived of what they had hoped for - as happens to Christopher Newman, Nanda Brookenham, Lambert Strether, and others. This use of a plot device to which he is usually averse, in order to infuse the conclusion of *The Reverberator* with the tone he generally favours for conclusions, combines what are, for James, the two most important aspects of fiction; that it is true to an artistic principle and vision, and that it is, in his judgement, 'a reflection of actual fact'.⁵² The claim that the end he has chosen is 'the truest and best and most illustrative', is always James's justification, in the face of accusations that his ends defy readers' expectations, hopes and preferences; he defends *Portrait* in this way, as well as *The American*. The history of *The American*, however, demonstrates how James's commitment to this practice of constructing his endings as predestined, sacred and inviolable is undermined by the lure of further opportunities, which involve both the attraction of popular acclaim and the challenge of working in a new form.

In 1891, after both *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Tragic Muse* had been coolly received, James decided to embark on a new enterprise which would involve returning to his earlier comic mode, but working in a different genre - writing plays. To this end, he produced a theatrical version of *The American*, and his process of adapting his work to comply with new generic demands illustrates the contradictions and complexities of his stance on how the ending of a work is determined. In his notebooks, he describes the changes that will need to be made to make *The American* appropriate for the stage:

Reduced to its simplest expression, and that reduction must be my play, *The American* is the story of a plain man who is really a fine fellow [...] he does the characteristically

⁵² The importance of realism, and James's concept of it, as endowing a novel with completeness, occupies part of my discussion of James's theory of narrative in its literary context, in the next chapter. Critics' view of James as a realist, or otherwise, is similarly important and is explored further in chapter four.

magnanimous thing – the characteristically good-natured thing – throws away his opportunity – lets them ‘off’ – lets them go. In the play he must do this – *but* get his wife.⁵³

Again the element of ‘letting them off’ is present, yet it is clear that James feels that concessions to a theatre audience will be necessary; the narrative must be ‘reduced to its simplest expression’ to succeed as a play. More perfidious than this, however, is James’s dramatic alteration to the ending of the plot, about which he is sheepishly terse, and for which he presents no artistic reasoning. The implication is that none can be given, since the change is made purely for the purpose of appeasing the play’s potential audience. James’s own sense of this being contrary to the ‘natural’ course of the narrative is revealed in his final ‘*but* get his wife’, rather than ‘*and* get his wife’. The alternative formulation would portray marriage as Newman’s due, consequential reward, while James’s actual choice of words implies that the accomplishment of the marriage remains, in the circumstances, contrary and perverse.

- This significant alteration contravenes some of James’s earlier strictures on the subject not only of this particular novel, but also of ending novels in general. In 1877 James wrote to Howells, regarding the original version of *The American*, that:

I quite understand that as an editor you should go in for ‘cheerful endings’; but I am sorry that as a private reader you are not struck with the inevitability of the *American* dénouement. I fancied that most folks would feel that Mme. de Cintré *couldn’t*, when the finish came, marry Mr N. [...] If I had represented her as doing so I should have made a prettier ending, certainly; but I should have felt as if I were throwing a rather vulgar sop to readers who don’t really know the world and who don’t measure the merit of a novel by its correspondence to the same. Such readers assuredly have a right to their entertainment, but I don’t believe it is in me to give them in a satisfactory way, what they require.⁵⁴

The change of genre from narrative to drama seems to have justified the unthinkable. James’s high-minded views of readers who ‘don’t really know the world’ were ones even he admitted later were inaccurate. He states in his preface to the New York edition of the novel that, many years later, he now realises that, far from rejecting Newman as an unworthy suitor,

⁵³ Entry on the stage adaptation of *The American*, in *Notebooks*, p.53.

realistically hard-up aristocrats like the Bellegardes would have been only too glad to 'pull Newman into their boat'. However, more importantly, the alteration which he considered in 1876 to be 'throwing a rather vulgar sop to readers' is, in 1891, perfectly acceptable.

It would be easy, but nevertheless unfair, to condemn James for so blatant an about-face. However, his apparent climbdown in the matter of giving the public what they want is mitigated by examining his changes in the context of his frustration and disappointment at the time. The dilemma of how he could achieve his ambition of being a popular author had become particularly perplexing; he had tried to be innovative and tackle 'social realism' in *The Tragic Muse* and *The Princess Casamassima*, yet both had been emphatically and universally condemned. It may well have seemed to James that the only way out of his increasingly desperate situation was to go beyond working with grittier subject matter and attempt to work in an entirely new genre. Moreover, the public taste for comedy on the stage would, in theory, support the idea of reviving his earlier, lighter works and reworking them to suit the theatre. In 1876 he had declared that it was 'not in him' to give the audience 'in a satisfactory way, what they require', yet James's private and public writings show the ambivalence of his position. He liked to appear impervious to the 'vulgar' demands of readers, and indeed held his artistic principles in almost sacred regard - but still yearned to be popular, to produce something that would be received by his audience as 'entertainment'. The theatrical success of *The American* (which, however temperate it really was, must have seemed rapturous to James after the reception of his last two novels) led James to believe that it *was* in him to give the public what they wanted.

While this move could be seen as betraying the original conception of *The American*, in which James had placed such faith, it might also be an attempt to retain what James felt were the essential themes and subject matter of his work, while repackaging them in a form

⁵⁴Letter to William Dean Howells, 30 March 1877, in *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 104-5.

both more acceptable to his audience and more appropriate to the medium in which he was working. On this issue James, like a government considering a change of policy, would either way be regarded as having made the wrong decision. To stay with his usual formula would have invited criticism for being unwilling and unable to accommodate theatrical requirements, while to make changes solicits accusations of being mercenary and untrue to earlier artistic principles. The greatest significance of the changes James made to his work between novel and stage adaptation lies not in the success or failure of the changes themselves (though that is certainly a matter of interest) but in the basic fact of his willingness, in spite of everything he stated to the contrary, to give his fictions not an immovable, inevitable end, but the end he believed was right for their context. Christopher Newman is destined in his novel to be disappointed, but the Newman created as part of a stage comedy written by a popular and successful playwright must succeed in his quest for a bride. For James, in this case the end justified the means; his aim was to produce plays that people liked, and for a while he almost succeeded.

The cumulative view of James's work, and his diverse representations of it, provided by his letters, notebooks and the Prefaces to the New York Edition, illustrate a history of confusion and inconsistency in James's compositional methods, and his attempts to direct and control his narratives. At some points he perversely misreads himself and his work; at others he demonstrates extraordinary insight into the possibilities of narrative and his own potential for creating innovative and unconventional narrative structures – which is, nevertheless, not always acted upon. Finally, for the moment, though, James's remarks in his notebooks on his planned conclusion to *The Portrait of a Lady* form a defence of his difficulties with completion, and indeed of his overall approach to writing fiction:

The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished – that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation – that I have left her *en l'air*. – This is both true and false. The *whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together.

What I have done has that unity – it groups together. It is complete in itself – and the rest may be taken up or not, later.⁵⁵

James's view of what a 'complete' novel should be has been established as an early landmark in theorising the novel. His boldness in using the form, and his ambitions to develop it, are seen in this declaration that completeness – certainly as understood by his Victorian peers – is inherently unattainable. Having explored James's desire to 'squeeze the Muse tight', and that desire's shaping of his art, the subsequent problem – that of what is actually *left*, or should be left, after the narrative has been 'squeezed to its utmost', will be the subject of the chapter which follows.

⁵⁵ Entry in *Notebooks*, dated by Edel at 'late December 1880 or early January 1881', pp.13-14.

Chapter Two

'Possessing a big subject': James and ideas of the 'complete' novel

If the opening chapter of this thesis was concerned with how much Henry James could squeeze out of his fictions in their finished form, this following chapter is intended to act as its counterpart, examining what James wished to include in the novel, rather than what to exclude. James is always concerned with the relationship of the particular to the general; his reviews of any novel consistently attempt to link the practice of fiction as a whole to its demonstration in the example at hand. An examination of the practical difficulties he encountered in ending his novels, then, leads naturally to a location of that particular problem within the broader problem it engenders; that of what makes a novel, as a whole, and in all its parts, complete. This chapter, therefore, constitutes an examination of James's ideas of 'completeness' in the novel, in their cultural context. Though James is often credited as the first real theorist of the novel in its modern form, his theories do not exist in a vacuum or without precedent.¹ James defines his position in relation to his peers and recent antecedents; indeed, his theories are often most successfully developed in opposition to either a specific essay by a rival (such as Besant's 'The Art of Fiction') or to the literary environment of late nineteenth-century England in which he produced most of his work. The dialogic character of much (if not all) of James's criticism, therefore, makes it imperative that an examination of his ideas of 'completeness' in the novel should be placed in the context of the ideas

¹ Both Richard Stang's *The Theory of The Novel in England, 1850-1870* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), hereafter referred to as Stang, and Kenneth Graham's *English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), hereafter referred to as Graham, select

already aired on this subject by the critics and writers of Victorian England, and those emerging from the creative dialogue which was concurrent with James's writing career.

My examination of the context of James's ideas focuses mainly on his Anglo-American reception and the theories of the novel emerging specifically in English culture. James's view of the English theory of the novel – or rather lack of it – as deficient and needing redress is, for my purposes, a productive dissatisfaction. He regarded the English distrust of theorising about art and its forms as a system (or rather anti-system) to which his work would form a response; it provided, like Pansy Osmond and the other *jeunes filles* in his fictions, a 'blank page' on which James could begin to combine theories about a novel's content with ideas about its form. While French ideas of the novel are clearly important to James and influential in his work, those ideas are often tacitly incorporated into James's own work in the novel, and used by him in response to the English system. Anne T. Margolis has documented the varied reactions to James's work from both American and English readerships, and the criticism he encountered when appearing to satirise national stereotypes.² James learned as a result to be more careful in presenting his work as culturally inclusive, while also analysing specific social spheres with discrimination. His theorising of the novel, then, was directed towards the cultural space in which he felt there would be most room for it, but also where he knew it would be recognised and contended.

James's essay 'The Art of the Novel' as a landmark in novel theory, after which Victorian ideals of simplistic realism and moral value are superseded by proto-Modernist emphases on form.

² Anne T. Margolis, *Henry James and the Problem of Audience: An International Act* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

Most of James's theorising on the novel, then, evolved in response to English cultural preconceptions, and can be seen as a dialogue between James's own project of modifying and developing the conventional form of the nineteenth-century novel, and the resistance to this project enthusiastically provided by the English literary scene. To examine James's theories of the novel in general would be a disproportionately large task for this chapter to perform – and moreover, has already been done.³ However, an examination of some established and popular perceptions of the complete novel, against which James defined his theories of fiction and his own ideas of how a novel could be considered 'complete', can be usefully distilled from this critical dialogue.

The criticism examined here comes from reviews of individual novels, as well as essays which constitute more overt attempts at theorising fiction, all of which represent contributions to the common forum in which the art of fiction was discussed. Though many reviews of James's work make superficial judgements based largely on popular taste and on the most hackneyed conventions of fiction, this does not mean those judgements can be dismissed or disregarded. It is precisely because James was regarded as being so out of step with the majority of the novel-reading public that views representative of that majority must be included in a consideration of how James's work related to novel theory and practice of the time. Moreover, the sheer number of times that this viewpoint occurs in reviews of James's fictions makes it impossible to ignore, especially since James himself certainly did not. Regardless of any claims he made – particularly after low points in his career – that he was indifferent to such vulgar judgements, his attempts to form a theory of the novel were

³ See Vivien Jones, *James the Critic* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1985) for an account

constructed in response to exactly this kind of position. Therefore, even if James was indifferent to *individual* expressions of this kind (and his assertions that he did not care must be taken with a pinch of salt) the *cumulative* body of opinion they came to represent was one with which he was fully conversant, and which he set out to counter in every respect. Attention to the most crassly hostile reviews, then, is more rewarding than might be expected, in that it enables us to identify the common factors of complaint against James; the grounds on which reviewers commonly chose to confront him, and to declare that he had failed.

Nineteenth-century novel theory, as a genre in itself, able to stand alone, did not exist until James's career was well under way; it began to be constructed in dialogue with novelistic practice – i.e., in reviews of specific novels. James's early reviews, which are characterised by just this approach, show him as understandably in concord with the cultural formulae and thought processes of his time, on which he begins to advance in 'The Art of Fiction'.⁴ Though this essay, too, is produced as part of a dialogue with Walter Besant, it functions as a manifesto for James's modification of the English literary *status quo*. Moreover, 'The Art Of Fiction' is particularly important for my argument because of its many unconscious and untheorised assumptions about completeness, and what completeness means to James in relation to the novel.

Close analysis of James's essay illustrates its implicit belief in liberal-humanist ideals of the novel as expressing 'life', and its ultimate construction of completeness as something that can only be partly theorised in terms of form, structure, content, and other such technical aspects of writing. In short, achieving completeness relies not just on the effect of a novel's constituent parts, but on the

of James's work as a critic, and as a theorist of the novel, in comparison with contemporary

impression it makes as a whole – an area in which reviewers often found fault with James. Reviews show a contemporary tendency to regard largeness of effect as not just desirable, but also as peculiarly and affectionately English by comparison with the image of the French novel as overly scientific and concerned with form above all else. The reviews quoted here show a dissatisfaction with smallness at the level of *parts*. They are followed by an exploration of Victorian attempts at novel theory which demonstrate similar concerns as related to the novel as a *whole*. I compare those with James's strivings for change – most notably exhibited in 'The Art Of Fiction', which attempt to install a new paradigm for examining novels; one which has a particular focus on the issue of endings and completeness in the novel as a form.

The proper purpose, form and effect of the novel were the subject of intense debate throughout the nineteenth century, with contributions ranging between extremes of championing the novel as the ideal work of art and denigrating it as a tool of the devil that would destroy society and culture as they were known. One important strand to this argument, which has particular relevance in discussing James's work, is the preferences of national culture in defining the form of the novel. In contrast to the French, whose national literature was stereotyped in terms of attention to form in the novel, along with a willingness to treat 'shocking' subjects in the interest of objectivity and of analysing social problems, English debates on the subject are perceived to have been primarily concerned with the morality of novels and the effect of their content on potentially impressionable readers. This effect was variously

English, American and French criticism.

⁴ James's first reviews, and career as a writer for periodicals, are discussed in chapter three.

interpreted as either advancing or debasing the moral awareness of its readers, but was almost always seen to be doing one or the other.

In retrospect, James's contribution to the theories of the novel has been judged to leave in the shade all such efforts by his contemporaries, and studies of the Victorian period as a whole can often be defensive about this. Richard Stang's *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870* opens with its intent to dismiss the 'persistent cliché of novel theory appearing in France only' until, as he says, 'infected or fertilised, depending on one's point of view', by James or George Moore in the 1880s.⁵ Kenneth Graham's *English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900*, which covers the period in which James was at the height of his critical powers, excludes James's theories on the grounds that they are already sufficiently influential and well-known, so much so that other formulations of novel theory are eclipsed. However, this defensiveness is often counter-productive in apparently polarising James and his peers, a portrait which is only partially true. James's developments of novel theory are precisely that – theories which advance the ideas already put forward by his predecessors and contemporaries, while necessarily drawing on and modifying them. Moreover, his critical writings are not to be straightforwardly aligned with a French attention to form, in opposition to the English concern for moral utility in the novel.⁶ His position involved a more complex attempt to compromise between the two – to Anglicise French ideas in order to theorise principles of the novel in

⁵ Stang, p.ix.

⁶ Though James was not primarily a 'moral' critic who found fault with novels on grounds of indecency – in the manner of Margaret Oliphant or Eliza Lynn Linton – he tended towards conservatism on the subject, as evidenced by his distaste for the sexual content of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and the consternation he felt towards, for example, some of the works of Zola, which he found formally admirable but morally repugnant and vulgar in terms of their subject matter.

a way that would be acceptable to his proverbially untheoretical English audience.

James's pursuit of 'small' fiction as an ideal was shown in the last chapter as the supposedly governing, and certainly overshadowing, principle of his working practices. I wish to argue here that James's ideal of smallness, set against a characteristic late Victorian desire for 'largeness', can be seen as a microcosm of the conflict between James's artistic intentions and the demands of his reading public. The way in which metaphors of largeness and smallness are employed by James, and his peers, illustrate, as I will show, the various systems of value being applied to the novel, which produce diverse concepts of what a 'complete' novel should be, and of what an 'incomplete' novel is deemed to be lacking, or - in James's view - to have in excess. A good example of James's own use of these terms is his letter to Rudyard Kipling, on the publication of Kipling's *Kim* in 1901. His letter shows a wish to both praise and give a critical assessment of the novel:

You are too sublime – you're too big and there is too much of you. I don't think you've cut out your subject in *Kim* with a sharp enough scissors, but with that one little nut cracked – so! – the beauty, the quantity, the prodigality, the Gangesflood, leave me simply gaping as your procession passes. What a luxury to possess a big subject as you possess India; or, to pat you still more on the head, what a cause of just pride!⁷

James's treatment of the sublime is an element of his work which becomes increasingly important from the 1890s onwards – and will be explored more fully in a later chapter – but he refers to it in two characteristic ways. Firstly, it is ultimately more dangerous than inspiring; secondly, however, it is more likely to be a virtue in someone else's work than it is in his own. His remark on Kipling's sublimity combines both censure and praise. (Can something be *too* sublime?)

Nevertheless, James, who is so concerned himself with writing 'economically', with keeping his subject small and perfectly formed, and who is swift to criticise a lack of this desirable economy in the work of other writers (notoriously in the case of George Eliot and Tolstoy, among others), tempers his admonition with a kind of puzzled admiration for a fiction in which these aspirations towards perfect form seem to have been not achieved, but transcended. The excess which James habitually deplors in himself is something to be admired in *Kim*. James's rationalising of this is that in perfectly rendering the microcosmic subject of his novel, Kipling's small victory has overcome the larger, but more peripheral, faults in the work overall: 'with that one little nut cracked – so! – the beauty, the quantity, the prodigality, the Gangesflood, leave me simply gaping as your procession passes'. This commentary is by no means endorsing *Kim* as a complete success, yet it demonstrates James's need to articulate the peculiar quality he finds so appealing in a fiction which, in terms of form and proportion, he should (by his own critical rules) consider a failure. I am not arguing that James wished to write fictions like *Kim*, but that he felt a measure of envy towards Kipling's achievement in fluently ignoring the writerly anxieties over length, economy of representation, and completeness, which troubled James himself so much. His remarks on the 'luxury' of possessing such a big subject as India are telling; the word carries a slightly grudging implication that Kipling has been luckier than himself in this respect, and also that James's chosen subjects do not lend themselves to a similar 'luxury', but are – though perhaps not less rewarding – certainly more compact, and thus have to be rendered with economy. He seems to be attempting to recover any sense of inferiority by composing this

⁷ Letter to Rudyard Kipling, 30 October 1901, in *Letters*, vol. IV, p.210.

critical assessment of double-edged praise; his characterisation of it as 'to pat you on the head still further', is subtly but undeniably patronising in tone, leaving the impression that though James appreciates Kipling's work, he considers himself to be dealing with novelistic problems of form and economy on a higher level.

When examining Victorian critics' assumptions about what the complete, perfect novel would be, several major elements are identified as assumptions expected, albeit implicitly in some cases, of such a work of fiction. Firstly, a good novel was expected to have organic unity, a prerequisite described as follows by the novelist Anthony Trollope in his autobiography:

There should be no episodes in a novel. Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story ... yet it may have many parts... There may be subsidiary plots, which shall all tend to the elucidation of the main story, and which will take their places as part of one and the same work, - as there may be many figures on a canvas which shall not to the spectator seem to form themselves into separate pictures.⁸

Trollope's autobiography promotes an aggressively utilitarian view of his craft, which is possibly motivated by defensiveness about his working practices and his literary status. However, critics as well as novelists themselves subscribed to this ideal: the *Saturday Review* stated in an 1886 article that:

A novel should be like a puzzle, in so far that each smallest portion should have both its relative and absolute value; and its should be so closely welded that it would lose meaning, completeness, and consecutive interest, if only one of the smallest portions was taken away. But the vast majority of novels are knocked up anyhow [...] one might prune them of whole chapters and leave no gap; on the contrary, the story would be made more compact by the excision and brought into closer line.⁹

This reference to a puzzle is an individual touch; Victorian approval and explanation of the principle of organic unity often utilised a Romantic

⁸ Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, 1883 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), chapter 12, p.118.

⁹ *Saturday Review*, vol. LXII (1886), 725-6.

vocabulary, employing metaphors of the body, or of a plant, to articulate the interdependent relationship of the parts to the whole.¹⁰ Explicit, or rather practical advice on the topic was less forthcoming: Stang notes that while there is a strong demand for material to be unified, indications of how this is to be achieved are more elusive. Opinions tend to favour the transcendent creative sensibility of the artist as the unifying force within the work; consequently, external constraints on this, such as the demands of serial publication, can potentially disrupt a novel's unity. David Masson remarked, in the *North British Review* in 1851, that serialising forced an author to 'supply the parts of his story before he has thoroughly conceived the whole, and also by compelling him to spice each separate part, so that it may please alone'.¹¹ While the ideal of organic unity was almost unquestioned as a necessary attribute of a true work of art, then, practical conditions of Victorian publishing often made its accomplishment difficult; while Dickens and Thackeray thrived on the system, many others shared David Masson's misgivings, including Trollope, who strayed once only from the path of completing a novel before beginning to serialise it, and vowed never to do so again.

The second prerequisite for the complete novel was the cherished convention of a happy ending. Kenneth Graham identifies 'two distinct conventions in the novel: the "agreeable" character and the happy ending. Both of these are frequently praised or accepted by critics as natural features of the world of fiction [...] The happy ending received less explicit comment and can be considered a critical principle more by its tacit acceptance than by its open

¹⁰ James's remarks on his own work, as quoted in chapter one, also draw on this Romantic sensibility.

¹¹ Quoted in Stang, p.119.

recommendation.¹² This was by no means a convention served primarily by the work of second-rate novelists: both Dickens in *Great Expectations* and Hardy in *The Return of the Native* changed their intended endings to accommodate happy marriages, or at least allow for projection of them on the part of readers, as a means of closure felt to be more to the taste of their public.¹³ Dickens, moreover, urged similar alterations on the authors he edited, Mrs Gaskell among them. I mentioned in the previous chapter that William Dean Howells, who himself was censured for not providing happy endings, advised James in his capacity as editor to end *The American* with the marriage between its protagonists which readers would expect, rather than James's actual denouement of the heroine breaking their engagement and entering a convent. In this, James proved himself particularly stubborn: Hardy gave in much more calmly to demands for him to revise or remove offensive sections of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and Ibsen (according to Peter Keating) 'wrote an alternative, ambiguous ending for the German production of *A Doll's House* rather than have censors mutilate the play, though this particular 'happy ending was never performed in Britain.'¹⁴ While scepticism towards the necessity of a saccharine-coated ending grew and became more artistically defensible during the Victorian period, as the imperative of conforming to Mrs Grundyism was gradually displaced, and challenges to fictional convention began to gain weight, this expectation was nevertheless

¹² Graham, p.33.

¹³ See Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Vintage, 1999), pp.951-53, and Hardy's note added to the 1912 Wessex edition of *The Return of the Native* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), stating that 'the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn [...] circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent. Readers can therefore choose between the endings, and those with a more austere artistic code can assume the more consistent conclusion to be the true one' (p.464).

¹⁴ Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Fontana Press, 1991) p.174; hereafter referred to as Keating. See Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), pp.240, for an impassive presentation of Hardy's deletions from the serialised version of *Tess*.

difficult to dislodge, and was consistently cited by James's reviewers as a fault he should strive to overcome.

The third element considered necessary – one which is central to my argument in this chapter – is the metaphorical need for 'largeness'. In my preceding chapter, I examined James's almost pathological need to make his fictions small, or certainly to be perceived to be keeping them as small as possible; smallness, compactness and strict economy were cited as the ultimate novelistic virtues, though James by no means adhered to these rules himself, and indeed complicated the picture by often feeling paradoxically drawn to the 'looseness and bagginess' he publicly deplored in other writers. Unfortunately for James, 'largeness' in a number of forms was the very quality valued by many Victorian readers in their novels. He began his writing career in the 1860s, an age dominated by the 'big' Victorian novel, written in a realist mode (or, alternatively, a sensational one, which is in a formal sense often the other side of the realist coin) and published in the often inflated form of the three-decker. Even by the time of James's growing fame as a writer of fiction, with the success of *Daisy Miller* in 1878 and *Portrait* in 1881, the previous dominance of the three-volume realist novel was in decline, but what would take their place was unclear. Experimental novels by James, Howells and others were still regarded with suspicion, and the literary market, rather than reuniting under a dominant mode of fiction, became increasingly diverse. As a result, the apparent 'largeness' of the mid-century period takes on a nostalgic glow in reviews during the second half of the nineteenth century, its tenets still exercising considerable influence.

Morally speaking, novels of the higher orders were expected to produce a desirable 'widening' and 'enlarging' effect, terms frequently employed to describe how reading such novels expanded the empathetic capabilities, knowledge of life, and moral awareness of their readers. George Eliot, identified as a leading exponent of this expansion of sensibility, explicitly advocated it herself, stating: 'If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally'.¹⁵ R.H. Hutton in turn expressed his approval of Eliot's work in remarking that she was 'too diffuse' but that this was because of her major strength, her 'largeness of mind, largeness of conception'.¹⁶ These images of expansion and desirable largeness were a recurrent element of the critical vocabulary, established as the suitably fuzzy goal for which true novelists should be aiming. For instance, George Brimley's 1868 review of *Westward Ho!* asserts that art makes us 'wiser and larger-hearted', and that novels 'conduct us through a wider range of experience than the actual life of each generally permits',¹⁷ and the journalist and critic E. S. Dallas stated that the novelist 'widens through fiction the range of our sympathy'.¹⁸ Especially relevant here, though, is Kenneth Graham's observation of the nationalistic claims made for this brand of novelistic expansion:

In particular, 'sympathy' is singled out as a quality of temperament essential to the artistic shaping of experience, and its lack is often named as the greatest single fault of the French realists. [...] The English are held up, in comparison, as examples of the power of authorial sympathy – Garnett Smith attributes it to the latent religious feeling in the English mind [...] The subjective element which these critics demand is essentially more than

¹⁵ Letter from George Eliot to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859, in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, 6 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), vol. 3, p.111.

¹⁶ R. H. Hutton, in *Spectator*, 2 January 1869, vol. 42, p.15.

¹⁷ George Brimley, 'Westward Ho!', in *Essays*, 1858 (London: Macmillan, 1882), p.294.

¹⁸ Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), vol. 2, p.287.

a mere colouring of sentiment. It can imply the whole involvement of the artist in his creation.¹⁹

This ensuing notion of the novel's power to engender widened sympathies defines its importance not just in terms of the novel's effect on its readers, but in how it ennobles artists themselves, in bringing out his finest artistic and moral capabilities – in short, that in producing this 'widening' effect artists are reciprocally and continually 'enlarging' themselves. This ideal, however, is advanced to the point where the potential asset of the 'whole involvement of the artist in his creation' becomes a prerequisite for all novelists, without which neither they, nor the novel, can be considered 'complete'. Kenneth Graham summarises this viewpoint as: 'The greatest artist does not shape incidents for a conscious moral effect, but this comes naturally if he is writing properly, as a complete man.'²⁰ Furthermore, this requirement of complete and transcendental involvement of the artist in his creation is, in some cases, developed further, to the point of requiring novelists to explicitly produce not only enlarged sympathy with one's fellow-man, but also with life as a process of spiritual enlargement above all, denying precedence to the more humanistic, earthly-driven sympathies and enlargements that are the focus of social novelists, and especially of satirical works by novelists such as Dickens and Thackeray. As a result, novels and novelists can be declared incomplete for producing the most acute, sharply-observed realist narrative, without sufficiently relating it to the spiritual (if not specifically Christian) dimension of experience. For example, Walter Bagehot states, in an article on Sir Walter Scott, that:

¹⁹ Graham, p.37. The article he refers to is Garnett Smith's 'Gustave Flaubert', *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1888, pp.20-31; reprinted in John Olmsted (ed.), *A Victorian Art of Fiction: Essays on the Novel in British Periodicals*, 3 volumes (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979), vol. 3, pp.433-447; hereafter referred to as Olmsted.

²⁰ Graham, p.81.

No picture of human nature [in a novel] can be considered complete which omits to deal with man in relation to questions which occupy him as man, with his convictions as to the theory of the universe and his own destiny.²¹

Similarly, William Roscoe censures Thackeray for his perceived indifference to the task of portraying the 'inner life' as follows:

He professes to paint human life; and he who does so, and who does not base his conception on that religious substructure which alone makes it other than shreds of flying dreams, is an incomplete artist and a false moralist.²²

It can be seen, then, that representations of the 'complete novel' or the 'complete artist' signify a whole range of idealised assumptions, in relation to which practical and theoretical guidelines on how to attain this completeness are, by the nature of those assumptions, difficult to assemble. While James was not entirely unsympathetic towards *all* of these ideals, they evidently provide a challenge both to the freedom he wanted to secure for the novelist, and, strange though it may seem, for the theoretical framework he wanted to establish as the basis of that freedom. Before turning to James's own writings, though, it is useful to see how these principles are manifested in contemporary reviews of James's novels.

When reviewers discussed James's work they complained, predictably enough, about the ends of his novels, as apt to leave the reader frustratedly unaware of the fate of James's characters. Just as frequently, though, they complain of an absence which is more nebulous and more difficult to define, than simply the failure of the protagonists to be safely married to one another – or indeed married at all – at the close of the narrative. One of the earliest examples of this type of remark occurs in a review of *Roderick Hudson*:

Looking at the book as a whole, it is like a marvellous mosaic whose countless minute pieces are fitted with so much skill and ingenuity that a

²¹ Walter Bagehot, in *National Review*, vol. 8 (1858) pp.468-70.

²² William Caldwell Roscoe, 'W. M. Thackeray, Artist and Moralist', *National Review*, vol. 2, January 1856, pp.177-213; reprinted in Olmsted, vol. 2, pp.223-259.

real picture is presented, but with an absence of richness and relief, of all that is vivid and salient; there is a pervading lowness of tone, and flatness of tint. This should not be the impression left by a novel of remarkable talent; we think, however, that it is not the result of a failure to produce the desired effect, but of a mistaken aim. The method, too, is a mistaken one; no aggregate of small particles, however cunningly put together, will produce the effect of honest cutting and shaping from the piece; it may be *marqueterie*, or a Chinese puzzle, but it will not be art.²³

The quality of the pieces of the novel, and the acknowledged art demonstrated in their arrangement, is inadequate to this reviewer in the light of the disappointing effect produced by the whole picture with its 'lowness of tone, and flatness of tint'. This could be seen as an admirable quality, in its implication of evenness and uniformity throughout the work - on the evidence of his letters and notebooks, James himself would have been flattered by the mention of his 'skill and ingenuity' in working with minute pieces. However, success in the detail of these small pieces is judged to be good, but by no means good enough; evidently, something more was expected. The reviewer goes on to declare that James has not failed in what he was aiming to do (presumably produce a very flat, low-tinted novel) but that his 'aim' and 'method' are wrong. The reviewer's tactic is to skilfully use received assumptions of what the 'right' kind of novel should be achieving as the yardstick by which *Roderick Hudson* is judged to be not only an artistic, but a moral failure. James has done what he intended to do; his fault, according the reviewer, is more deep-rooted in that he should not *want* to produce this sort of thing. The reviewer thinks James ought to want to be producing novels with 'vivid and salient' features, which create an overall, unified effect; in short, which strike the reader as large, in spite of James's apparent skill in delineating the small. In fact, *Roderick Hudson* is judged to be

²³ Unsigned review of *Roderick Hudson*, in *North American Review*, April 1876; quoted in *CH*, p.41.

characteristically small in both its conception and reception; its success is personal and localised - since it amounts to achieving what its author intended - but cannot be 'large', since it fails to live up to the vague but impressively-sized notions sketched by the reviewer of what a novel should do.

Before attempting to clarify what this successful novel might be like, it is important to recognise the criticism of James's method advanced here as a template for many similar injunctions - dogmatic but indeterminate - that a novel should have some kind of holistic singleness of purpose which apparently could not be found in James's concern with economy, smallness and detail. In this instance, James's method of aggregating 'small particles [...] cunningly put together' is declared simply to be 'wrong'. One could challenge the reviewer's logic in arguing that if James has indeed produced the effect he aimed for, then surely his method of doing so must have been the right one. However, the reviewer introduces this image of 'honest cutting and shaping from the piece' as the method which is opposed to James's in being the truly artistic one, but which itself raises many questions about the workings of this method which cannot be easily answered. What did the reviewer mean, then, when he advocated 'honest cutting and shaping from the piece?' It can be seen to imply concerns about unity and singularity of purpose and design, as well as a wish to endow the role of the successful novelist with the responsibility and ethics of hard work, honesty and craftsmanship. The reviewer's tactic of resorting to an evocative metaphor makes his terms of success extremely difficult to define when applied to any specific novel. Nevertheless, the broad concept this image is meant to represent, and which I am choosing to define as 'largeness', is taken up and supported in many other reviews of James's novels (and indeed novels of the period) and, hazy as it

is, becomes supremely important in the emerging theory of the novel.²⁴ The importance of 'largeness', and its imputed qualities, is the principle James becomes most anxious to challenge, I will argue, in his own attempt to establish an Anglicised theory of the novel.

It is a marked characteristic of James's career that reviewers are frequently certain that there is something missing from his work, but far less sure of themselves when it comes to explaining exactly what the missing element is.

Another relatively early review by W. E. Henley, of *The Europeans*, makes this attempt:

The effect of the whole thing is that of something colourless and cold, but so subtle and right, so skilful and strong, as to force the attention first and afterwards the respect of those who consider it. Mr. James has a sufficient contempt for prettiness and obviousness. [...] All [his characters] are handled with equal acuteness and with equal sympathy, so that the reader's intelligence of one and all is for the nonce as perfect as the writer's. The book is, in fact, a remarkable book; in its merits as in its shortcomings. As it stands, it is perhaps the purest of realism ever done. And there seems every reason to believe that, if Mr. James could, or would, endow such work as in it he approves himself capable of with the interest of a high tragic passion, he might be not only one of the ablest but also one of the most renowned novelists of his epoch.²⁵

Henley has many positive remarks to make about *The Europeans*, but is evidently troubled, in spite of this, about what he feels to be absent and which he feels James has the potential to supply, if only he would make the effort. Even in these complimentary statements, too, there is a note of unease about the manner in which James has accomplished these merits. For example, in describing James's 'equal acuteness and equal sympathy' for all his characters, Henley emphasises the balanced nature of this approach. James's concern with equality

²⁴ The haziness of the concept is an element of its success; it can act as a guideline while avoiding charges of being overly specific or prescriptive. French formal directives, in contrast, are often characterised as tyrannical and undemocratic, restricting the freedom of the individual writer analogously with the French state's actions towards its citizens.

²⁵ W. E. Henley, 'New Novels', in *Academy*, 12 October 1878, vol. 14, 354-5; 354.

implies fairness but also an impartiality which Henley and other reviewers find distinctly daunting, the effect of which Henley identifies as 'something colourless and cold'. To treat things equally is not necessarily to treat them generously; James's 'equal' handling of his characters denies this kind of emotion, with the result that commentators who admire the technique still regret the elements it necessarily excludes. Henley tries harder than most to portray James's approach in a positive light, stating his expectation that James will learn to provide the interest that his fiction currently lacks, a 'high tragic passion'.

In this specification Henley demonstrates the difference between himself and less discerning reviewers of James's work, who declare that the absence of a conventional happy ending is what spoils James's novels, and reprove him for delineating such unpassionate love affairs. Henley, having recognised that James is never likely to fall back on such staples of popular success, imagines hopefully that a 'high tragic passion' will be consonant with the kind of narrative James is developing. Demanding conventional displays of emotion and their conventional results is the trite response of many critics to James's fiction; however, this does not mean that the absence of those things is a superficial concern. James's more sensitive critics were prepared to appreciate emotional involvement which was more complex than popular taste would like; the fears they voiced were that James was reluctant to engage even in this, preferring instead a careful withholding of all apparent strong feeling by or for his characters, which they could not rationalise and regarded as 'something colourless and cold'.

In spite of James's concern to keep his fictions short, the number of occasions in reviews when a reference (often disparaging, and almost certainly with an air of weariness) is made to the length of his latest novel demonstrates

the gap between James's image of his own fictions and their common reception. An admittedly harsh review of *Portrait* in the *Athenaeum* comments that the novel is 'of enormous length, being printed much more closely than is usual with three volume novels'.²⁶ It is interesting to note this impression that the text itself is irritatingly small; which perhaps reflects the reviewer's attitude that he has had to concentrate on a mass of small detail much harder than he would have liked and has had his eyesight ruined without good cause. Neither is this the only remark of its kind: the review of *Portrait* in *Blackwood's Magazine* describes it as 'three very large volumes',²⁷ and while many similar observations could be cited, the most concisely fatigued appears in this *Literary World* review of 1899:

Four hundred and fifty-seven pages of Henry James's analysis, intricacy, dry cleverness, and disheartening suggestiveness make a pretty big dose for one time. Such is *The Awkward Age*.²⁸

In this one respect, then, James *was* seen as a 'large' author; common opinion was that he took too long to say too little. His work was evidently felt to be more demanding simply to get through, as well as to appreciate when finished, than was normally expected of a novel. The fact that, for most of James's career, the often oversized and padded three-decker was still the favoured form of publication for the novel, emphasises the point that length *per se* was by no means off-putting to Victorian readers. The 'largeness' to which they are partial, as we have seen, is not supplied by length any more than it is by the accumulation of detail with which James painstakingly constructed his narratives, but which was received ambivalently as a 'marvellous mosaic'. The comments above on *The Awkward Age* represent James's length as tiring because of the evenness of its keel, its author's refusal to venture into entertaining or

²⁶ Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 26 November 1881 (vol.2) no.2822, p.699.

emotional diversions. Terms like ‘analysis’ (often applied as censure to James’s work), and ‘intricacy’ are again cited as qualities of which a little will go a long way; it is not the case that analysis and intricacy are entirely bad, but that in excess they crowd out other elements which readers and reviewers would also like to see in the novel. The compound terms quoted from the *Awkward Age* review demonstrate this equivocal attitude to James’s own: references to his ‘dry cleverness’ and ‘disheartening suggestiveness’ imply that in each instance the noun should have been an asset, but was qualified and its value reduced by the adjective. James strives for balance and evenness in his narratives in a belief that this is what makes a novel complete. Ironically his audience often seem to respond to this balance as the element which *prevents* the novel from being complete, precluding the emotional imbalance, the unevenness that indicates authorial engagement, as the completing quality.

Another popular criticism of James derived from the issue of genre – more precisely, late nineteenth-century attempts to reconcile the narrative tropes of romance with the more contemporary school of realism that had entered fiction. The debate between the two became a dominant feature of literary culture in the 1890s, and while Robert Louis Stevenson and others produced insightful contributions to the debate, other less subtle critics saw the issue as a straightforward battle in which only one form could be championed. In this kind of article, James generally surfaced as the villain regardless of the author’s preferences, because while his work was often held up as an example of accomplished realism (as in Henley’s review of *The Europeans*) that quality was often equated in hostile reviews with accomplished dullness and monotony,

²⁷ Unsigned, ‘Recent Novels’, in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, March 1882, vol.131, 365-391; 377.

saying, in effect, that James's brand of realism gave the genre a bad name.

James's realism was identified with his 'analytical' style, and thus was judged to be excessive in causing more important things to be omitted from his fiction, a point of view elucidated by this review from the *Critic*:

All lovers of the analytical method in novel-writing will find in *The Portrait of a Lady* the perfection of this form. There is not a single character in the book to whom we grow enthusiastically attached, not one of whom we approve of steadily. They are the best when they are left half drawn. [...] He seems able to deal with but one thing at a time. When we have finished Lord Warburton, as we think, pretty effectually, then we may take up Madame Merle. When she is labeled and ticketed we may have Mr. Osmond. When Mr. Osmond is well under way and has lost our sympathy, we may start afresh with his daughter.²⁹

This reviewer declares what others have hinted at: that excessive analysis of characters aborts emotional engagement with them, by either author or reader.

The images of 'growing' attached to and 'steadily' approving of characters presuppose the enthusiasm for an organic concept of the novel, in which all parts are interconnected and interrelated to the whole, which James himself advocates in essays like 'The Art of the Novel'. However, this reviewer (among others) clearly envisions organic unity quite differently, considering James's characters to remain static after a certain point rather than either 'growing' or growing on the reader, as his remarks on *Portrait*'s protagonists indicate. The kind of perfection, then, provided by this apparently super-analytic style of fiction is an inappropriate use of the techniques of realism, which in James's hands become cold and unfeeling. The accusation that James is 'able to deal with but one thing at a time', implies his approach to be systematic and amateurish, and provides another example of how a deliberate tactic on James's part is interpreted by critics as a failure, in not doing what they would prefer James to want to do. The

²⁸ Unsigned review of *The Awkward Age*, in *Literary World*, July 1899, quoted in *CH*, p.294.

entrances of successive characters into the narrative of *Portrait* is consciously delayed, allowing the reader to make successive and separate efforts (though each is still influenced by its predecessor) to predict how Isabel will react to the newcomer. Since they are in turn the centre of Isabel's attention, they must also occupy the centre of the narrative for that period, and no longer. While this is actually part of a careful plan (albeit one which, as James admitted, begins too slowly and has to speed up near the end), Isabel's single-mindedness is here interpreted as James's, and as a limitation of James's, at that. This reviewer's preference for 'half-drawn' characters, from which one need not expect so much, shows a scepticism about James's ability to provide completeness, which James himself was later to adopt toward the novel as a form. In both cases, but for different reasons, 'realism' in its purest form was felt to be important, but not above all else.

Alternatively, reviewers took the easy route and attacked James for not providing a 'story' which is plot-driven in the spirit of romance, as shown in this review of *The Princess Casamassima* which ironically welcomes an exception to the Jamesian rule:

Who, for instance, would ever have believed that the author of *Daisy Miller* would ever condescend to make a real story? Who would ever have anticipated that he could do it well? [...] Here is a genuine romance, with conspirators, and harlots, and stabbings, and jails, and low-lived men and women who drop their h's, and real incidents, and strong emotions, and everything 'in a concatenation accordingly'. I cannot congratulate the author too heartily on his escape into fiction, nor advise too strongly that he should be encouraged on all hands, in the way which authors love, to go on in his new path, and leave forever behind him the land of ghosts and shadows in which he has sojourned so long.³⁰

²⁹ Unsigned review of *Portrait*, in *Critic*, December 1881, quoted in *CH*, p.107.

³⁰ 'London Letter', by 'H.B.', in *Critic*, December 1886, quoted in *CH*, p.179.

The irony of using 'real story' as a term of approval for what is then defined as 'a genuine romance' illustrates the tendency of both sides to appropriate the same virtues as characteristic of their preferred mode of writing. The more accomplished writers of the period (including James himself) were aware of the interdependency of realism and romance and were able to combine elements of both. However, this article from the *Critic* is clear in its allegiance to the tropes of romance; the inclusion of 'conspirators, and harlots, and stabbings' makes a truly complete novel, with the representation of James's earlier work as 'the land of ghosts and shadows' vividly conveying a sense of this approach as limited and intrinsically incomplete. Earlier in the piece, *The Princess Casamassima* is appreciatively compared to the fiction of Bulwer-Lytton, and this highlights another tactic employed by reviewers: the appeal to literary tradition. While George Eliot, Thackeray and others with claims to artistry are more likely to be cited in this context, this strategy of locating James's work in relation to 'real' and indeed 'large' novelists of the past is frequently used to invoke an authoritative vision of what fiction should be like. An example is this passage responding to an 1882 article on James by Howells in the *Century*, which undertakes to refute all of Howells' praise:

And then the theory is laid down, that the silly old custom of finishing a novel should be discarded. There is to be no beginning, no middle, and no end. It is like a lucky-bag at a bazaar – you thrust your hand in and take out anything you can find. As Mr. Howells says, the reader must be left 'arbiter of the destiny of the author's creations'. The novelist provides the characters, and everybody is left free to dispose of them according to his own taste. Thus, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the fate of all the personages in the book is left unsettled...³¹

This characterises the attitude of reviewers who assert their dislike of James in the context of nostalgia – they overtly take pride in presenting themselves as

³¹ 'American Novels', in *Quarterly Review*, January 1883, vol. 155, pp.201-229; p.214.

'old-fashioned' admirers of 'silly old customs' like finishing a story, which have the weight of fictional precedent to support them. This premature yearning for the golden age of the novel involves conveniently forgetting that the novel is not, as such critics imply, an age-old form which has been established in its current fashion for centuries, and assuming – perhaps unconsciously, but also conveniently – that the values of their age are eternal ones, or, at least, have been in place for long enough to make any alternative inherently inferior.

Interestingly, the nostalgic attitude can be supported either by deploring the lack of artistry and haphazard approach of modern writers – as in the above representation of James's work as 'a lucky-bag at a bazaar', or by the opposite route of frowning on the very modernity of the artistry used in these works, as in this passage from a review of *The Awkward Age*:

We are willing to commend the novels of to-day to the careful attention to students of advanced mathematics, and shall content ourselves hereafter with the simple old novelists who were unsophisticated enough to write straightforward stories.³²

This approach condemns modern fiction like James's as being constructed in the style of and from the vocabulary of modern science, represented as the natural foe of old-fashioned innocence and narrative simplicity. Again, the charge does not entirely miss the mark: James's fiction can be aligned to some degree with a formally-driven, technical approach to novel-writing.³³ Nevertheless, the strategy of declaring contemporary fiction to be overly scientific (either in form, social attitudes, or both) and harking back to the days of 'straightforward stories' was always popular with reviewers, and constituted a cheap shot when directed at James, who was in no way trying to imitate the novelists of yesteryear, and was

³² Unsigned review of *The Awkward Age*, in *Sewanee Review*, January 1900, in *CH*, p.299.

³³ Frequent use of mathematical images in his novels and his general interest in numbers and symmetry are an important part of James's work, and are discussed in chapter six.

recognised by more sympathetic critics as someone who was at least consistent in his desire to be modern and to extend the conventional boundaries of the novel.

Though much of James's work was received with hostility by contemporary critics, it is misleading to imagine that none of his aims was understood. Indeed, towards the end of his career more and more sympathetic overviews of his work began to appear. These reviewers tend to divide into two sub-groups: those who interpret James's 'weak endings' as a conscious element of his artistry, and those who chastise James's conclusions as a weakness all the more noticeable because of his obvious talent. R. H. Hutton, who reviewed several of James's novels, takes the second view, which he expresses most forcibly in his unsigned review of *The Portrait of a Lady*:

That he [James] always likes to end his tales with a failure of anything like the old poetic justice, we all know. That perplexing relations should ravel themselves, rather than unravel themselves, and end, so far as there is an ending at all, in something worse than they began in, is one of Mr. Henry James's canons of art. [...] But never before has he closed a novel by setting up quite so cynical a sign-post into the abyss as he does in this book. He ends his *Portrait of a Lady*, if we do not wholly misinterpret the rather covert, not to say almost cowardly, hints of his last page, by calmly indicating that this ideal lady of his, whose belief in purity has done so much to alienate her from her husband, in that it had made him smart under her contempt for his estimates of the world, saw a 'straight path' to a liaison with her rejected lover.³⁴

Hutton is evidently familiar with James's work, and in many respects appreciative of it; he admires the representation of most of the cast of *Portrait* and is particularly impressed with the characterisation of Osmond. Yet James's defiant avoidance of 'poetic justice' and of unravelling his narrative to completeness, engenders a level of frustration in Hutton which causes him to misread the novel's ending. As the last sentence quoted above progresses in its

³⁴ Unsigned review, by R.H. Hutton, in *Spectator*, November 1881; quoted in *CH*, pp.95-6.

description of the plot, it resembles the actual events of the novel less and less; the idea that Isabel is finally seen discarding her scruples to become Caspar Goodwood's kept woman suggests that Hutton has been reading the wrong novel. He has certainly made an uncharacteristic error of judgement, apparently provoked by James's refusal to provide either a sense of moral closure, of 'poetic justice', or a structural closure in terms of harmonising the end of the narrative. The fact that a capable critic like Hutton can make this mistake shows the risk James was taking in choosing to upset his readers' expectations on so many levels. James's own expectation that an attentive readership would rise to the occasion is itself shown to be disappointed.

Hutton's misreading of the novel's end is to some extent redeemed by the fact that before that point, his review had already argued that *Portrait* was excellent in many details, but lacking centre and 'largeness' on the whole, in that it gave fine portraits of all its characters except the central one, Isabel:

She has no faith whatever, no fixed standard even of inward life and motive, though she is always chasing ideals of no particular substance, or even uniformity, in them. Why she is so much fascinated by a man so utterly destitute of anything that is large in mind or heart, as Mr. Osmond [...] it is impossible to say.³⁵

Osmond's lack of 'largeness' is a reflection of that same lack in Isabel, something Hutton finds unforgivable in a heroine. His ardent belief in the Victorian virtue of 'largeness', the necessity for some form of faith, passion or ideal which guides life and narrative, is shaken by *Portrait*'s portrayal of largeness as unreachable and unsustainable. While Hutton's critical abilities are shown to be on a level above most others in his construction of an argument that engages with the whole structure of *Portrait*, rather than merely grumbling about

³⁵ Ibid, p.93.

its ending, the critical values of his time are endemic to his views of James's work.

H. E Scudder's review of *The Bostonians*, in contrast, finds faults in parts of James's narrative, but also finds them forgivable because of the convincing effect of the whole. He, too, criticises the end of the novel in question before putting his disappointment into context:

The final scene of the book [...] ought to have been a climax; instead of which, by its noise and confusion, and its almost indecent exposure of Miss Chancellor's mind, the scene allows the story just to tumble down at the end ... It is when we stop and take a look at the book as a whole that we forget how fine the web is spun, and remember only the strong conception which underlies the book; the freshness of the material used; the amazing cleverness of separate passages; the consummate success shown in so dangerous a scene as the death of Miss Birdseye, where the reticence of art is splendidly displayed; and in fine the prodigal wealth scattered through all the pages. There is sorry waste, and one's last thought about the work is a somewhat melancholy one, but we all have a lurking affection for prodigals.³⁶

Scudder's experience of reading James's work is the opposite of Hutton's; while dissatisfied with some of its details, he admires the 'strong conception which underlies the book'. Even though some of his praise comes near to undermining the idea of the book as a successful whole - such as his tributes to the 'amazing cleverness of separate passages', and the 'prodigal wealth scattered through all the pages', both of which imply that the novel's structure is somewhat wayward - he concludes his review with his 'lurking affection' for the novel in spite of its 'waste' and 'melancholy'. For Scudder, James's art proves its largeness in being, at the right moments, small. His description of how, in Miss Birdseye's death scene 'the reticence of art is splendidly displayed', concurs with James's own feelings that less is more, as well as capturing the contradictions which

³⁶ H. E Scudder, review of (among other novels) *The Bostonians*, in *Atlantic*, June 1886; quoted in *CH*, p.168.

characterise James's most successful moments, in the paradox of 'reticence' being 'displayed'. Scudder, in short, is convinced of the presence of 'largeness' in *The Bostonians*, as Hutton is not with *Portrait*; while that is clearly at some level a subjective judgement, it is still the criterion by which James's novels are most frequently judged to be successes or failures. George Moore, in a passage from his autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Young Man* (originally published in 1886) gives a particularly illuminating view of this one indefinable quality as being crucial in its presence:

I will admit that an artist may be great and limited; by one word he may light up an abyss of soul; but there must be this one magical and unique word. Shakespeare gives us the word, Balzac, sometimes after pages of vain striving, gives us the word, Tourgueneff gives it always; but Henry James only flutters about it; his whole book is one long flutter near to the one magical and unique word, but the word is not spoken; and for want of the word his characters are never resolved out of the haze of nebulae.³⁷

Questioning of a work's largeness tends to produce self-justifying answers – if critics like the work, they consider it 'large', and if they do not, they say it is not. The result of this does not solve the difficulty of defining what largeness is, but does demonstrate its perceived importance and, therefore, the radical nature of James's challenge to largeness, his doubts about how positive a quality it really was, and his narrative attempts to subvert readers' demands for such 'largeness'.

James's most celebrated essay, 'The Art of Fiction', is central to his theory of the novel, and also to my examination of his theories of the complete novel. This is not because of its venerable status, or the fact that it is by far the most well known piece by James on the subject of his own art. Rather, it locates problems of completion as central to James's artistic practice, by making the difficulty of determining what constitutes proper closure in fiction the major

factor in influencing relations between the writer and his audience – and, therefore, making that factor central to any theories of the novel. In a relatively short essay, James not only returns to the subject of completion again and again, but also uses the word itself repeatedly, betraying his anxiety about this point when applied to the characters of artists themselves. The opening sentence presents the issue as uppermost in both James's conscious and unconscious mind:

I should not have affixed so comprehensive a title to these few remarks, *necessarily wanting in any completeness* upon a subject the full consideration of which would carry us far, did I not seem to discover a pretext for my temerity in the interesting pamphlet lately published under this name by Mr. Walter Besant. [my italics] (AF, p.3)

The assertion at the beginning reflects the stance James takes towards his own fictions, that 'the *whole* of anything is never told'; something which will be borne out by my examination of the novels in subsequent chapters.³⁷ James begins in announcing the *necessary* incompleteness of what he is about to say – making it not a confession of his own inadequacy, but an assertion of the inevitable shortfalls of narrative – and stating that it was engendered as part of a dialogue, rather than pretending to stand as a self-supporting text. It is an intrinsic element of James's project in 'The Art of the Novel' that his argument is produced by the pre-existence of an, albeit untheorised, discussion about the purpose of the novel. However, James's charges of the novel's incompleteness are not, as this might suggest, based on attacking the artistry of past novelists:

Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it [...] I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that: it would take much more courage than I

³⁷ George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1886 (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p.156.

³⁸ Henry James, from entry on *The Portrait of a Lady*, in *Notebooks*, p.15.

possess to intimate that the form of the novel as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. (AF, p.3.)

While James is keen to assert that his agenda is not to undermine the reputation of great English novelists, this statement does nevertheless seem to be aimed at getting his audience back on side after his reference to the superior terminology of the French. By paying tribute to masters like Dickens and Thackeray, long enough dead to be considered part of the previous generation and therefore an established part of English literary tradition, James establishes himself as being properly appreciative of that tradition, without committing himself to approving all of its present-day practices. This qualified praise of the English tradition presupposes, however, that the novel of James's generation has somehow become, or has come to seem, tainted with 'incompleteness'; James's next use of the term, though, is again to reassure the audience of his fidelity, this time to the ideal of realism:

The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it make itself humble in order to be forgiven; and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, *complete*. [my italics]. (AF, p.5.)

The legitimacy of James's analogy between painters and writers is not (interesting though it may be) in itself of interest to me here. What seems significant for my purposes is the comfort offered to James by the idea of something being complete, and the evident belief that, in spite of his doubts about the attainability of completeness in the actual writing of a novel, it is still a condition deserving of the highest praise, and the one to which both art and criticism, however hopelessly, should continue to aspire. James seems to be subtly advancing his argument by his careful qualification of the terms he uses.

He states the novel is supposed to ‘*attempt* to represent life’: not necessarily to do so, and certainly not to *fully* represent life, for instance.³⁹ In making his analogy with the painter, he repeats the word twice, describing ‘the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter’; thereby justifying the analogy because of the shared ambition of the attempt, rather than arguing that painting is the form in which this attempt, by definition, succeeds. By using these qualifications, James can be seen to endorse the realist form of the English novel, while actually qualifying any idea of its unquestioned success, as he himself begins to develop his own modes of narrative representation and move towards an embryonic modernism. More importantly, he endorses the nature of any artistic enterprise as a *attempt*, an essay into something not necessarily complete – an argument which is still being developed in ‘The Art of Fiction’, and only later shown, in his later fictions, as extending to the point of art being defined as necessarily *incomplete*.

Warming to his subject, James’s discussion of the purpose of literature, as determined by its audience, brings up the difficulty that (as shown in my first chapter) in a practical sense proves to be the greatest test of his resilience as a novelist: the requirement of the right ending. On the question of what a ‘good’ novel is, James’s suggestions all directly address issues with which he has problems:

One [critic] would say that being good means representing virtuous and aspiring characters, placed in prominent positions; another would say that it depends on a ‘happy ending’, on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks. Another still would say that it means being full of incident and movement, so that we shall wish to jump ahead, to see who was the mysterious stranger, and if the stolen will was ever found, and shall not be distracted from this pleasure by any tiresome analysis or ‘description’. (AF, p.7)

³⁹James’s use of ‘representation’ indicates a more than usually subtle understanding of the problems and contradictions inherent to realism, in comparison with many of his reviewers.

James's satirising of the constituents of a 'happy ending' demonstrates the level of his exasperation with critical demands in this quarter. His scepticism towards the kind of upbeat conclusion preferred by both his publishers and his readers became evident as early in his career as the serialisation of *The American*, when he defended staunchly to Howells the incongruity, as he saw it, of marrying off Newman and Claire de Cintr . This remark of James's is particularly well-known; however, the other criteria for goodness mentioned are similarly significant. James is hardly in the league of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Harrison Ainsworth or Mary Elizabeth Braddon in terms of glamorising villains, a tendency frequently singled out by Victorian critics concerned for the moral welfare of novel readers. However, his fictions often conclude with an equally troubling implication: that 'virtuous and aspiring characters' are often punished rather than rewarded, and this contributes to the struggles of James's reviewers to explain the coldness of the final impression made on them by his novels. While James does not overtly flout the novelist's moral duty by rewarding 'bad' characters (it is clear even to the most hostile reader that characters who fill that role - in that they actively contribute to the suffering of 'good' characters - such as Gilbert Osmond, Madame Merle, Charlotte Stant, or even the Bellegardes, are not themselves allowed to escape without some kind of punishment), he pointedly refuses to award good ones the recompense that many Victorian readers felt was their due. Without necessarily permitting evil to flourish, James was perceived to withhold the expected dividends of virtue; he is judged, as it were, to be lacking rather than guilty.

James's mention of 'jumping ahead', too, marks out a response to fiction that he felt to be almost criminal on the part of the reader - having, as he did,

such high expectations of the response his hoped-for readers would provide. The incidents he uses here as examples of what makes readers 'skip' to see what happens are clearly stock ingredients of sensation fiction. While James was far from being hostile to the genre, he resented his novels being judged by its standards. Reviewers (as can be seen from some reviews quoted earlier) urged him to fill them with more incidents, which – since James himself considered them to already contain sufficient incident – actually amounted to a request for events of a more sensational nature. He argues explicitly against the need for sensationalism in a novel that is not sensational later in the essay, stating:

When a young man makes up his mind that he has not faith enough after all to enter the church as he intended, that is an incident, though you may not hurry to the end of the chapter to see whether perhaps he doesn't change once more. (*AF*, p.13)

The ironic references to 'hurrying to the end of a chapter' and to creating tension through repeated vacillation on the part of the protagonist are clearly directed at the techniques of sensation fiction which interfere with what James saw as the proper tempo and process of reading. He argues that a novel lacking in *sensational* incident is not, in spite of some critics' opinions, a novel lacking in incident, but also argues that sensational techniques are not necessary to a broadly realistic novel, nor is it, in most cases, appropriate to expect to find them there.⁴⁰ James's ideal of the complete novel was that every part was sufficient to the moment of reading; the complete reading experience would involve a willingness to pay equal attention to each part of the narrative, as opposed to

⁴⁰ This point follows on from, and is analogous with, my earlier assertion that James could find sensation fiction and its strategies appealing, while sincerely wishing that his work would not be judged by its rules. I want to stress that James is not averse to using the techniques of sensational narrative (and this will be discussed further, specially in relation to *The American* and *Portrait*, in chapter four) himself, but considers it entirely his prerogative to choose when to do so. While on several occasions he achieves his chosen aim by combining realism and sensationalism, he

rushing towards the ultimate reward of the story's conclusion. In this light it is easier to see both what James was trying to do, and how different the expectations of his actual readers were from the ideal reader posited by his ideal of completeness. Later on in the essay, he states:

I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks [...] A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. (*AF*, p.13)

This remark shows that the idea of organic unity, prized by the Victorian novel-reading public, is not in its conceptual form one with which James has a quarrel. On this issue his difficulty lies in his belief that such unity takes a form which is often quite different from the reading public's favoured form; they disagree on a question of interpretation rather than on the principle itself. What it also demonstrates, though, is James's resistance to a linear valuation of the novel, where the whole structure is seen as leading up to its end as the summit and summation of the whole; his advocacy of a non-linear model for fiction, while not formulated in those terms, is tacitly displayed in his frequent use, in his criticism, of circular and cyclical metaphors to describe the way experience should be represented in fiction. An example of this is the well-known passage from James's preface to the New York edition of *Roderick Hudson* discussed in my previous chapter. In 'The Art of Fiction', too, a similar metaphor is brought into play:

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. (*AF*, p.10)

At this point in the essay, James is challenging the prescription of Walter Besant, in his own essay on 'The Art of Fiction', that authors should write from experience, and, conversely, not attempt to write about situations outside that personal experience. As with the passage from the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, James's use of a spherical metaphor, that of the spider-web, is particularly illuminating with regard to his ideas of completeness in fiction. While a spider-web can vary in size, its structural parts are interdependent and equally important; each section of the web would be equally representative of, and important within, the whole. The structure of James's imagery, then, redefines the nature of the structure of a complete novel as aspiring toward these spherical models of the circle and the spider-web, rather than the linear progression that supports the practice of 'skipping', and necessitates 'appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks'.

James's position, therefore, identifies the convention of the happy ending as the aspect of Victorian novelistic conventions, as a whole, to which he is most obviously and straightforwardly opposed. As a result, he produces one of his clearest and most appealing similes to describe the situation:

The ending of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddling doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes. (*AF*, p.10)

While a number of the critics I quoted earlier objected to James's downbeat endings on the grounds that they were *not* artistic, his assertion that a non-happy ending is generally received as having spoiled the reader's fun, denying them the concrete satisfactions of comforting closure in the name of a selfish devotion to his own art, has a considerable degree of truth, and is reflected in many remarks of that nature made in reviews of James's individual works. James's casting of

himself as a doctor, however, is an ambiguous figuring of the role of the writer.⁴¹ It suggests a benevolent intention on the writer's part, but couples this with the implication that the true writer will perform the duty of imposing nasty-tasting medicine on the public, on the understanding that it will be for their own good. This kind of relationship awards power to the deserving and authoritative (in all senses) party, the writer, while imagining the audience in terms of an ideally passive patient who would gratefully obey instructions about what they needed. Therefore, James's metaphor is both incisive about the more banal demands of his audience, and reductive about the possibilities in the author-reader relationship, which for James ought to exist in a very particular form, as demonstrated by the metaphors of doctoring and consumption employed here. As a result, his theory of completeness in fiction is simultaneously progressive and liberating - as in his insistence that (in contrast to Besant's view) no author should be obliged to write only about events they have experienced themselves - and also indicative of his own limitations and prejudices.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, James's theories of the novel are focused on establishing such a theory as part of a specifically English literary culture. However, he is also carefully directing his argument to reach an Anglo-American audience, having offended potential readerships on both sides of the Atlantic at various times by satirical portrayals of national character. Mindful of this, James is muted in his references to French fiction, though he ventures into

⁴¹ In James's fictions, doctors are generally ambiguous and slightly sinister figures; this is more obviously the case the larger their part in the narrative. (Sir Matthew Hope, who takes a relatively minor role in *Portrait* and *The Tragic Muse*, is allowed to be benign.) Doctor Augustus Sloper in *Washington Square*, and Sir Luke Strett in *The Wings of the Dove* are characters who by virtue of their position have the status of being morally unimpeachable, but show a disturbing interest (more subtly portrayed and latent in Strett than in Sloper) in manipulating others' emotions and actions for no reason other than the personal interest it may afford them, a trait which could be seen as analogous to James's ideal notion of the artist whose responsibilities are primarily to

praise when arguing against categorising novels as ‘romances’, ‘modern’, or otherwise:

The French, who have brought the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness, have but one name for the novel, and have not attempted smaller things in it, that I can see, for that. (*AF*, p.14)

James is not wholly uncritical of the French novel; nevertheless, it is significant that his high estimation of its achievements is based on this image of its ‘remarkable completeness’, in contrast with which the English novel is characterised by potential completeness, which is hampered by habits of self-limitation and an insistence on categorisation and prescription of subject.

Addressing Walter Besant’s argument, James states:

Mr. Besant [...] mentions a category of impossible things, and among them he places ‘fiction without adventure’. Why without adventure, more than without matrimony, or celibacy, or parturition, or cholera, or hydropathy, or Jansenism? This seems to me to bring the novel back to the hapless little *rôle* of being an artificial, ingenious thing – bring it down from its large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life. (*AF*, p.19)

Any need to dictate the subject of a novel, or to place restraints on its subject, is categorised by James as a reductive desire for – in this case – unproductive smallness. This is not the minaturisation or economy James usually professes his interest in, but what he calls a ‘hapless little rôle’, a disempowering smallness in contrast to the empowering ‘large, free character’ a novel should assume. The crucial difference between James’s ideas and his predecessors is in their diverging ideas over who confers largeness on a work, which, in turn, actually defines what that largeness is. For James, the artist himself does so – hence the address of the last section of ‘The Art of the Novel’ to aspiring authors, who are told in conclusion to ‘be as complete as possible – to make as perfect a work. Be

himself rather than his audience (which, of course, would be a dangerous characteristic of

generous and delicate and pursue the prize'. They, not their audience, accord completeness to a novel. In contrast, while the completeness cherished by earlier critics is generated by the author of a work, it is only validated by producing the right effect on its readership.

The most striking impression gained from 'The Art of Fiction' is its insistence on the value and pursuit of completeness, whatever that might be, as the effect towards which all novelists should aspire. This not only illustrates the paradox of James's attitude towards completing fictions - which, in conjunction with my discussion in chapter one, is shown to be deeply ambivalent - but also the paradox inherent in ideas of what a 'complete novel' might be, as something to be achieved by way of being both selective and inclusive. James's own separation of the idea of conclusion from that of completeness is demonstrated in the closing paragraph of the essay:

If you must indulge in conclusions, let them have the taste of a wide knowledge. Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible - to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize. (AF, p.23)

The aspiration James recommends is a relative one - to be 'as complete as possible', but he is nevertheless insistent on its value.

In discussing the rise of the 'best-seller' in the nineteenth century, Peter Keating describes its appeal as follows:

At a time when the most advanced novelists were striving to refine themselves out of fiction, to subdue their personalities in favour of dramatic, oblique or impersonal narrative methods, the best-selling author slid easily into the spot vacated by the mid-Victorians, berating, consoling or denouncing the reader, and always telling a strong story. In opposition to the godless relativism of the age, the best-seller asserted the existence of absolute values.⁴²

someone acting as a doctor).

⁴² Keating, p.442.

The best-seller, Keating goes on to say, was regarded as a comfort to readers, who felt an almost personal gratitude towards the books and their authors. The largeness of this emotional effect was the complete opposite of James's intention, which is declared in 'The Art of the Novel' as being to comfort the author, and award the responsibility of interpretation to the reader. Conversely, this kind of largeness is often, I would argue, an approximation of the elusive element which reviewers complain is lacking in James's work, thus explaining his failure to become a best-selling novelist himself. However, what becomes clear from comparing James's attempts at a theory of the novel with those of his contemporaries, is the pervasive appeal of the concept of completeness as expressed in terms of 'largeness', terms which even James himself found both appealing and useful. He states in 'The Art of the Novel':

There is as much difference as ever between a good novel and a bad one; the bad is swept with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble into some unvisited limbo, or infinite rubbish-yard beneath the back windows of the world, and the good subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection. (*AF*, p.8)

These terms, while actually describing something quite different from the best-sellers described by Keating, employ a vocabulary of largeness which invokes the ideals closest to the heart of the reading and reviewing public. As such, James's practice of the novel may have been slow to win readers over, but by utilising the tools of his more conservative peers, his theories of the novel have reached the distinction of being both ahead of their time and consonant with it.

Chapter Three

'The *placeable* small thing': James's non-fiction and being a 'complete' writer

James's literary reputation is obviously based, first and foremost, on his work as a novelist. To a lesser degree, he is known for his work in a variety of other literary genres, though more often remembered for his failures in those fields, such as *Guy Domville*, than for his successes. It is interesting, then, that James did not advance a theory of journalism, short story composition, travel writing, or any of the other genres in which he worked. On the contrary, he often used his non-fictional productions as vehicles in which to propound his theories of fiction, and of the novel in particular. The novel was clearly the literary form of greatest interest and worth to James; even so, he never abandoned his interest and involvement in other forms of literary production. Clearly, some motivations – whether commercial, psychological or circumstantial – existed which account for James's continuing to work in genres which apparently hold less interest for him and which present him with a lesser challenge than his favourite pursuit.

This chapter examines James's career in writing for periodicals, as an underexplored aspect of his writing career as a whole. It has three broad objectives. The first is to show that James's difficulty in finishing his fictions, and in providing closure for those fictions, is an intrinsic attribute of his writings, which can be found in his lesser-known and lower-rated productions just as it is in his greatest novels. This attribute represents both a problem James tried to overcome, and also a deliberate strategy he employed as part of his interest in developing and subverting traditional forms. In other words, James's absence of closure variously signifies a failure or a success, depending on the text in question and his aims in it, as later chapters in this thesis will demonstrate.

Secondly, I intend to examine the hierarchy within the James canon, and to argue for the necessity and importance of its 'lesser' elements in understanding James's career. In the context of the literary climate of the late nineteenth century, the figure of the (especially male) writer needed to fulfil various criteria to be judged as a consummate author, a role James craved in spite of his often ambivalent feelings towards contemporary popular culture and literary culture in particular. Moreover, James developed within this orthodoxy his own views of what made a writer a 'complete' writer, which he worked throughout his career to fulfil. The art of fiction alone, while being James's artistic priority, could not sustain this ambition; James's production of more ephemeral writings fulfilled various aspects of his authorial persona, including and shifting between his financial, social and artistic aims.

Thirdly, then, this chapter advances my argument that James's 'organic' theory of fiction (which by implication extends to writing in general), as examined in the previous chapter, has been misunderstood and misapplied by critics. This notion of the organic, perfectly proportioned entity is interpreted as James advocating a structure of homogeneous parts within the whole, creating a homogeneous, symmetrical and evenly proportioned relational nexus. The hierarchy of James's writings, to which I have already referred, is apparently justified by James's own requirement for any text or body of text(s) to have 'centre', and is thus endorsed by many critics in their explicit prioritisation of a particular phase of James's career.¹ In fact, James's 'organic' theory does not endorse homogeneity within the organic body, but instead demonstrates the importance of diverse elements in the text (or canon) performing diverse tasks, which are interrelated without belonging to an equal or fixedly symmetrical relationship.

¹ This takes the form of a critical assertion that a certain period or group of texts represents James's best work, and that therefore these works are at the 'centre' of Jamesian meaning and craft, the others being a kind of Bloomian distorted reflection of his true artistic accomplishment. For instance, F.R. Leavis's declaration that *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Bostonians* and *The Europeans* embody Jamesian perfection contrasts with much contemporary criticism which cites *The Ambassadors* (which Leavis hated) and the other 'late' novels as the peak of James's achievements. This critical discourse tends to become synecdochic, its focus on the 'exemplary' Jamesian text often subsuming all differences from and

James's non-fictional periodical writings are a constant career presence, which are nevertheless regularly re- and dis-placed in the James hierarchy, often through published collections that draw on this pool of writings. These texts provide different means of furthering James's 'completeness' as a writer – financial, psychological, artistic, social, professional – without being confined to any one of these roles, yet without occupying a high profile or achieving critical approval or acclaim.

So how would this hierarchy of James's writings be arranged? His novels would be at the top, with probably his most ephemeral productions, the writings he produced for periodicals, at the bottom. Within this group, too, some productions can be judged to be more ephemeral than others: James's most celebrated essay, 'The Art of Fiction', would be likely to lead a hierarchy of James's periodical writings, having been reproduced many times and elevated to the status of a seminal treatise on fiction as an art. At the bottom of this hierarchy, I believe, would be the writings that, unlike 'The Art of Fiction', are regarded as essentially disposable products of their time: reviews, often of books and authors, sometimes of art exhibitions or theatrical productions, which were not revived by James himself for inclusion in any of his essay collections, and which if reprinted at all since his death, have been revived as curiosities, representing an early and quaint view of James rather than having intrinsic value. Since their author presumably deemed them to be short-lived, an investigation of the cultural and canonical politics involved in selecting material for such collections is worthwhile.

An example of such a collection is *Notes and Reviews by Henry James: A Series of Twenty-five Papers Hitherto Unpublished in Book Form*, first published in 1921, relatively soon after James's death, and reprinted in 1968. The collection has a preface by Pierre De Chaignon la Rose, which sets out clearly his view that the project presented in his volume is unlikely to begin a trend, or engender greater admiration for James's work:

To reprint all the forgotten and unsigned scraps of an eminent author, fleeting papers which he himself refrained from reordering and reissuing, is often to do his memory a cruel disservice. [...] But in the case of Henry James, fortunately or otherwise, we shall, I feel, be spared a completely 'definitive' edition. A few devout Jacobites, the editor included, will regret this; but the reason is not far to seek. James, despite his present posthumous eminence, was never a 'popular' author; and even the most devout Jacobite must admit, albeit with serene tranquillity, that he was not a 'great' one.²

It is not merely by way of his statements about James's reputation that De Chaignon la Rose's preface seems unnecessarily anachronistic (in a way that other relatively early critical remarks on James, such as Edmund Wilson's, do not). One wonders what he would make of the vast number of Jamesian publications available today, which include examples of every type of writing he ever produced, with many texts often available in several versions. The 'completeness' with which James's work is now available can only be matched by the daunting amount of criticism published about it. However, the preface is characterised by this avuncular and patronising approach. De Chaignon la Rose remarks, on an instance where James erroneously uses 'fictitious' instead of 'fictional', that 'he does make this single engaging slip!' and concludes the preface with the sentiment that:

It is a delight to find revealed through them [the reviews] the familiar features of a loved author in his young prime, features already stamped with that distinguishing quality which throughout his long life never grew blurred or dimmed - his supremely endearing 'fineness.'³

Rose presents James's work as something of which a group of devotees are inexplicably fond; the proper view to take of it is one of affection, rather than artistic appreciation. This is reinforced by the vocabulary used to characterise James and his writing, which is dominated by terms such as 'loved', 'engaging' and 'endearing'; when Rose refers to philosophy as 'that family paddock in which he [James] might well have romped with the brilliant gaiety of his eminent brother', he could almost be describing a Crufts

² *Notes and Reviews by Henry James: A Series of Twenty-five Papers Hitherto Unpublished in Book Form*, pref. by Pierre de Chaignon la Rose, 1921 (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. vi-vii; hereafter referred to as *Notes and Reviews*.

³ Preface, *Notes and Reviews*, p. ix, and pp. xv-xvi.

champion of particularly good stock. Above all, he assures us, this edition of James's early work is not intended to invoke literary admiration of his craft, but to make available 'James's unconscious self-portraiture' of himself as a young writer, and thus further endear the already loved author to us.

However, Rose's collection does indeed serve the purpose of providing insight into James's beginnings as a professional writer, though hopefully from a less complacent critical view. James's early non-fictional work, like his fictions, show him beset from the start of his career by the perennial problem of how to end a piece of writing and how to make it coherent and complete as a whole. His first published work was a review of Nassau W. Senior's *Essays on Fiction* (1864), published in *The North American Review* in October 1864 and reprinted as the first item in Rose's collection. This shows James struggling to determine what form a review should take, and what it should achieve; typically, he uses it to make a statement about the nature of fiction in general, and also about the role of the author. The presence of these elements overshadows and inhibits the article as a review of a specific text. However, James's purpose is less to evaluate what Nassau W. Senior is doing in the field of fiction, than to establish himself as a reviewer and as an authority in his own right on the subject of how fiction is and should be written. The review begins as follows:

We opened this work with the hope of finding a general survey of the nature and principles of the subject of which it professes to treat. Its title had led us to anticipate some attempt to codify the vague and desultory canons, which cannot, indeed, be said to govern, but which in some measure define, this department of literature. We had long regretted the absence of any critical treatise upon fiction. But our regret was destined to be embittered by disappointment.⁴

James does go on to justify his disappointment in Senior's approach: the text only discusses five novelists and, we are told, even then merely provides 'an exposition of the plots of their different works', rather than 'an exposition of their general merits'. In

⁴ Henry James, 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott', a review of *Essays on Fiction* by Nassau W. Senior, (London, 1864), originally published in *The North American Review*, October 1864; reprinted in *Notes and Reviews*, pp.1-16; p.1. Hereafter referred to as 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott'.

this he is expecting more than Senior's unassuming title could be said to have promised. However, his rhetorical opening paragraph - the use of 'we', the melodramatic image of the opening of the book, and then the concluding pronouncement of disappointment - seems designed to establish the presence of the reviewer's personal literary standards in preference to the standards engaged with by Mr. Senior.⁵ It is significant that James's flourish at the end of the paragraph is centred on his own reaction to the text rather than the text itself. Rather than stating that as a 'critical treatise upon fiction' Senior's work is a failure, he focuses on his own 'regret' as 'destined to be embittered by disappointment'.

James attempts to consolidate his projected authority with an evocation of the working methods of the novelist and, characteristically, the difficulty of making his readers understand the nature and intent of his work (this archetypal novelist is assumed by default to be masculine, and referred to by James as 'the great man'). Having discussed the habits and expectations of readers, again in a general manner rather than in terms of the authors examined by Senior, James moves on to a lengthy dramatisation of a novelist's private defence of his methods:

An author's wife, sitting by his study-table, and reading page after page of manuscript as he dashes it off, will not be unlikely to question him thus: 'Do you never weary of this constant grinding out of false persons and events? To tell the truth, I do. I would rather not read any more, if you please. It's very pretty, but there's too much of it. It's all so untrue. I believe I will go up to the nursery. Do you never grow sick of this atmosphere of lies?' To which the prolific novelist will probably reply: 'Sometimes; but not by any means so often as you might suppose. Just as the habitually busy man is the best novel-reader, so he is the best novel-writer; so the best novelist is the busiest man. It is, as you say, because I "grind out" my men and women that I endure them. It is because I create them by the sweat of my brow that I venture to look them in the face. My *work* is my salvation.'⁶

The length and intensity of this digression indicates James's passionately held views on

⁵ Although the use of 'we' can be read as an adherence to stylistic conventions in the periodicals of the time, it is applied to activities in which only the individual reviewer is participating - the opening of the book, the personal hopes and disappointments - rather than referring to any critical assessment which could truly have been a joint process (e.g. 'we consider this novelist to be underrated...'), based on collaborative and shared assessments. James is, I think, using the authority of the periodical 'we' in an

the worthiness of the novelist's art, and in particular, his anxiety to justify it as *work*. This recalls his titular reference to Scott, whose determined grinding out of novels in order to pay off his massive debts brings the dignity of manual labour – valorised here by James – to bear on the creative process. In later critical writings, such as 'The Art of the Novel', James's justification of the novel is located in its ability to impart a true sense of life – which, one could argue, is evidenced by the effect it produces on the discerning reader. The author's skill in achieving this, and the technical methods he employs to do so, are of greater importance than the individual qualities of the writer as a person. Indeed, James emphasises his belief that, contrary to Besant's preceding argument, the art of the novel is not dependent on the author's social background and life experiences. Yet here he emphasises not only the social circumstances of the construction of literature (the author is evidently a man with family commitments and the influence of that family to consider) but its value in providing a work ethic for the individual writer. James portrays the work of writing as demanding in all senses, even physically, in the image of the author 'grinding out' his characters 'by the sweat of his brow', and this work represents more than the prospect of financial support - it is endowed with a moral and spiritual value, being the author's 'salvation'. Though James regards the art of creating fictions as a vocation (albeit one which also offers the promise of fame and fortune), his later views differ substantially from his first presentation of the novelist's task. Here James seems to see novel-writing as a task which primarily gives the writer worth and meaning as an individual, instead of either providing satisfaction for the public or contributing to the sphere of fiction as an art. The role of the novel is to provide its writer with the challenging work that his vocation demands; similarly, the role of James's review is to justify its author's position as an authority on literature, and as an aspiring novelist.

overly autocratic way, to legitimise distinctly individual theories and assessments.

⁶ 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott', p.5.

The ambitiousness of what James is trying to do in what is, after all, a review of a book and not a treatise on the novel, is encapsulated in the long section of dialogue between the imaginary author and his wife, which continues for some time beyond the section quoted here, before James evidently realises that he should return to the subject in hand, and begins a new paragraph thus:

But we have wandered from our original proposition; which was, that the judgements of intelligent half-critics, like Mr. Senior, are very pleasant to serious critics.⁷

The strategy of damning with faint praise is one characteristic of James's criticism used to great effect later in his career, a well-known example being his reference to the 'good little Thomas Hardy'. The implication here is that James himself is a 'serious critic', certainly in comparison to the unfortunate Mr. Senior. In spite of 'wandering from his original proposition' into what is really an unnecessarily long diversion, James successfully continues to pursue his own agenda, which is to establish himself as an authority in his field. The conventional picture of James as a delicate and unassuming individual, disgusted and bewildered by commercialism, is dispelled by this demonstration of the tenacity and self-confidence with which he promotes his literary aspirations, even at the very beginning of his career.

Nevertheless, in spite of the assurance of James's manner, the article also shows the first sign of what was to become an endemic problem with his work - the difficulty of concluding. Having devoted a great deal of space to a general commentary on both fiction and its criticism, discussed Walter Scott's work at reasonable length, and granted a paragraph to Thackeray, 'the only other name of equal greatness with Scott's handled by Mr Senior',⁸ James's review ends in an admittedly hasty and defensive fashion:

We have no space to advert to Mr Senior's observations upon Bulwer. They are at least more lenient than any we ourselves should be tempted to make. As for the article on Mrs. Stowe, it is quite out of place. It is in no sense of the word a literary criticism. It is a disquisition on the prospects of slavery in the United

⁷ 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott', p.6.

⁸ 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott', p.14.

States.⁹

The admission that there is not space to discuss the other subjects of Senior's work is certainly a professional weakness, brazened out by James's assertion that they are not worth discussing anyway; Bulwer's fiction, the article implies, is only fit to be severely criticised (a task in which, again, the hapless Mr Senior has failed) and Stowe's work simply has no place in a literary discussion. In spite of his implicit championing of fiction as having social value for its producers, James is unwilling to concede the potential social value of discussing a novel about slavery. Ironically, he seems to feel that Senior has committed a professional mistake in crossing the line between literary criticism and social commentary, and on that note, the review ends. There is a noticeable lack of conclusion, of the final summing-up and judgement that might have been expected not only to finish the review itself, but as a counterpart to balance the grand opening statement of James's high standards, hopes, and expectations. The difficulties James encountered in concluding his novels were clearly endemic to his writing and took a great deal of effort to control. However, his efforts seem to have been more successful with these non-fictional writings than with his fictions; James proved himself to be a competent and professional reviewer and contributor to periodicals by the amount of work he did in that sphere. Relative to his career as a writer of fiction, his career as a reviewer followed an extremely steep learning curve, as my examination of his rate of publication in periodicals, and the nature of those publications, will show.

In his introduction to the bibliography of James's writings produced by Edel, Laurence and Rambeau, Leon Edel describes James as turning out 'potboilers with his left hand, novels with his right'.¹⁰ This image suggests several things: that James's writings can be divided firmly into two groups, the artistic and the profitable; that there

⁹ 'Fiction and Sir Walter Scott', p.15.

¹⁰ Leon Edel and Dan H. Laurence, *A Bibliography of Henry James*, 3rd edition, revised with the assistance of James Rambeau (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.13; hereafter referred to as *Bibliography*.

is no crossover between the two; and that James's writing persona is comfortably divided in this way. Edel does not seem to recognise the possibility that some of James's writings may not fit straightforwardly into either of these categories; he also characterises James, rather oddly, as a combination of a diligent artist and a blithe producer of disposable articles. The only motivation he discerns for James to write so prolifically in so many genres was that he 'enjoyed writing', and was a 'happy producer'. Glossing over any hint of financial or artistic pressures, Edel also asserts that James would have considered keeping track of everything he wrote 'a waste of time', and that if he returned to an article, it was only to 'promote it carefully in book form'.¹¹ These assertions, however, are not only at odds with other evidence about James's attitude to his writings, but lead us to question the validity of Edel's original portrait of James as the cheerfully schizophrenic writer, turning out potboilers with his left hand and novels with his right.¹² If this dichotomy is as absolute as Edel would have it, why does James return to *any* of the articles he has written (since they are presumably potboilers), and how does he decide which are worthy of elevation to book form? Is it only on reconsideration that he deems them of sufficient quality to deserve a longer life, or does he produce certain articles which are apparently 'potboilers' fully expecting that they will later become something more? Not all these questions can be answered; nevertheless, this chapter addresses some of the points Edel raises in his bibliographical introduction, without, apparently, becoming conscious of them as problematic to his portrayal of James.

What emerges from such discussions of James's non-fictional writings is that any attempt to categorise those works complicates further the critical view of the James

¹¹ *Bibliography*, p.14.

¹² The image of James as not caring to keep track of what he wrote seems to me to be a contradiction of James's resolutely professional and often commercial attitude towards authorship, as well documented by Anesko, Margolis, and others. The letter quoted by me in chapter one, where James informs a correspondent of the precise length of *The Sacred Fount*, seventy-seven thousand words, seems most characteristic of someone who was obsessive about the length and quantity of what he wrote, rather than the reverse, as Edel implies.

canon. Yet this complication is a productive one. The problem created by the persistent presence of these 'ephemeral' writings as a significant element, year by year, of James's written output, gives an important insight into the different views held on James's body of work and on the various interpretations of when James's career was at its most successful. I argue elsewhere in this thesis that critical views of James tend to favour prioritisation of a certain period or style. The formation of a tacit hierarchy of James's different types of writings, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, operates in a similar way. However, an examination of James's periodical output in the context of its production - often alongside his most celebrated novels - demonstrates that they represent something which cannot be defined either as a quick buck or an expedient method of serving a literary apprenticeship.

Referring to the details of James's periodical publications, Edel remarks, apropos of nothing, that 1878 was 'very productive' for James, with 36 publications listed.¹³ He gives no reason for choosing 1878 as his example, nor does he refer to any other year's output; perhaps 1878 represents a watershed in being the year in which *Daisy Miller*, James's first popular success and the tale which made his name, was published. It is also, as Vivien Jones points out, the year in which *French Poets and Novelists*, 'his first major critical collection' was published.¹⁴ Either or both of these factors could be said to mark James's transition from fledgling writer to established one. In fact 1878 seems at first glance to be an arbitrary choice: a not especially typical year in James's productive life as chronicled by the bibliography, nor his *most* prolific year, something which might be suggested by Edel's highlighting of it. Yet, to be fair to Edel and his co-bibliographers, the pattern of James's periodical output is a difficult one to summarise. Having begun in 1864 with the review of Senior's critical study, he published one other piece, a story, that year. However, in the following year, 1865, this

¹³ *Bibliography*, p.13.

¹⁴ Vivien Jones, *James the Critic* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p.3; hereafter referred to

level of output increased dramatically; he published seventeen items in total, comprising sixteen unsigned reviews and one story. This represents an eightfold increase in James's publication success, from the modest starting point of the previous year, and it shows an ability to meet the challenges of reviewing, and the opportunity offered to establish himself as a literary critic, which at this point exceeded James's focus on and success in the area of publishing fiction. However, James was publishing some fiction alongside his reviews, even though at this stage it had a lower profile in his authorial career. His review of Senior demonstrates a persistent concern to link the criticism of fiction to the practice of writing it, and to the importance of understanding the role of the Author (in a Barthesian sense) when considering fictions generally, regardless of who actually authored them. This early part of James's career reveals a combined approach of calculated, commercially-minded professionalism, and a sincere artistic commitment to linking the theory and practice of writing fiction, in an attempt to become a complete writer by mastering both, or indeed all, these requirements.

In her study *James the Critic*, Vivien Jones defines the period of James's 'apprenticeship' as follows:

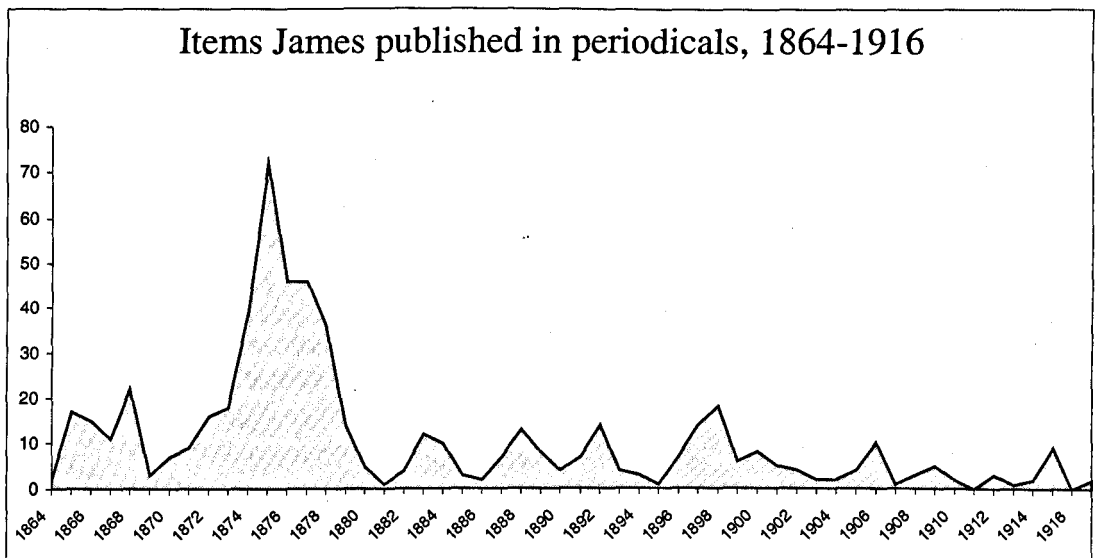
James's critical apprenticeship runs roughly from 1864, when his first review appeared in the *North American*, to 1875. He continued to write pot-boiling notes and articles for the *Nation* until 1879, but *French Poets and Novelists*, his first major critical collection, was published in 1878 and many of the essays included were written between 1873 and 1876. And in 1875 James finally rejected what he saw as American creative and critical provinciality and moved first to Paris and later to London.¹⁵

Though Jones is specifically defining a *critical* apprenticeship, and not necessarily a *literary* one in general, her emphasis on this period as circumscribing the first phase of James's development provides a useful comparison with the narrative of James's critical output given in the *Bibliography*. The *Bibliography* maps out an early, though fluctuating, shift towards fiction, along with a general increase in productivity that

as Jones.

¹⁵ Jones, p.3.

shows the 1870s, as a whole, to be a landmark decade in this apprenticeship. Within that period, there are again several points that are significant for James's career, but in different respects. I would argue that in identifying 1878 and 1875 as key years in James's development as a writer, Edel and Jones are accurately selecting landmarks, but for reasons other than the ones they give. Some prose exposition of the bibliographical details is helpful to fully demonstrate this, and a graph is provided below to illustrate my discussion:



Having published seventeen items in 1865, James falls back slightly in publishing fifteen items in his third year of professional writing, 1866. These include two stories, doubling his previous fictional output, and his first signed review, of George Eliot, along with twelve others that remained unsigned. In 1867 he again produced slightly less, publishing eleven items, but in 1868 he doubled his previous year's workrate in publishing twenty-two pieces, among which was another signed review of Eliot's work, and six stories. In this year, therefore, fiction now accounts for a little less than a third of James's total published output. In the following two year he publishes only three and seven items respectively, but in 1871, though only seven items

are listed, the diversity of the material included in the year's output shows James's confidence in expanding his professional horizons. It comprises two unsigned reviews, three stories, a play, two unsigned travel sketches, and the serialisation of his first novel, *Watch and Ward* – the length of this contribution also accounting for the low total number of published items. This year's output indicates the range of James's ambitions and the importance of this diversity in his idea of what a complete author should be aiming to achieve.

James's most productive year in terms of periodical publication was 1875, in which he published seventy-two items. In a sense this could be viewed as James's most successful period, given Michael Anesko's assertion of the paramount importance of periodical publication to the average writer:

For these men and women, by far the majority, serialisation of their work in English and American periodicals was much more significant, financially, than returns from published volumes. [...] This fact was certainly no secret to men of letters in the nineteenth century. Publishers themselves testified to it. 'It is impossible to make the books of most American authors pay, unless they are first published and acquire recognition through the columns of the magazines', one publisher told a Congressional committee studying the question of international copyright in 1885.¹⁶

James's career, then, like that of many of his contemporaries, was dependent both financially and in other ways on his work being published in periodicals. He wrote to William Dean Howells in 1876 that 'having a "perpetual serial running" had defined itself as a "financial necessity"', and indeed the sheer volume of work he produced for periodicals seems to support James's assertion.¹⁷ In that case, is Edel's portrayal of James as turning out 'potboilers with his left hand, novels with his right' accurate, and is he correct, after all, to compartmentalise James's career into works of profit and works of art, with periodical articles produced primarily to support the creation of experimental fiction?

In addressing this question, a useful comparison can be made with Thomas

¹⁶ Anesko, p.168.

Hardy, whose career is broadly contemporary with James's, and who is also today among the canon of late Victorian novelists. In contrast to James, Hardy published very little in periodicals beyond the serialisations of his novels. He is recorded as publishing one item, a sketch titled 'How I built Myself a House', in 1865, and following that in 1874 with a story, 'Destiny and a Blue Cloak'.¹⁷ In the meantime, he had also published four novels: *Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*. In 1878, the year highlighted by Edel, Hardy achieves the publication of *The Return of the Native*, but publishes only two periodical items in comparison with James's thirty-six. While this comparatively low level of activity can be attributed to the greater success of, and greater financial remuneration from, Hardy's novels, it also illuminates Hardy's decision not to pursue, through reviewing and other periodical contributions, the more journalistic aspect of literary apprenticeship, and of an authorial role in general, carried out so energetically by James. In contrast, Hardy's periodical output increases, though never dramatically, in the later stages of his career, representing the activity of an elder man-of-letters consolidating his role. Indeed, a significant number of his periodical contributions from the 1890s onwards are letters to newspapers defending, correcting misrepresentation of and refuting allegations against his work. For James, in the less productive years of this period, his output is on a level with and often exceeds Hardy's. It seems that James's above average productivity in this field is both distinctive in comparison to his peers, and difficult to explain either solely in terms of financial necessity, or more than partially in terms of literary advancement.

My argument here is that, without denying the importance of the economic role James's periodical writings played in his career, they have a further role to play in his conception of himself as an artist, writer and professional author, which goes beyond

¹⁷ Letter to William Dean Howells, 24 October 1876; quoted in Anesko, p.52.

¹⁸ Richard Little Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

serving the purpose of an authorial apprenticeship early in James's life. Joanne Shattock has drawn a distinction between the role of writing for periodicals in the careers of 'serious' authors and more popular, 'lowbrow' authors; George Eliot, she observes, wrote very little for periodicals after 1857, when she began to be established as a novelist (having previously been most significantly occupied with work for the *Westminster Review*) while Margaret Oliphant, a novelist who literally could not afford to give up periodical work, produced fiction and non-fiction at an alarming rate, driven by the necessity of supporting her family, throughout her career.¹⁹ Eliot's periodical writings serve as a straightforward literary apprenticeship which, having made her name with *Adam Bede*, could be abandoned in favour of more serious, artistic writings. In spite of the value of journalism in establishing one's name, once that has been achieved it becomes a potentially disadvantageous occupation, which may deplete one's professional stamina and take up time which could be spent on more worthy creations - the reason cited by Michael Collie for George Gissing's avoidance of journalism in favour of novel writing.²⁰

If writing for periodicals is motivated by one of these two reasons, it is difficult to place James in either category. Though he claims that writing for periodicals is a financial necessity, it is hardly a necessity for him in the same way that it was for Margaret Oliphant, or for the typical hard-up writer of the kind portrayed by George Gissing in *New Grub Street*, who must publish to avoid starvation. Neither is he, or has he ever been, viewed as the kind of competent but second-rate writer churning out potboilers of which Oliphant is seen as the nineteenth-century archetype.²¹ Furthermore,

¹⁹ Joanne Shattock, 'Literature, gender and the status of journalism', a paper given at the conference *Victorian Periodicals in Britain*, University of Leeds, 29 March 1999.

²⁰ Michael Collie, *George Gissing: A Bibliographical Study* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1985), p.7: 'Gissing by and large resisted the temptations of journalism, though from time to time he did respond to occasions created by others [...] his unorthodox private life made him shun the limelight and, in any case, he needed all the time he had for the writing of fiction'. In contrast with this, James seems more of a publicly-orientated, Jasper Milvain-like author, though without the popular success.

²¹ Though it would be unfair to claim that James did not *need* to write in order to earn a living, since he was anxious to provide for himself by doing just that, he was never in danger of being destitute due to the

though he used his early periodical writings as a platform by which to enter the literary scene, with a view to becoming a successful author in his own right, he did not, unlike Eliot, abandon journalism when he became well-known as a writer of fiction; neither is there a steady correlation between the level of his periodical production and that of his novelistic success. After 1878, James's periodical output falls sharply; from 1879 onwards he never produces more than 20 articles in any one year. However, the number of articles he *does* produce fluctuates unevenly between one and twenty (there is only one year, 1911, in which he does not publish any periodical work at all), without a uniform relation to the other creative projects that occupied him at the time. It seems plausible that his smaller pieces of work function as welcome distractions from the struggles for completion that dominate the writing of his novels: an instance of this, cited in my first chapter, is James's delaying work on *The Bostonians* to write 'Lady Barberina' instead. He seems to attempt to overcome (or at least avoid) large creative blockages by turning to the more immediate reward of completing smaller projects.

James's nadirs of production tend to correspond to other, personal factors affecting his life, such as the death of his father and the depression he suffered after the failure of *Guy Domville*, and in these instances his whole professional output, not just that intended for periodicals, diminishes. If anything, James is often more productive in terms of reviews and other periodical publications when he is simultaneously occupied with a novel, or other relatively artistic project, as the example of 1875 shows; at the height of his periodical production, James was also writing *The American*, and committed to producing a regular column for the *New York Tribune* on life as an American expatriate in Paris, a project of particular interest which I shall discuss later. To be, as Edel calls him, a 'happy producer', he needed in the first instance to be a producer, and the conditions which made literary production most conducive for James

relatively comfortable financial position of his family. Michael Anesko points out that 'his earnings from the family's Syracuse properties [...] were considerable' (Anesko, p.172).

involved a combination of financial, artistic and social motivation. The attribution of periodical production to any one of these factors, which for other writers are generally in themselves sufficient motivation (as in the cases of Eliot and Oliphant), results from a misunderstanding of James's conception of his own role not just as a writer, but as a 'complete' writer.

The first publication of James's work in book form was, as Anesko recounts, a deliberately considered venture on James's part. In 1873 his father secured an offer from the publisher James R. Osgood to publish a collection of James's previous work. James himself, however, was reluctant to push ahead, arguing that he wished 'to make a volume, a short time hence, of tales on the theme of American adventurers in Europe', which would consist of relatively recent fictions, and so be 'much better and maturer than their predecessors'.²² James's desire to publish his most mature works available is understandable; the more interesting point is his concern that the collection should have a distinct theme. However, another, even more significant development of the project is James's expansion of his plans after a spell in Europe, as described by Anesko:

When James returned to America the following year "to start [him]self on a remunerative and perfectly practical literary basis", he came with plans for two books in mind. The collection of tales was now possible, but James also hoped to assemble his recent travel articles and letters about Europe in a complementary volume of non-fiction.²³

The books James had in mind were to be issued as *A Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales* and *Transatlantic Sketches*; they were published together in early 1875, priced identically (at \$2), and with the same number of each (1500 copies) printed. The symmetry of this arrangement foreshadows James's fascination with forms and images of symmetry in his novels, a concern which became more insistent as his novelistic career continued.²⁴ At this point, however, his attraction to symmetry takes the form of James's ambition to enter the book-world with 'complementary volumes'. This

²² Letter to Mrs Henry James Sr., 24 March 1873; quoted in Anesko, p.32.

²³ Anesko, p.32.

simultaneous publication is a unique occurrence, and the value it held for James – since neither financial reward nor service of a literary apprenticeship were motivations – is located in this project of the ‘contemporary volumes’, and in their representation of James’s concept of being an author.

Nigel Cross, examining figures from the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, observes a contrast between male and female nineteenth-century authors:

Men [...] appear much more versatile - thanks to their university educations. 25 per cent are poets, 14 per cent are novelists, 14 per cent are ‘prose writers’ (critics and essayists), 11 per cent write children’s stories, 8 per cent are philosophers and the rest are theologians, historians and miscellaneous writers.²⁵

Since male authors have the ability to produce a considerable range of literary works, this versatility is an expected attribute of authors successful at the highest level. Writers were also censured for using their talents too diffusely (a strategy often equated to writing purely for financial gain), as in the cases of Margaret Oliphant and her male counterparts such as Andrew Lang and Grant Allen. Nevertheless, James pursued the authorial stature attributed to writers who demonstrated that while a particular field, such as fiction, was their speciality, they were also capable of producing other types of writing worthy of publication. In other words, a master of all trades whose accomplishments were profit-driven deserved censure as a hack; conversely, however, the gentleman or ‘serious’ writer who could do the same achieved the satisfaction of being one of a diminishing group, a ‘man of letters’. James used this term with approval, and cited it as an ideal to which writers should aspire, and which he was proud to hold. In a letter to his nephew, Edward James, his professional advice was: ‘If you go in for literature, be a man of letters’²⁶ and in a more publicly-orientated letter to the Royal Literary Fund on behalf of the widow of Charles Dickens, he employs the term in order to evoke the most impressive image possible of the role of the author:

²⁴ This issue is the subject of chapter six.

²⁵ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.167; hereafter referred to as Cross.

I feel as a man of letters – as I am sure we all must feel – the strength of the appeal residing in the urgent character of Mrs. Dickens's need and in the eloquent association of the illustrious name she bears.²⁷

The role of the man of letters was presented by James as the best aspirational model for a writer, and the one designed to evoke the greatest admiration and respect among one's peers; perhaps the two most important facets of the goal of being a 'complete' writer, which is closely identified with the given image of the man of letters. John Gross's study of the man of letters states that: 'Journalism is a career; literature is, or ought to be, a vocation'.²⁸ James's construction of his role as a man of letters encompasses both a career and a vocation, and attempts, as always with varying success, to combine those two roles in individual texts and in his work as a whole.

In not only publishing selections of his originally ephemeral writings in book form, but in presenting them as an counterpart to his fictional productions, James constructs his journalistic work as an element of the career of an aspiring man of letters, rather than that of a relatively wealthy hack. His performance as a periodical writer was intended to enhance rather than detract from his professional standing; though it had an material function in earning money, James fashioned himself as the kind of writer for whom that consequence of his writing was important but not paramount. The periodical writings he produced served both long-term and short-term goals, in both generating a relatively immediate source of income and contributing to his literary stature. However, James did not see them as performing this in themselves, but rather as a 'complementary' element, necessarily accompanied by fiction-writing, of his role as a writer.

Cross emphasises not only that this reciprocal influence was an intrinsic aspect of the culture of the period, but that James was personally aware of its implications:

²⁶ Letter to Edward James, 15 February 1896, in *Letters*, vol. IV, p.30.

²⁷ Letter to Llewlyn Roberts [secretary of the Royal Literary Fund], 24 October 1896, in *Henry James: Selected Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.302.

²⁸ John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), p.26.

Both Besant and James understood that the new journalism and the new fiction were interdependent. The mass readership could only be won for the novel if the novelist featured prominently in the popular press, while the popular press was able to sustain and increase its circulation with titbits about best-selling writers.²⁹

James's social activities in London, especially his capacities for dining out, have assumed the status of urban myth. He defined the role of the author as being to a great extent a public one - if not dependent on, then certainly aided by the trappings of social success, not least because invitations to a gathering often furnished him with material for new fiction. In being publicly acknowledged as an author, he was able to gather more fictional material in an attempt to perpetuate that role indefinitely. While this did not succeed in endowing James with the best-selling status he craved, maintaining both the public figure of an author, and the professional operations of one, on a regular basis, fulfilled the composite role of the 'complete' writer. Cross's statement that journalism and literature are to a certain extent interdependent is enacted in James's continual engagement with the problems and fascinations of one mode even when he is writing in the other. Both his novelistic interest in journalists, biographers, writers, literary critics, and his concern for exploring theories and interpretations of art in general when reviewing a particular work show this interdependence as a consistent presence in his work.

The articles published as *Parisian Sketches* (1957) are a good example of this kind of interaction, and the mixed reception of its early versions. The volume is a collection of the 'letters from Paris' James was commissioned to write for the *New York Tribune* during the year he spent living in Paris from 1875-6; 'letters' which are regarded as a journalistic failure. His audience and employers did not want aesthetic impressions of France, but rather gossip about the glamorous and wealthy, and in particular their misdemeanours. However, the need James is filling in these letters is a very personal one - as can be seen from the tone of the opening letter in the projected

series:

But no American, certainly, since Americans were, has come to Paris but once, and it is when he returns, hungrily, inevitably, fatally, that his sense of Parisian things becomes supremely acute. [...] Was it really so very good as all that?³⁰

James's romanticising of his own individual elation at being, at last, domiciled in Paris shows the approach which made this writing unsuitable for the journalistic market in which he had undertaken to work. Far from being Americans returning to Paris for a second look, his audience were more likely to be comparative provincials who had never travelled to Europe, but who wished to consume vicariously some of its imagined allure in the pages of the *Tribune*. James was, therefore, meant to be giving his readers an exclusive glimpse into glamorous (and, it should be emphasised, contemporary) Parisian society, with descriptions of the kind of romantic intrigues and social scandals to be found in the works of Balzac that he so admired. His approach, instead, was to evoke a kind of *déjà vu* that reveals more about James himself than his given subject. James remarks in this first article, 'You may not like Paris, and if you are not extremely fond of her you will in all probability detest and abominate her'.³¹ His technique here, as in his first review, was to assume an authoritative tone, to distinguish those who knew what they were talking about (a group naturally including himself) from those who did not. Unfortunately, James was unable to follow the steep learning curve he had climbed in the early part of his reviewing career. The interaction of novelistic and journalistic concerns, while enhancing discussions of literature, was not appropriate in this form and for this audience. Perhaps most damningly, though, James (again, in contrast to the authority he assumed in his reviewing) was ultimately unable to make good his claim to be an insider. While he made profitable acquaintances with other expatriate writers, Turgenev in particular, he was unable to pervade the inner circle of

²⁹ Cross, p.220.

³⁰ Henry James, *Parisian Sketches: Letters to the New York Tribune, 1875-1876*, ed. and introd. by Leon Edel and Ilse Dusior Lind (New York: New York University Press, 1957), p.3; hereafter referred to as *Parisian Sketches*.

native Parisians, and grew increasingly frustrated that his residence in Paris was not as fruitful as he had imagined, feeling continually alienated rather than becoming an 'insider' as he had expected. Parallels can be drawn between James's experience and that of Christopher Newman, the protagonist of *The American* (written largely during this period) who suffers a similar cultural exclusion; however, the experience is all the more painful for James who, unlike Newman, prides himself on his cosmopolitanism. Newman can be interpreted as a rewriting of James himself as a visitor with a thicker skin; interestingly, too, he is a professional businessman who has enjoyed success in a number of different lines of trade, which is reminiscent of the self-image James wishes to cultivate in a literary sphere. In both cases, though, their Parisian residence ends with them occupying the moral high ground, but without the trophy they craved; for Newman the ideal wife, for James the title of accomplished foreign correspondent.

Though James is not necessarily supplying what his public wants, he is at least, in his early letters, not short of material; he enthuses over the aspects of Paris he finds particularly agreeable and has no trouble in writing about. He eagerly describes 'the ingrained Parisian passion for all things theatrical'³², and remarks approvingly, having been to see the latest play by Alexandre Dumas, that 'the Parisian theater-going public seizes an artist's intention with extraordinary alertness'.³³ As in the review of W. Nassau Senior, this sentence shows James straying from his commissioned subject to the subject that not only interests him most, but also in which he aspires to become an authority. This hope of finding an audience who will respond in the desired way to an 'artist's intention', is James's pursuit of a personal dream. The article's view of Paris is constructed for the producer, not for the consumer, who, it seems, became increasingly indifferent (the worst possible reaction to journalism) to James's articles. Subsequent pieces for the *Tribune* shift rather desperately to descriptions of art exhibitions, seaside

³¹ *Parisian Sketches*, p.4.

³² *Parisian Sketches*, p.22.

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³¹ *Parisian Sketches*, p.4.

³² *Parisian Sketches*, p.22.

towns, elections, while still evading the gossip about romantic entanglements and social gatherings which readers expected. James's journalistic persona was tempered by his dual role as a professional writer of fictions and travel sketches, the influences of which can be seen in his *Tribune* writings, but which in this instance obscured his attempted delivery of the required product. Almost admitting his continued status as an outsider, he attempts (as he did in concluding the W. Nassau Senior review) to justify his stance:

Nothing is more striking to a foreigner, even after he thinks he has grown used to such things, than the definiteness with which people here are classed and ticketed. [You feel] a little private elation at being yourself an unconsolidated American and able to enjoy Mr. A and Mr X who enjoy each other so little.³⁴

It is notable that James calls himself not a *detached* outsider, which would cohere with his apparent pleasure in being an 'unconsolidated American', but an *unattached* outsider, suggesting that this status is not of his own choosing, and that he is not entirely happy with that outsider's unattached status. Moreover, this characteristic concern with the narratorial frame of vision, highlighting the self-reflective process of James examining himself, the American, examining the French (who, according to the subtext of the articles, have examined and rejected him) is another example of how his fictional and documentative styles intersect; unfortunately, the market for which James was working was concerned only with the picture, not with its frame or its principles of composition. After having written twenty 'Letters from Paris' for the New York Tribune, James broached the subject of a higher rate of pay. The editors took this opportunity of telling him that his view of Paris was not exactly the one required for their newspaper and appreciated by their readers. Asked to produce shorter, chattier letters for the same salary, James took the less embarrassing option of resigning his commission on the grounds that an agreement over salary could not be reached. As on other occasions, it proved easier to attribute decisions that were produced by a combination of motives to merely financial ones. 1875, then, represents the year in

³³ *Parisian Sketches*, p.13.

which James's ambition of 'complementary' works was launched with reasonable success, but also in which he learned, in harsher circumstances than before, that his attempts at being a man of letters needed to pitch the right text to the right market in order to be successful.

Having argued, then, that these relatively insignificant works within the James canon play an important part in his definition of what a 'complete' author should be and in identifying James's difficulties with 'finishing' as a defining characteristic of his writing, I will conclude this chapter by establishing the periodical article - and especially the non-fictional article or review - as the form which provided an essential counterpart to James's more heavyweight creations.

Firstly, and to state the obvious, articles in periodicals are short. The kind of anxiety James habitually felt about finishing his novels is not applicable to finishing an article, for several reasons as well as the fact of their less daunting size. They have a shorter public life as well as length; since they are intended to serve as a commentary upon happenings of the moment, and not necessarily to enter posterity beyond that, then the judgement passed by an article or review need not be set in stone, but merely a temporal end, lasting until the next issue. Furthermore, a single article, positioned as it is within a journal, is not required in itself to provide a definitive end, since it is placed within a group of competing and supporting discourses. In other words, James's authorship of a journal article does not leave him with the responsibility of 'completing' his topic, since that responsibility is shared by the articles which surround his in the journal, the articles on similar topics which will follow his in future issues, and ultimately the editor of the periodical, who must be responsible for making the composite publication seem as complete as it can be. Ironically, the writing which is least in need of closure is the kind where it can be most readily supplied; as I have noted, James's reviewing followed a steep learning curve, where he quickly corrected

³⁴ *Parisian Sketches*, p.55.

the mistakes of his initial effort to review W. Nassau Senior. The reviewing system was easy to dip in and out of, requiring relatively little in the way of time or contractual commitments, yet providing James with a definite and non-remote deadline (unlike the awareness that the 'end' of a novel, or serialisation of a novel, could be over a year away). All this acted as a counterpoint to James's anxieties about both finishing his productions and making them 'great'; in his review and periodical work, the pressure to accomplish these things was greatly reduced.

Margaret Beetham's discussion of the nature of the periodical reveals how the form's simultaneous guarantee of and evasion of closure would appeal to James, who struggled to do the same:

Each number must function both as part of a series and as a free-standing unit which makes sense to the reader of the single issue. [...] The periodical is an open form in a number of ways: it resists closure because it comes out over time and is, in that respect, serial rather than end-stopped. Its boundaries are fluid and it mixes genres and authorial voices; all this in a time-extended form seems to encourage readers to produce their own readings. Yet, in complete opposition to these formal qualities are another set of qualities, which are equally characteristic. Each number of the periodical is a self-contained text and will contain sub-texts which are end-stopped or marked by closure.³⁵

For a writer who both fears and desires closure, this form is an attractive and flexible one in which to work. James's claim in his letter to Howells that 'having a "perpetual serial running" had defined itself as a "financial necessity"' now seems to represent James's deliberate focus on only one aspect of the benefits of the 'perpetual serial', and his periodical writing in general. James often attributes his career decisions (such as choosing to write for the theatre) to artistic motives when they are actually financial, and vice versa, or indeed conceals the fact that his decisions are based on a combination of such factors by ascribing them to just one. This is also the case here: James is indeed aware of a need to have a 'perpetual serial running', but that need is not based solely on financial grounds. That James prefers not to acknowledge this to Howells, a

³⁵ Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre', in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, Lionel Madden (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990),

representative of his peers and also of editorial authority, is understandable; James's professionalism would not, perhaps, be best served by appearing to regard periodical publication as something more personally gratifying than professionally marketable. Moreover, James proves himself to be adept at manipulating the conventions and conventional role of publishing in periodicals to his own advantage. One instance of this is cited by Anesko:

An article that he published in the *Atlantic*, [...] 'London Pictures and London Plays', [...] is a remarkable attack on the appalling dilettantism of the dramatic profession in England. [...] Knowing that such comments would jeopardise his relationship with English managers and actors, James insisted to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, the *Atlantic* editor, that his article "*must* – oh MUST! – be rigidly anonymous".³⁶

Since Dallas Liddle contends that by the 1880s even the more conservative periodicals had succumbed to the 'new' convention of publishing articles with signatures, this occasion, in 1882, demonstrates both James's rising influence in that sphere in successfully making the demand, and his keen awareness of the desirability of manipulating this flexible form with his own authorial interest in mind.³⁷ Another letter to Thomas Bailey Aldrich provides a further instance of James's strategy at work:

Three or four short tales, from my turning hand, are to appear (this is a profound secret) – have been, in a word, secured, *à prix d'or* in – je vous en donne en milles – the New York Sunday *Sun*! This last fact, I repeat, is really as yet *a complete and sacred secret*. Please bury it in oblivion and burn my letter. I mention it, with the preceding items, simply to denote that [...] I expect to be in the enjoyment of a popularity which will require me to ask \$500 a number for the successive instalments of *The Princess Casamassima*.³⁸

As Jacobson observes, 'James's embarrassment at publishing in the rather lowbrow *Sun*

pp.19-31; p.29.

³⁶ Anesko, p.20.

³⁷ Dallas Liddle, 'Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors: Anonymity and Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism', in *Victorian Studies* 41:1 (1997), 31-69. Liddle states: 'Between 1859, when the new *Macmillan's Magazine* quietly began to print contributors' names, and 1877, when the *Nineteenth Century* started the fashion for 'star' contributors, a convention as old as British journalism was reversed. [...] By the end of the nineteenth century only the newspaper genre of the "leading article" or editorial remained entirely anonymous' (p.32).

³⁸ Letter to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, 1885, quoted in Marcia Jacobson, *Henry James and the Mass Market* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1983), p.16; hereafter referred to as Jacobson.

did not stop him from doing so'.³⁹ Moreover, he skilfully constructs an epistolary confession of that embarrassment which also conveys to Aldrich the self-image James wishes to project to others in his field – namely that he is ambitious, professional, and a master of whatever literary form will make his name and enhance his reputation, whether that be the great American novel or the latest sensational article being gossiped about in London and New York. James's use of French in his references to the monetary gain he expects is both a personal characteristic and a professional tactic; it demonstrates that he is not afraid to talk about money, to foreground it as part of a business communication to an editor, but also protects James from appearing vulgar in mentioning the thousands he will get, by showing that he instinctively and easily adopts an cultured, literary tone. James is proving that he is able not only to change the register of his 'voice' from that of high culture to that of the marketplace, but that he can appropriately address both simultaneously – as his simultaneous production of weighty novels and lighter articles also strove to do.

James was an author interested in writing as a popular art as well as a highbrow one, and the elements of his writing persona which addressed these different demands are reciprocally influential. Sustained critical interest in 'The Turn of the Screw', regarded by James himself as a supreme example of the potboiler, but now considered to be a canonical example of James ambiguity and psychological analysis, is a example of how this division has been elided among James's fictions. I have attempted in this chapter to further this critical development by examining an remaining, analogous division in the critical view of the James canon, and showing that an reciprocal influence is there too, and needs more serious attention. The idea that serious writing and 'potboiling' are entirely diverse writerly productions, as Edel would seem to have it, is quelled by James's own advice on the subject to the sculptor Hendrik Andersen:

You are attempting to do what no young artist ever did – to live on air

³⁹ Jacobson, p.16.

indefinitely, by what I can make out, putting all your eggs into one extremely precarious and perforated basket, and declining the aid of the thing done meanwhile *to live*, to bring in its assistance from month to month: the potboiler call it if you like, the potboiler which represents, in the lives of all artists, some of the most beautiful things ever done by them. Stop your multiplication of insaleable nakedness for a while and hurl yourself, by every cunning art you can command, into the production of the interesting, the vendible, the *placeable* small thing.⁴⁰

The importance of the ‘placeable small thing’, often overlooked in favour of the ‘big’ novels, is seen here to represent not only financial but psychological and artistic support and encouragement; playing an essential, if low-profile, part in an artist’s continuing success. What I have tried to show is that a reading of James’s career, and of ideas of ‘completeness’ in his work, is itself incomplete without consideration of the minor productions – not as ephemeral or insignificant, but in James’s own appealing terms as ‘placeable small things’.

⁴⁰ Letter to Hendrik Andersen, 18 October, 1905; quoted in Anesko, p.5.

Chapter Four

Spurious centres: problems in defining the 'complete' James

James's wish to present a self-portrait of a complete writer has, of course, not been universally accepted in the near-century since his death. His literary reputation has fluctuated between extremes of New Critical reverence and subsequent periods of dismissal, before resting at the end of the twentieth century at a reasonably high watermark. While James's work may be seen to require a certain amount of proportional reduction because of his hitherto privileged subject position (as a white, male, middle-class, and canonical writer), his work has correspondingly proved amenable to theoretical analyses and interrogations from the field of cultural history. The 1995 *Reader's Companion to Twentieth Century Writers* states in its entry on James that 'To say that he is the best novelist of the twentieth century is contentious, but not absurd', which gives a good sense of James's perceived literary standing.¹ Far more contentious, however, is the question of exactly what Jamesian qualities, and which of James's works, have served to construct this reputation.

The title from this chapter is taken from a well-known passage from James's preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in which he is exploring the idea of what and where the 'centre' is in this novel, and in his others. Since the whole passage runs to two lengthy paragraphs of complicated syntax, the following is the most relevant extract for my purposes here:

Again and again, perversely, incurably, the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself *not*, so to speak, in the middle. It mattered little that the reader with the idea or suspicion of a structural centre is the rarest of friends and of critics [...] I urge myself to the candid confession that in very

¹ Peter Parker (general ed.), *The Reader's Companion to Twentieth Century Writers* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), entry on Henry James, p.366.

few of my productions, to my eye, *has* the organic centre succeeded in getting into proper position. [...] In several of my compositions this displacement has so succeeded, at the crisis, in defying and resisting me, has appeared so fraught with probable dishonour, that I still turn upon them, in spite of the greater or less success of final dissimulation, a rueful and wondering eye. These productions have in fact, if I may be so bold about it, specious and spurious centres altogether, to make up for the failure of the true. As to which in my list they are, however, that is another business, not on any terms to be made known.²

This kind of admission on James's part is of a similar kind to those discussed in my first chapter, where he confessed again and again to friends or editors that the exquisitely brief fiction he had planned had grown beyond his control into something large and decidedly more difficult to manage. In spite of these anxieties about finishing, though, James did in fact finish all the fictions he was writing about. There is a comparable sense of partial triumph here; though the 'centre' of *The Tragic Muse* and James's other productions may not have been 'in proper position', there is nevertheless a centre there, even if it is a 'specious or spurious' one.

If we approach James's work in a postmodern spirit, the idea of a 'spurious' as opposed to a 'true' centre for a fiction, and an implied preference for the 'true', is a hierarchy waiting to be dismantled; the apparently spurious centre would be equal in status to its supposedly authentic counterpart. Indeed, the concept of 'the centre' has been displaced by postmodernism, so that if anything, the 'spurious' centre has more claim to being 'real', having apparently been accepted as such by James's audience, than any centre identifies by James does. Yet James's critics continue to be as anxious as James himself was to find the 'true' centre of his individual works and his work as a whole. What I want to examine in this chapter, then, is the way in which, for critics of James's work, the

² Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in Blackmur, pp.85-86.

search for completeness comes to correspond to the search for a centre. Though these things are not the same, and can even be mutually exclusive, they are often identified as the composite object of a critical project; locating the centre of a James novel becomes equivalent to mapping the territory of his whole body of fiction. The theoretical position or practices espoused by a critic are rarely an influence on this, as I shall show; academics from all parts of the critical spectrum can be seen to be confusing a sense of completeness with a sense of centre. What emerges from a survey of various critical approaches to James's work is the sense that to pursue a quest for the centre of James's work is to mistake the nature of that work and produces a reductive interpretation of it.³ The most sophisticated Jamesian critics can be seen to be aware of this and to be actively pursuing a more advanced agenda.

James's addressing of the issue of the 'centre' in his prefaces demonstrate his own changeability on how it should be dealt with. While in the *Tragic Muse* preface he makes a distinction between true and spurious centres, this binarism is compromised in prefaces to successive novels. The concept re-emerges in a more fully developed and a more complicated form, in James's return to the topic in his preface to *The Wings of the Dove*. Firstly he says of Milly:

Though my regenerate New Yorker, and what might depend on her, should form my centre, my circumference was every whit as treatable. Therefore I must trust myself to know when to proceed from one and when from the other.⁴

Here James seems to have returned to a binary image of the centre, though in this instance opposing centre to circumference, rather than a spurious rival centre.

³ I am aware of the need to defend my own work from this charge, but I would argue that this chapter explains the nature of the trap that needs to be avoided in writing about James, and that the rest of the thesis makes an attempt at such an avoidance; endings and completeness being an important aspect of James's work without being its centre.

⁴ Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, in Blackmur, p.294.

However, the notion of ‘proceeding from’ what he considers the circumference itself gives that ‘circumference’ something like the status of a rival centre. James effectively concedes this later in the preface:

There was the ‘fun’, to begin with, of establishing one’s successive centres – of fixing them so exactly that the portions of the subject commanded by them as by happy points of view, and accordingly treated from them, would constitute, so to speak, sufficiently solid *blocks* of wrought material, squared to the sharp edge, as to have weight and mass and carrying power.⁵

The insistence on fixing these elements exactly, on their image as ‘blocks [...] squared to the sharp edge’, seems to me to show James attempting to counter the potential fuzziness of a narrative which departs from its declared centre, by establishing a clear-cut, squared-off system as governing that departure from singularity. Multiple centres are not confessed as a failure, as in *The Tragic Muse*; instead they are reinvented as ‘successive centres’, a structural triumph of parts which fit and work together without competition or overlap. The practical and actual outcome of the aim to ‘fix exactly’ these centres is more fluid and less ‘squared to the sharp edge’ than James would have it; however, that is not necessarily a criticism. James’s ambivalence towards the arrangement of his fictions around multiple centres is very much in keeping with his attitude towards ‘finishing’ and towards theorising the novel, as documented in my first and second chapters. He admits and welcomes a system of rigour, while regularly introducing modifications and compromises into that system, which nevertheless remains valuable. Significantly, James refuses (in the original quotation from the *Tragic Muse* preface) to identify the fictions where, according to him, the rightful centre was misplaced: ‘that is another business, not on any terms to be made known’. While this reticence is understandable in itself, the names of the

offending fictions cannot be revealed, perhaps because James's readers would then be able to apply the same criteria to further publications - to designate centres for themselves. Instead, as in the case of Hugh Vereker's disciples, this process becomes the proper work of the critic. It is useful at this point, then, to outline the most basic ways in which this definition of the 'centre', and by implication a portrait of the 'complete' James, is generated.

F. R. Leavis's inclusion of James in his chosen three 'great novelists in English' is not only a double-edged sword - in that James's work became identified with a Leavisite approach to literature, thus sharing in Leavis's decline when he lost critical favour - but a well-known example of the critical pursuit of a centre.⁶ While Leavis is passionate and insistent about James's greatness as a novelist, this claim is based largely on an assessment of *The Portrait of a Lady*, and entirely on the merits of James's works up to and including *The Bostonians*, which is described along with *The Portrait of a Lady* as 'one of the two most brilliant novels in the language'.⁷ Although Leavis awards praise of a more reserved kind to other early works, particularly *The Europeans*, his reading virtually dismisses James's career after the production of *The Bostonians*. He refers to *What Maisie Knew*, 'which is perfect', and *The Awkward Age* as works of merit from James's later phases, but mentions *The Ambassadors* exclusively in terms of negative judgement: '[It] seems to me to be not only *not* one of his great books, but to be a bad one'.⁸ According to Leavis, then, James's greatness rests entirely on his early work, and peaks with *The Portrait of a Lady*. The so-called middle and late phases of James's career are pointless extra verbiage, whose

⁵ Ibid., p.296.

⁶ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, 1948 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962); hereafter referred to as Leavis.

⁷ Leavis, p.153.

major worth for study is in exploring, as Leavis says, 'the question of what went wrong in his later development; for something certainly did go wrong.'⁹

Leavis should not be singled out in this preference for the early work, however, nor in his aim of defining it as the 'centre' of James's work as a whole. Sara Blair, in spite of an apparently more up-to-date agenda, employs the same limited strategy as Leavis in 'In the House of Fiction: Henry James and the Engendering of Literary Mastery', which proposes to 'displace the prefaces, to read them against their formidably literary contexts, as documents of engenderment in both senses of the term – and thereby to consider their production of such critical counterreadings.'¹⁰ Blair demonstrates from the outset her facility with the vocabulary of critical theory, but undermines her stated, and expansive, aims, by this statement at the beginning of the first section proper of her article:

Within the New York edition no document more effectively manages the motives and desires of mastery than the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. Combining with virtually unique seamlessness the intimacy of personal reminiscence and the high seriousness of literary doctrine, the *Portrait* Preface exemplifies the project of the edition as a whole.¹¹

Blair's original, expansive aims with regard to all the Prefaces can, we are told here, safely rest on an examination of the 'exemplary' preface to *Portrait*. She makes the error of arguing that because this particular document is the most illuminating in terms of the field of her study, it represents all of what this body of work, the *Prefaces*, yields on the subject; she succumbs to the tendency I mentioned earlier, confusing ideas of completeness with ideas of the centre. This

⁸ Leavis, p.126, in both cases.

⁹ Leavis, p.127.

¹⁰ Sara Blair, 'In the House of Fiction: Henry James and the Engendering of Literary Mastery', in David McWhirter (ed.), *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp.58-76, p.58; hereafter referred to as Blair.

¹¹ Blair, p.59.

inadequate justification of Blair's methodology is emphasised even more strongly at the close of her essay:

In the simultaneity of its gestures of self-erasure and self-exposure, the *Portrait* Preface can be usefully taken to stand for the New York Edition as a whole.¹²

Firstly, the *Portrait* preface is not alone in performing these simultaneous gestures. Secondly, I have already shown how James's treatment of a particular subject (in this case, the theme of the 'centre') is seen to mutate and develop through several prefaces and, it seems, the process of revision which has intervened. The idea that one text, even in the instance of the *Prefaces* - which could be considered to be more focused and coherent, as a group, with respect to the date and conditions of their production, than James's novels - can 'stand for the whole' is simply not satisfactory. As a result, *The Portrait of a Lady*, by way of its preface, is declared to be James's exemplary work without any thought of questioning the need for such a title to be bestowed.

In contrast to these preferences for early novels, James's later work has been prioritised by a number of scholars whose work pre- and post-dates Leavis's. Leavis himself attributed this position to Percy Lubbock's 1921 study of James, *The Craft of Fiction*, and Richard A. Hocks's historical narrative of James criticism cites Lubbock and Joseph Warren Beach, who published *The Method of Henry James* in 1918, as the critics who set the early tone of Jamesian criticism, and by 'attending to theme and technique and exhibiting respect for James's New York Edition preferences', established a scholarly preference for James the proto-modernist over James the late Victorian.¹³ In spite of this apparent

¹² Blair, p.73.

¹³ Richard A. Hocks, 'From Literary Analysis to Postmodern Theory: A Historical Narrative of James Criticism', in Daniel Mark Fogel (ed.), *A Companion to Henry James Studies* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp.1-24, pp.4-5; hereafter referred to as Hocks.

opposition, though, the approach of Lubbock and Beach to locating the centre of James's work operates on the same lines as Leavis's, except that they choose a different phase and a different James novel as representing completeness. Both Beach and Lubbock prioritise *The Ambassadors*: Beach states that 'The *ideal* of James is clearly a combination, or rather a *fusion* of good taste with spiritual discernment, and perhaps the most complete, if not the most dramatic, instance of this fusion is [...] Lambert Strether'.¹⁴ The title of F.O. Matthiessen's 1944 study, *Henry James: The Major Phase*, itself characterises this view; the critical views James expressed in the *Prefaces* justified literary precedence being awarded to the works of those period over James's earlier, less mature efforts.

This preference has not been confined to Leavis's predecessors; while both (and other) camps have enjoyed dominance in James studies at various times, emphatic partiality for the 'major phase' has been resounding in the last twenty years, since, as Richard Hocks observes:

James has become the receptacle for all the divergent, interlocking strands of postmodern critical theory – as distinct from 'literary criticism' – a development that, as we have seen, got underway in the late 1970s [...] I think it is fair to say that the ideological centre and critical hallmark of 1980s James studies resides with postmodern theory.¹⁵

This being the case (though, as Hocks acknowledges, broadly non-theoretical and non-postmodern approaches to James continued to proliferate) James's later novels are frequently utilised as texts most rewarding to theoretical exponents. This preference for a certain Jamesian 'phase' on occasion leads, ironically, to exaltation of *The Golden Bowl* in a manner reminiscent of Leavis's treatment of *The Portrait of a Lady*. Hocks's description of R. W. J. Wilson's *Henry James's*

¹⁴ Hocks, p.4.

¹⁵ Hocks, p.14.

*Ultimate Narrative: The Golden Bowl*¹⁶ (not, incidentally, one of the more theoretical works on this novel) argues that this work has ‘two interesting implications’ which are:

First, he presented *The Golden Bowl* as *the* book in James’s canon, much as Lubbock had *The Ambassadors* sixty years earlier. Second, his study insinuated that James’s last published novel alone deserved the status of, say, *Ulysses*, a proposal that seems excessive yet at certain moments almost plausible when one encounters chapter after chapter, essay after essay, written on it during the 1980s.¹⁷

The title of Wilson’s book is not unusual in tone; in addition to a general tendency to focus on James’s late novels as being of supreme contemporary and theoretical interest, *The Golden Bowl* seems to attract particular attention as the ultimate narrative achievement which leaves all of James’s other works in the shade. As well as documenting this critical tendency, though, the remarks above themselves have a metacritical interest. They make clear the fact that the practice of selecting a single novel as the centre of James’s work, able to represent the complete works, is a persistent strategy. Hocks’s response to this, though, is reminiscent of James’s remarks about the ‘spurious centres’ of his fictions; while aware of the extravagant claims being made for *The Golden Bowl*, he is almost ready to subscribe to them because of the sheer weight of academic opinion which has located it as the centre. Thus a spurious centre becomes, for all intents and purposes, the true one, at least of its moment. Earlier in his article Hocks remarked on Leavis’s revelation of the several canons within James’s work:

What this thesis really pointed up, however, besides new contextual appreciation for early and middle James, was the sheer quantity, the several ‘canons’ within James’s oeuvre. After all, how many authors could have their ‘major phase’ dismissed and *still* be part of ‘the great tradition’?¹⁸

¹⁶ R. W. J. Wilson, *Henry James’s Ultimate Narrative: The Golden Bowl* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Hocks, p.15.

¹⁸ Hocks, p.7.

Leavis's appreciation of James's middle phase is actually somewhat limited, but the idea of potential multiple canons within James's work that he seems to have prompted is a valuable one. Unfortunately, even criticism which uncovers this concept often chooses to deny it, as Leavis does, by insisting that a certain novel or phase represents the true centre of James. At this point, I wish to return to James's own image of 'spurious centres' in the spirit of the postmodern sensibility I invoked earlier. The difficulty posed for James himself in reckoning with these spurious centres, which were able to compete with and even defeat the centres he, as author, regarded as true, is one which should also be recognised and faced by critics. In short, what if the only centres available to us (as to James's contemporary readers) are the spurious ones created in the service of criticism and interpretation? The notion of a single centre would have to give way to a recognition of the existence of multiple centres, each valid but not supreme. In the criticism surveyed so far, Beach, Leavis, R. W. James Wilson and others are seen to pursue a single centre, a practice warned against by the admissions of the preface to the *Tragic Muse*, yet which seems inevitable.

James is by no means the only writer to whom this kind of selective appreciation is applied. Wordsworth's post-1805 output is, similarly, often regarded as little more than an anti-climactic footnote to *The Prelude* as his supreme work. It is natural, too, that tastes will change, and that certain works by an author will at times be more appealing to the contemporary reader than others. There are countless nineteenth-century novelists whose output demonstrates this: the changing regard for Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, once rapturously received, but now considered to be one of his least accomplished productions, is only one example. However, this tendency to synecdochise – to assume the part

to be fully representative of the whole – is a more-than-usually common feature of criticism applied to James's work. It seems, furthermore, to be in some instances a necessary limitation of the critical project, but in others an unnecessary, misleading and damaging one. Before analysing such approaches, I will explain more fully the judgement criteria I am applying to such criticism.

The titles of books about Henry James's work can often be deceptive. It is astonishing how many scholarly works imply, by way of their title and subtitle, that they discuss James's work in general, but are actually about (for instance) *The Ambassadors*. It is not unusual for a book which appears to devote perhaps a third of its length to James to spend that section discussing a single novel by James. Now, it is often a necessary and indeed desirable limitation of the critical project that scholarly works must focus on a small number of texts, or even a single text, to establish and substantiate their findings. I would not wish to invariably promote range of textual discussion over depth; range can often be a euphemism for shallowness, and while there are works in existence such as Samuel Gorley Putt's *A Reader's Guide to Henry James*, which discusses every major novel and tale by James, it would clearly be detrimental if every critical work operated on this model. The tendency I wish to challenge, though, is one which, like Leavis's, uses a relatively small number of James's texts as a basis for judgements which are applied homogeneously to *all* of James's texts. This error is by no means confined to the Leavis school of criticism; as I have already stated, many more recent and theoretically sophisticated critics have done the same thing, and thus have concluded their discussion with pronouncements on the nature of 'the Jamesian text' (significantly, a much-used phrase) which have clear limitations and obvious exceptions. The concept I want to question, then, is that of the

exemplary Jamesian text, the existence of which is assumed as a given. The most acute and rewarding readings of James, I would argue, are those which recognise and articulate the danger of subscribing to such a notion. In order to identify these more rewarding approaches, some more textually-specific examples of how synecdochic criticism operates, and an examination of its strongest and weakest points, are imperative.

It is perhaps inevitable that the fields of criticism which have examined James's work most fruitfully will also, in some instances, demonstrate the corresponding weaknesses of that criticism. Genre-related criticism of James's work is particularly susceptible in this respect, for two main reasons. Firstly, because James works in and draws on a variety of genres, using them flexibly and in combination often within a single novel, this eclecticism complicates his relationship with any single literary genre. Secondly, his ambivalence towards narrative closure presents a particular challenge to genre criticism. Since the ending of a narrative is a significant factor in determining the genre to which it belongs, and vice versa, critics who examine James's use of genre are also faced with the problem of fitting his endings into a generic pattern. Often, then, critical efforts to 'centre' a reading of James's work as a whole in the context of a certain genre require particular ingenuity in harmonising the 'closure' provided for individual novels within that reading, and can de-centre themselves in the process. It is useful, in elucidating this process, to examine several readings of this kind and the strategies they adopt in dealing with the endings of specific novels – in these instances, *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Peter Brooks, in his study *The Melodramatic Imagination*, must be given credit, at the outset, for explicitly taking on the aspect of *The American* which

presents the greatest challenge to his reading of it: the lapse from melodrama provided by the ending, in which Newman relinquishes his chance of revenge, burning the note that incriminates the Bellegardes and resolving to let them, and Claire de Cintré, go:

That Newman does not so rout the villains is a first sign of the typical Jamesian transmutation of melodrama, his primary interest in the melodrama of consciousness. [...] Newman's renunciation of revenge should not be construed as James's renunciation of melodrama. It marks on the contrary a deep understanding of the fundamental concerns of melodrama and its possible uses. If melodrama as a form exists to permit the isolation and dramatisation of integral ethical forces, to impose their evidence and a recognition of the force of the right, the mode and terms of Newman's choice stand squarely within the tradition. What differs is that the melodrama of external action - the suspenseful menace, pursuit, and combat - are all past by the time he resolves the ethical conflict. External melodrama has been used to lead into the melodrama of ethical choice.¹⁹

Brooks recognises James's 'deep understanding of melodrama and its possible uses', and the fact that James's ending represents a departure from any straightforward adherence to or use of the conventions of the genre. However, he seems to present James's use of the genre as something intended merely to enrich James's own primary concern with the narrative of consciousness. The ending of *The American* is defiantly incongruous, in the context of the orthodox melodrama which has structured its plot until Newman's renunciation of both Claire de Cintré and of his plan for revenge. Yet it is not approached as an incongruity, a strange and puzzling twist which is uncompromisingly out of harmony with the rest of the narrative. Instead, Brooks attempts to smooth it into a congruous relation with not only the whole of the novel, but also with James's early work, and indeed the complete body of James's work. This low-key, non-melodramatic ending to a generally melodramatic narrative is interpreted as an organic part of

¹⁹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) p.157; hereafter referred to as Brooks.

James's overall strategy to translate the crude external forms of melodrama into more refined internal ones. This is summarised by Brooks as follows: 'External melodrama has been used to lead into the melodrama of ethical choice.' Thus the strangeness of *The American's* ending is itself appropriated as part of a strategy by James, with regard to melodrama. Brooks's argument is that the end of *The American* thus makes sense when seen as a part of the whole that is James's work. The problem with this, I would argue, is that the ending of *The American* makes *more* sense when one does not attempt to resolve it into a part of a pattern (in this case, as a progressive element of James's use of generic convention) but accepts it as a deliberate anomaly, a part which was intended to stand out from the whole. Though the parts of James's various whole units (novel, group of novels, corpus) may be intended to fit together, this surely should not mean that they are to be seen as homogeneous. The conclusion of *The American* is, rather, James's conscious rupture with the conventions of melodrama; possibly the best instance of how his appropriation of any literary form mutated according to the demands not only of the work of the moment, but of the separate aspects of the work of the moment.

This critical project of bringing the various aspects of James's awkward endings into a harmonious relation with one another is best demonstrated by examining the way that *The Portrait of a Lady* is frequently invoked as an example of how the gap is bridged. *Portrait* is one of James's most frequently discussed works, and, moreover, is almost always rated highly in the James canon – this makes it a more useful example than the later works which tend to be worshipped and reviled in different quarters. Moreover, as an early novel demonstrating some of the characteristics of the more 'mature' James, it can be

more readily examined either as the high point of James's achievement, or as a useful point of reference to and comparison with novels from another stage of James's career. It is chosen by Brooks to support his argument about James's use of melodrama, but is also used in, among others, H. Meili Steele in relation to realism, and by Jonathan Freedman in relation to aestheticism. Therefore, it is helpful to look at the use of this same novel as part of these different generic standpoints.

Peter Brooks's treatment of the ending of *The American* argues that it represents the beginning of James's decision to transmute the melodramatic element in his fictions from the external to the internal - into 'the melodrama of consciousness'. To support this position, he turns to *The Portrait of a Lady*, identifying it as the next step in this progression, and the natural successor to *The American* in its development of James's generic borrowings:

In later novels, the melodrama of external action will tend to be more and more superseded in favour of a stance, from the outset, within the melodrama of consciousness. Such for instance is the case with *The Portrait of a Lady*, where all of Isabel Archer's career is framed in terms of choices, and the terms of choice are themselves progressively polarised and intensified [...] It is probable that the discomfort felt by many readers and critics faced with the ending of the novel derives from the absolute terms that James has staked on Isabel's choice, a feeling of moral assault or psychic scandal of the type that we found literal melodrama to produce.²⁰

There are certainly parallels between *Portrait* and *The American*; they are both concerned with the question of hubris, with national identities, and with ideas of 'culture' and social order. Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman share an excess of self-confidence, a belief in their own faculties and opportunities which is eventually undermined, and the awareness of their apparent good fortune which is taken advantage of by others. However, *Portrait* is both less overtly, but also

²⁰ Brooks, pp. 157-8.

differently, melodramatic. It has a greater melodramatic affinity with James's first two novels, *Watch and Ward* and *Roderick Hudson*, whose plots are both to some extent reliant on the revelation of true biological parentage, and the implications of genetic inheritance that accompany it, than it does with *The American*, in which one's status as European or American is determined by straightforward cultural conditioning, and where the opposition between the two cultures is therefore greatly simplified. In fact, the 'absolute terms' of Isabel's final choice are less absolute than Brooks implies. As the narrative moves towards its end, there are hints that its conclusion will not necessarily be a definitive conclusion for Isabel. She feels, in the railway carriage which is taking her to London and away from her husband:

Deep in her soul - deeper than any appetite for renunciation - was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost enlivening, in the conviction. It was a proof of strength - it was a proof she should some day be happy again. It couldn't be she was to live only to suffer; she was still young, after all, and a great many things might happen to her yet. (*P*, vol.2, p.392).

This suggests that though James's narrative may be drawing to a close, Isabel's narrative will continue, and continue developing, not just perpetuate the stasis of her current relations with Osmond. This is endorsed by her dying cousin Ralph who, when she arrives at his bedside, remarks: 'I don't see how such a generous mistake as yours can hurt you for more than a little' (*P*, vol.2, p.417). Rather than the more predictable doom of an obvious submission to her husband, assumed by Brooks, *Portrait* promises many more things for Isabel, yet puts them beyond the easy reach of the reader. Indeed, the final paragraph of the novel produces discomfort precisely because of its refusal to endorse Isabel's choice as absolute:

Henrietta had come out, closing the door behind her, and now she put out her hand and grasped his arm. 'Look here, Mr. Goodwood,' she said; 'just you wait!'

On which he looked up at her - but only to guess, from her face, with a revulsion, that she simply meant he was young. She stood shining at him with that cheap comfort, and it added, on the spot, thirty years to his life. She walked him away with her, however, as if she had given him now the key to patience. (*P*, vol.2, pp.437-8)

Isabel's ultimate destination remains unknown, with no promise of a definitive conclusion for the reader any more than for Casper Goodwood. The method of Isabel's exit is melodramatic; her choice is not. The frustrations of James's readers, with this novel as with others, derive from the lack of absolutes in its resolution - from the absence of the 'poetic justice' demanded by R. H. Hutton and his peers.

H. Meili Steele's concern is to examine the sense in which James has traditionally been considered to be a realist writer - that is, by excelling in 'psychological realism' and the representation of consciousness - alongside the idea of realism as a 'drama of reference', a system of historical and social reference which creates a sense of verifiable reality within the text. Her strategy is to examine and compare three novels - Balzac's *Les Illusions perdues*, Flaubert's *L'education sentimentale*, and James's last finished novel, *The Golden Bowl*.

These examples are chosen for the following reasons:

They represent important and historically distinct variations of the ubiquitous nineteenth-century type, the *Bildungsroman*, in which a young character is initiated into the complexities of society. Such a structure provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between realism and knowledge, since the protagonist's understanding, not just his actions, is foregrounded.²¹

Steele's examination of language and knowledge is, even at its broadest, focused only on James's three major late novels. However, in spite of this consciously

select focus, she also demonstrates how a reading of James's generic forms leads to problems, in assuming the part to stand for the whole and vice versa. The description of the qualities in her novel of choice, 'important and historically distinct variations of the ubiquitous nineteenth-century type, the *Bildungsroman*, in which a young character is initiated into the complexities of society' could well be applicable to other novels in the James canon and not only *The Golden Bowl*; it could be more appropriately applied to *The Portrait of a Lady*.²² In this context, though, *Portrait* is invoked as the point of reference against which the generic attributes of *The Golden Bowl* are defined. Steele says of that novel:

The background information that we receive [...] is limited to what is essential to the problem. That is, we find that Charlotte was a poor but well-educated American girl, but we do not find out what she read, what were the formative influences on her character. (One can contrast this treatment with extensive exposition of Isabel's background in *The Portrait of a Lady*.) Most important, 'facts' do exist independently of language. The Jamesian text is not simply 'withholding' information about the characters or their culture; rather, the text dramatizes the articulation of the past.²³

Portrait, then, is located as a traditionally realist point of reference in the sequence of James's work, from which he develops to produce the self-referential system of meaning which dominates his later fictions. We have already observed, however, that *Portrait* is itself a departure from the traditional realist notions of representation held both by its contemporary reviewers and other critics such as Brooks. Again, the view of James's novelistic development as a smooth progression, from untroubled realism to a self-referential drama in which meaning is subjectively defined, becomes problematic.

²¹ H. Meili Steele, *Realism and the drama of reference: strategies of representation in Balzac, Flaubert and James* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1988), p.4; hereafter referred to as Steele.

²² I discuss *Portrait* in relation to the *bildungsroman* model in the next chapter.

²³ Steele, p.76.

Steele's prioritisation of James's late phase results in her locating the attributes of the exemplary Jamesian text in the terms of *The Golden Bowl*, as she states, having differentiated between that novel and *Portrait*: 'The Jamesian text is not simply "withholding" information about the characters or their culture; rather, the text dramatizes the articulation of the past'. Firstly, James's fictions do not homogeneously 'dramatise the articulation of the past'; secondly, they do not demonstrate a continuous and even development towards this method of representation. Instead, they tend to adapt their presentation of background information in accordance with the generic demands of the text. Thus, in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), though the governess remains nameless, we still receive information about her background as an unworldly provincial girl, partly from herself and partly from Douglas, the narrator; whereas, in *The Sacred Fount* (1900), no social background or points of external reference at all are provided for the unnamed narrator - yet these two works belong to the same period of James's career, and were written in close proximity. The idea of 'the Jamesian text' is not one to be straightforwardly identified within the context of referential realism.

A third instance of this generic approach is Jonathan Freedman's analysis of James's engagement with British aestheticism and its portrayals of decadence and commodity culture, which takes up, to some extent, the ideas of referentiality questioned by Steele. Freedman states that 'what James accomplished was both to complete and to supplant the aestheticist project by fully resolving its irresolute if playful problematics through the valorizing of his own imaginative processes and

aesthetic performance'.²⁴ This vocabulary of 'completing' and 'fully resolving' seems in a sense anathema to James's fictions, which show a deep distrust of the idea that completion and resolution can ever truly be achieved. However, Freedman goes on to argue that the finished artistic object, and the way it is fetishised by aestheticism, is an aspiration which James sets out to satirise. Having created one aesthete in *Roderick Hudson*, James develops this interest in his portrayal of Gilbert Osmond, the oppressively polished gentleman of *Portrait*:

The representation of Osmond is thoroughly grounded in this historical moment [...] [It] mirrors and mimics the satirical attacks on these aesthetes launched largely by Du Maurier and members of the *Punch* coterie. [...] In this novel aestheticism is understood as being an endemic - indeed epidemic contagion, ultimately infecting even the author himself.²⁵

The rhetorically flourished idea of the author falling prey to the subject of his own satire is a slight overextension of this point. Though James often speaks of aspiring to have 'finished' his books, as I documented in the first chapter of this thesis, he has great problems with doing so, exhibiting a strong aversion to regarding his work as 'finished' or complete. The extensive revisions of his fictions that became the New York Edition are, I would argue, one symptom of this attitude; certainly, James's desires as a craftsman are quite the opposite to Osmond's in that he wishes to leave Isabel unfinished, 'en l'air', rather than transform her into a sterile *objet d'art*. It is also, perhaps, James's consistent habit of engaging with a variety of literary genres, and often with more than one in the same novel - *Portrait*, as we have seen, can credibly be said to draw on realism, melodrama, and romance as well as aestheticism - which prevents him from locating himself entirely within the context of a particular genre. However

²⁴ Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993) p. xxvi.; hereafter referred to as Freedman.

²⁵ Freedman, p.147 and p.153.

Freedman argues that James's use of these received images of aestheticism inform and prescribe his strategy in ending *Portrait* the way he does. He states:

[James] can demonstrate himself to be a non-Osmondian author only by opening up the plot: by refusing the consolation of closure, whether comic, ironic or tragic. It is in response to this problematic, I am suggesting, that James ends his novel with an interpretative mystery [...] It is this narrative silence that provides the final repudiation of the reifying aestheticism associated with Osmond [...] the effect of this conclusion is to enable Isabel to step beyond the narrative frame within which she is enclosed.²⁶

The ending of *Portrait*, then, can be seen to be in this sense akin to endings such as that of *The American*: its refusal to provide resolution is a refusal to grant ultimate authority to any generic element within the text, in accordance with the developments and fluctuations in James's use of these genres. However, Freedman's argument is presented as, in effect, a rather grand flourish of closure in its refutation of conventional closure on *Portrait*'s behalf. Again, we do not see Isabel 'step beyond the narrative frame'; the final vision focuses on Henrietta and Goodwood, with Osmond left behind before any of the novel's concluding scenes of confrontation. In constructing the text's ending as a battle in which Isabel triumphs over Osmond, Freedman is imposing rhetorical closure even as he debunks that linked with plot.

Freedman's treatment of James's generic practice, though, is an advance on that of some other critics, in his affirmation that these elements of James's work are *not* necessarily equally and evenly related to his work as a whole. In concluding his argument, he states:

I am not hostile to the identification between his work and the example of aestheticism - even aestheticism at its most reductive - at least as long as this identification is put in its proper place both in terms of James's career and his role in literary and cultural history. As long as we avoid a reductive reading of James's entire career as if it were aspiring to the

²⁶ Freedman, p.166-67.

condition of *The Golden Bowl*, we are in a position to read James's final turn towards the aesthetic in its full complexity.²⁷

The point made here by Freedman is one that is easily overlooked. As critics working from an overview of James's career and its development, it is certainly tempting to try to interpret the various elements of his work as having a regular, evenly proportioned relation to one another and within his body of writings; especially with the encouragement of James's own intense interest in the relation of the parts to the whole, and his advocacy of a sense of organic unity, within fictions. However, though he maintains that those relations should be present, he does not advocate them having equal weight. Freedman rightly sees James's career as something more irregular and complex than a progression of fictions growing steadily nearer to the perfection of *The Golden Bowl*. The factor that is endemic in these approaches to James, yet problematic for every one of them, is that of his engagement with the ideas of completion, ending, conclusion, resolution. It is a necessary part of their critical project to try to account for his irresolution. My own critical project, more in sympathy with Freedman's than with those of Brooks and Steele, is to demonstrate that this irresolution can itself be interpreted as a strategy of resolution by James and, moreover, a more satisfying one than attempts to refashion them as consonant in some way with particular ideas of closure, generic or otherwise, can be. Nevertheless, even Freedman is lured by the vocabulary of closure, as my initial quote from his study shows. Declaring James's intent to 'complete and supplant the aestheticist project' is too dismissive of James's own statement that 'nothing is my *last* word

²⁷ Freedman, p.244.

about anything'.²⁸ His aim, rather, is to expose incompleteness, aware that providing alternatives is not so easy.

Gender-related studies of James have also engaged with the difficulty of explaining his apparent aversion to narrative closure and completeness. The success of the enterprise, on these terms, often depends on the extent to which analysis considers the completeness and closure of the form of the texts, as well as those qualities (or lack of them) in specific characters. For instance, queer theory has been enthusiastically applied to James's work, in the wake of continuing debates about his sexual identity, in recent years, and a prominent and groundbreaking example of this is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's essay 'The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic'.²⁹ Sedgwick interprets John Marcher's secret, the 'prodigious and terrible' thing for which he is waiting, as his concealed awareness of himself as homosexual. This essay engendered a huge amount of interest in queer readings of James, which have made it easy to overlook Sedgwick's original focus on a single tale. Her investigation of 'homosexual panic' places 'The Beast in the Jungle' in a late Victorian context, comparing it to earlier works by Thackeray and writings by peers such as Stevenson, rather than interpreting it as representative of James's body of work as a whole. While Sedgwick has returned to the task of queering James in other essays, her criticism is carefully selective, avoiding the implication that all of James's major works are *primarily* about repressed homosexuality, often the impression made by subsequent, less subtle extensions of her theories. The need to queer James can on occasion lead critics into implausibilities, especially where

²⁸ Letter to Mrs F. H. Hill, 21 March 1879, in *Henry James: Selected Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.161.

²⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic', in *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Harvester, 1991), pp.182-212.

(as I have previously argued) James's ambiguous closures are concerned. One example of this is Christopher Lane's article on *Roderick Hudson*, a text which hardly needs a 'resisting reader' to perceive its homoerotic and homosexual elements. Lane's insistence that these elements are deeply repressed, however, leads him to make a claim for which the text itself gives no evidence. He states:

The heterosexual imperative governing Rowland and Mary's marriage, which marks and even scars the end of this novel, seems to obscure Rowland's rivalry with Mary for Roderick; Rowland's conventional (that is, 'homosocial') rivalry with Roderick for Mary only partly subsumes his 'homosexual' interest in the younger man.³⁰

Lane's chosen interpretation of the whole text leads him to misinterpret the dissonance of the ending of *Roderick Hudson*. Like Brooks, his synecdochic approach results in a strained effort to resolve the irresolvable, by finding a pattern governing the work into which this awkward part can be awkwardly fitted; in Lane's case, however, this becomes a more serious error – one of outright misreading rather than questionable interpretation. The last paragraph of *Roderick Hudson* gives very clear indications of the non-matrimonial relationship between Rowland and Mary:

That cry [Mary's, on seeing Roderick's body] still lives in Rowland's ears. It interposes persistently against the consciousness that when he sometimes – very rarely – sees her, she is inscrutably civil to him; against the reflexion that during the awful journey back to America, made of course with his assistance, she had used him, with the last rigour of consistency, as a character definitely appointed to her use. She lives with Mrs Hudson under the New England elms, where he also visits his cousin Cecilia more frequently than of old. When he calls on Mary he never sees the elder lady. (*RH*, pp.526-7)

This account hardly permits a marriage between Roderick and Mary, who are clearly living separate lives in separate houses, and 'very rarely' see one another. It also, in my view, presents Rowland as being painfully and reluctantly aware

that Mary does not, and will never, see him as a potential sexual or marital partner. The irony of the passage is that, while Mary regards him as 'appointed to her use' in an almost husbandly way during their return to America, that regard not reciprocal – it is based entirely on propriety and practicality, and is asexual. Moreover, the final sentences of the novel describe Rowland's reversion to his original state as a man without a purpose except to discuss with his cousin Cecilia (a 'safe' woman) his fascination for another man:

And then he talks to her [Cecilia] of Roderick, of whose history she never wearies and whom he never elsewhere names. (*RH*, p.527)

Not only does the novel end by reinstating Roderick as Rowland's perpetually unattainable object of desire, it also positions Roderick as the subject which will always divide Mary and Rowland, not, as Lane asserts, the catalyst who 'precipitates the reciprocal desire between Rowland and Mary Garland, who mourn the same lost object.'³¹ Any examination (close or otherwise) of the text undermines Lane's project of reading *Roderick Hudson* as an anti-queer narrative which raises the spectre of homosexuality, only to exterminate it in favour of 'normal' marital closure. There is more than one centre, either heterosexual or homosexual, for the narrative of relationships in *Roderick Hudson*, in which no sexual choice can be seen as successful. Lane's suggestion that James smooths its disruptive homoeroticism into a final triumph of conventional heterosexual love and marriage is by no means endorsed by the text. This illustrates the need to guard against indiscriminately reading all of James's output as homogeneously receptive to a particular theory, however pioneering. The result in this instance is that Sedgwick's innovative approach to a particular section of James's work can

³⁰ Christopher Lane, 'The Impossibility of Seduction in *Roderick Hudson* and *The Tragic Muse*', in *American Literature*, 68:4 (1996) 739-764, 747; hereafter referred to as Lane.

³¹ Lane, p.746.

be seen to engender attempts like Lane's to read James as a whole in the same way, which prove ideologically and textually unsustainable.

Considerations of gender and writing at the level of form can often be more usefully applied to James's work in general. Strategies such as James's approach to (or avoidance of) closure, his efforts to delay what is happening in the text – whether this is the entrance of a protagonist, such as Nanda Brookenham in *The Awkward Age*, or even the end of a particularly complex sentence – and his circuitous writing style, have been enthusiastically appraised by feminist critics as examples of feminine texts, if not *écriture féminine*. Lisa Appignanesi's study of femininity and creativity demonstrates this line of argument, attributing characteristics of James's writing to the 'femininity' of that writing:

As Blake points out, the feminine principle is flux, change and the refusal of a fixed point of reference. James's partiality to water metaphors, the primal element of flux, supports this feminine orientation. It is the feminine sensibility that keeps relationships alive by disturbing ritual, by submitting it to the tests of change, as Naomi Lebowitz has suggested. James's art is built on this continual unwillingness to allow ossification of an inflexible centre. This is the basis of his law of 'successive aspects' or the planned 'rotation of aspects', which prevents any one element from gaining absolute proportions, since any element, once it is seen from constantly shifting points of view, begins to lose its fixed and unchanging quality. Undoubtedly this leads to James's recognised 'ambiguity'.³²

This kind of definition is perhaps too dependent on conventional binary determinations of masculinity and femininity; in fact, Appignanesi could go much further than she does in exploring the paradox of three biologically male writers constructing feminine texts, since her examination is strictly textual rather than contextual. However, her insight into James's fluidity and aversion to 'an inflexible centre' is extremely perceptive, and accurate in its description of the

³² Lisa Appignanesi, *Femininity and the Creative Imagination: a study of Henry James, Robert Musil and Marcel Proust* (London: Vision Press, 1973), p.26; hereafter referred to as Appignanesi.

formal fluidity and rotation of characters found in many of James's novels.³³

Appignanesi's work is informed about James's suspicion of centres, but its limitations are more apparent when she shifts her analysis from writing to plot and character, as can be seen from her statements on the fate of Isabel Archer:

Isabel runs away from Goodwood and in doing so she renders her portrait complete. She emerges as the slightly ascetic Diana who lives, as she herself put it, in the mind of Osmond, the moon [...] She has become another masculine emanation, a static figure, whose outlines are complete, defined, and whose possibility for expanding the circuit of 'felt life' and attaining consciousness is closed.³⁴

Appignanesi's character analysis is most persuasive if we, as readers, begin it as firmly convinced as she is that Isabel is to return submissively to Osmond at the end of *Portrait*. If (like me) the reader is not, this image of Isabel as having become 'masculine' 'static', and 'complete' seems less convincing. What can be characterised as feminine in terms of form and writing itself, is not necessarily the same as what is perceived to be feminine in terms of character and plot. Since the object and outcome of Isabel's journey to Rome are unspecified, we are not provided with the definitive, 'masculine' closure of such a return to Osmond, a factor overlooked by Appignanesi. Moreover, the attributes which Appignanesi has here designated masculine – 'static', 'defined outlines', a restricted consciousness – are often imposed on, and read as emblematic of, *female* character; female protagonists in Victorian novels are more likely than men to be limited in their movements, consciousness of life and range of experience, and regarded as static objects. An important element of *Portrait* is its examination of how Isabel is the subject of everyone's gaze, objectified and figured as a spectacle for her cousin Ralph and her successive suitors. She is the subject of a series of

³³ This aspect of James's work, particularly from the late 1890s onwards, is discussed in chapter six.

³⁴ Appignanesi, p.46.

attempts to restrict her movements, from Mrs Touchett's attempts to make her go to bed, to Osmond's disapproval of her leaving the villa to meet Henrietta Stackpole or the dying Ralph – attempts that she temporarily evades by going to London, out into Rome, even on a trip around the world, but to which she then succumbs. However, her final journey out of the scene of the narrative is an occasion on which we do not *see* Isabel's motion arrested – whatever she is destined for, she is last seen running. I would argue that rather than finally dooming Isabel to a masculine enclosure of plot and character, James's final documentation of her movements enacts an evasion of traditionally *feminine* character closure. Appignanesi's view of the novel's end, however, is redeemed by her awareness of the danger of exemplifying Isabel:

There is nothing to say that James approved of Isabel's actions. Indeed his ironic approach to her should make us wary of idealising her as the consummate Jamesian heroine. If we rid ourselves of this assumption, we see that Isabel emerges as the first Jamesian venture into the realistic world of his middle period.³⁵

While Appignanesi's approach has its limitations, it also contains instances of clarity on how to avoid some of the errors committed by other critics in 'idealising', or searching for James's 'consummate' heroine, trope or text. Lastly, her figuring of *Portrait* not as a 'centre', but as a 'venture' into a new stage of James's career, is a valuable alternative to the recurrent image of the 'centre', and one to which I shall return in my conclusion to this chapter. A less problematic use of feminist theory - perhaps so because the article states its theoretical position upfront - is provided in Mary Doyle Springer's essay, 'Closure in James: A Formalist Feminist View', where she brings together ideas of feminist representation and the biographical need *not* to appropriate James as a feminist,

³⁵ Ibid.

thus accepting the 'centre' of her article as a focus and not a holistic way of reading James or his work:

Almost no female character is conceived as a finished or closed character and it follows that we cannot easily test her author against any easy set of feminist principles having to do with the representation of women – with the very notable exception of that principle of representation itself.³⁶

Springer locates femininity with an anti-rationalist position and with the kind of non-linearity associated with *écriture féminine*, and argues persuasively that instances of women in James who espouse rationality and a need for closure are brought to a tragic end, as in the case of the governess in 'The Turn Of The Screw, of whom she states:

The governess lacks, as the children initially do not, almost all of what Julia Kristeva would call a feminine sense of 'jouissance', of the 'carnivalistic' play of life, a playfulness that attempts to fool us out of what is often our insane rationality – including perhaps our excesses of critical rationality. Is there a possibility that her critics have all aped the governess in her dangerous desire to control all mysterious matters?³⁷

Springer's formal association of avoidance of closure with a delight in play, in fluidity and an overthrow of fixedness and linearity, not only develops her feminist argument, but consolidates my argument in its awareness of the 'dangerous desire to control' found in the insistence of critics on fixing a centre for James.

The final point I want to make in this chapter returns to postmodernism, and concerns the question of the extent to which I wish to endorse 'decentring' James's body of work. In other words, having expressed scepticism about various critical approaches which have assumed the validity of a 'fixed centre' of James's work, how sceptical should the reader of James be towards postmodernism itself?

³⁶ Mary Doyle Springer, 'Closure in James: A Formalist Feminist View', in *A Companion to Henry James Studies*, ed. by Daniel Mark Fogel (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp. 265-285, p.269; hereafter referred to as Springer.

³⁷ Springer, p.271.

Is the image of the centre to be dispensed with altogether? To conclude, then, I will describe some modifications that could be productively made to the importance of the centre.

In Jamesian criticism structuralism has been particularly productive in taking on this question of the centre, at least in term of form, the centre being a formal or literary property of the text. The best example is Tzvetan Todorov's article 'The Secret of Narrative'; which states, as its central proposition, 'The Jamesian narrative is always based on *the quest for an absolute and absent cause*.'³⁸ The essay makes an excellent argument for this pursuit as a centre of James's work, but as we can see, Todorov's awareness of the need to define the terms of his investigation are themselves revealing of its weaknesses. I will quote at length to give a fair account of the points being made:

Before illustrating the diverse variations of this 'figure in the carpet' we must deal with one possible objection - that not all of James's works conform to the same pattern. To speak of the tales alone, some do not participate in this movement, even if we discover it in them. We must therefore add two qualifications. First, that this 'figure' is linked to a particular period in James's *oeuvre*; it dominates that *oeuvre* almost exclusively from 1892 to at least 1903 (when James was in his fifties). James wrote almost half his tales during those twelve years. What comes before may be considered, in the light of this hypothesis, as no more than a preparatory labor, as a brilliant but scarcely original exercise, which belongs to the context of the lessons James had learned from Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. The second qualification is of a theoretical, not a historical order; we may assume, it seems to me, that an author comes closer in some works than in others to that 'figure in the carpet' which epitomizes and sustains the totality of his writings. Whereby we may account for the fact that even after 1892 James continues writing tales which belong to the realm of his 'realistic' exercises.

[...] Let us say that what we have just defined resembles the notational grid shared by the various instruments in a jazz group. The grid establishes certain points of reference, without which the piece could not be played. But this does not mean that the saxophone part becomes identical to the trumpet's. Similarly, in his tales James exploits very different timbres, tonalities which at first seem to have nothing in

³⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Secret of Narrative', in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp.143-178, p.145; hereafter referred to as Todorov.

common, though the overall project remains the same.³⁹

The focus of the project is carefully and admirably limited; Todorov is aware that the figure he is discussing is most prevalent in a particular area of James's output and directs his examination accordingly. However, his theoretical stand that some works 'come closer' to the author's guiding principle, his 'figure in the carpet', becomes self-destructive in that it leads the reader to wonder whether, if that is the case, the critics might not have got it wrong. If some works display the 'figure' more readily than others, then those 'other' works might yield their own 'figure', a centre to rival *the* centre which Todorov claims to have located. While Todorov's recognition that James's work is not homogeneously concerned with the same theme is important and advanced, his reading of James, which in itself is inspiring and provocative, maintains the singularity of the centre. Having invoked the analogy of 'The Figure in the Carpet', he nevertheless fails to remember the import of the story, which is that, firstly, the 'figure' is never revealed, and that secondly, as a result of that, the reader has no evidence (all characters being to some extent unreliable) that the protagonists in the tale are actually thinking of the same 'figure' that Hugh Vereker first alluded to, or that they have not, between them, thought of more than one possible 'figure'. The circularity of the pursuit conceals the fact that there may be, and is, more than a single figure, or centre, to pursue.

What Todorov's work on James shows is that structuralist projects, applied to James's work, are worthwhile and valuable, but not as comprehensive as they want or often claim to be. However, a wholly decentred view of James's work is just as misshapen as one which identifies a fixed centre. To a certain extent,

³⁹ Todorov, p.146.

Todorov is right, in that one of the main points of James's fictions is to induce a search for the centre, a search which in and of itself is rewarding and productive. Postmodernism can also have a homogenising effect, and this too should be avoided as should readings which elevate *The Golden Bowl*, or *The Portrait of a Lady*, or any other Jamesian text as 'exemplary'. The disruptions of a pattern, rather than either fixing or dispensing with it, are what engender productive readings of James's texts in the context of James's oeuvre.

A plausible solution (or, perhaps, desirable compromise), then, is to accept James's own configuration of the structure of his work as having 'spurious centres', which are multiple and thus without absolute authority, and which are also fluid, occupying a changing position in the hierarchy of the text and its perceived meanings. To reclaim the notion of the spurious centre as something to be celebrated about James's work is actually to do James more favours than by imitating his own initial uncertainty about them – rather, we should aim to move towards the kind of valorising of 'successive centres' which James attempts more confidently in his preface to *The Wings of the Dove*. Nevertheless, I would argue, the notion of 'spurious centres' is more useful to us as James readers and critics than an adoption of the image of 'successive centres' would be. I would suggest that there are points in James's oeuvre which are often identified as centres - such as *Portrait* and *The Golden Bowl* - but that, while figuring them as centres locates them as fixed, they actually represent waves, in terms of certain things James is trying to construct and which, having been reached, provoke him to break off from that pattern of composition and move on to a new phase. This can be seen in the pause after writing *Portrait* and the subsequent turn to politically and socially-engaged fiction in *The Bostonians*; in the 'ultimate narrative' and

obsession with symmetry of *The Golden Bowl*, after which James completed no more full-length novels; even after the disastrous reception of *Guy Domville*, which prompted James's adoption of his 'dramatic method' for narrative fiction. Rather than isolating a particular text as a 'centre', or as the encapsulation of all previous narrative achievements, it could be seen as a 'wave', connected with its predecessors and successors (in a less hierarchical way), as a part of the whole that is James's work, yet without dominating the whole. However, since replacing a critical vocabulary is itself an ideological statement which should be comprehensively explored, I wish to argue for the moment that our persistent fixation with the centre should be prefaced by the qualification of 'spurious', in a reminder that such centres are constructed in order to be succeeded, and are always provisional and fluid.

Accepting, at the beginning of any critical enterprise, the spurious character of any attempt to permanently 'centre' James's fiction is invaluable. There is something too positive, too clear and comfortably defined about the notion of successive centres, just as James's description of the sharpness and good construction of these items in *The Wings of the Dove* seems to be protesting too much. To accommodate and even support the search for spurious centres is to reconcile oneself to the unease that James's fictions produce; to become comfortable with it, in fact, by recognising it as such, without growing to see it as comfortable. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, in her book on James's late fictions, demonstrates exactly this awareness of the problem that needs to be confronted:

Strether's Paris is not imaginatively contiguous with Newman's, nor is Maggie Verver's England with Isabel Archer's. Yet ironically, the experienced critic of James is in more danger than the naïve reader of underestimating the distance from the one novelistic universe to the other. Bewildered and frustrated by the elaborate indirections of the late style, a reader confronting *The Wings of the Dove* for the first time scarcely needs

reminding that he has before him a very different sort of thing from 'Daisy Miller'. But the Jamesian critic, accustomed to interpreting different fictions and rendering their language into his own, may have mastered this art of translation too well. He has made himself familiar with what 'really' happens in the late novels. [...] But one thus translates James's late novels at the risk of doing violence to what is most idiosyncratic and exciting in them, of making their peculiarly fluid and unsettling reality something far more stable and conventional.⁴⁰

If the term were not too dangerous, I would say that Yeazell's work 'exemplifies' the approach which proves most valuable in James criticism. Her insistence on maintaining a sense of the 'fluid and unsettling reality' of James's later fictions is a strategy which can also be kept in mind with regard to the various phases of James's career. A pattern of achieving an aim, then veering off in a new direction, describes not only the topography of James's career but also the arrangement of the texts themselves. Creating centres and de-centring them are intrinsic to the way James writes, and thus to the most profitable ways of reading his work.

⁴⁰ Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp.1-2; hereafter referred to as Yeazell.

Chapter Five

The in/complete man: individuals, incompleteness, and bildungsroman in James's novels

In 1865, the first full year of James's writing career, he reviewed an English translation by Thomas Carlyle of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, regarded as the paradigmatic *bildungsroman*. The review is characteristic in saying as much about James's interests and ideas about how fiction should be written as about the work itself. His admiration of the concept of *Wilhelm Meister* rises above his admiration for its separate elements, which he criticises as being dull and lacking in plot or excitement. The points he singles out for praise, though, foreshadow his own fictional preoccupations, as can be seen here:

We have Goethe's own assertion that the work contains no central point. It contains, however, a central figure, that of the hero. [...] [The hero] sets out on his journey through life in quest, to speak generally, of happiness – that happiness which, as he [Goethe] is never weary of repeating, can be found only in the subject's perfect harmony with himself. This is certainly a noble idea. Whatever pernicious conclusions may be begotten upon it, let us freely admit that at the outset, in its virginity, it is beautiful.¹

Important elements of James's future novelistic output are already evident; for example, the focus on the hero's journey, or on the quest of finding harmony with oneself. Most significant for this discussion, though, is James's attitude towards Goethe's project of completeness, which exemplifies the feeling permeating his fiction - that completeness is a noble idea and inevitably draws us into its pursuit. His remarks on the 'pernicious conclusions [that] may be begotten upon it', would probably have seemed, to a contemporary reader for whom James is merely a cub reviewer, to refer to the cynicism that could

¹ Henry James, 'Wilhelm Meister: Apprenticeship and Travels. From the German of Goethe by Thomas Carlyle', in *North American Review*, July 1865; reprinted in Roger Gard, *The Critical*

pervade such a noble idea and spoil the idealism of this quest for happiness. A retrospective view which takes James's own novelistic career into account, produces, I would argue, just the opposite reading: a narrative which shows completeness and happiness being achieved by way of harmony with oneself is, in James's opinion, a false narrative. Conception (and James's metaphor of virginity and procreation is telling here) is admirable, but the inevitable growth of the idea, in a full-length novel, will destroy its ideal and perfection.

James develops the question of how this noble idea might be brought to a less pernicious fulfilment, outlining his technical approach to the problem:

A modern novelist, taking the same subject in hand, would restrict himself to showing the sensations of his hero during the process of education; that is, his hero would be the broad end, and the aggregate of circumstances the narrow end, of the glass through which we were invited to look; and we should so have a comedy or a tragedy, as the case might be.²

This emphasis on technical formation of a tale as endowing it with interest is typical of the remarks James makes about his own individual works in the planning stages. His notebooks are replete with examples of how particular novels will be structured by a protagonist's limited perspective, by the successive viewpoint of more than one protagonist, or even by the delayed entrance of and subsequent speculation about a protagonist. However, this emphasis on technical artistry as 'making' a work of fiction, which often receives the lion's share of attention in criticism of James's novels, should not obscure the importance of this generic pattern – that of the education of the protagonist, of his sensations during this process, and of the potential for both tragedy and comedy in its events. This pattern is central to much of James's fiction, without dominating all of it or being present all of the time. The influence of genre in terms of its

Muse: Selected Literary Criticism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.29-33, p.30; hereafter referred to as '*Wilhelm Meister*'.

² '*Wilhelm Meister*', p.32.

content and structures are as important as the technical innovations which James employed to adapt them.

Literary criticism and theory of the *bildungsroman* defines it as a liberally interpreted and appropriated formula, which has successfully evolved from its original German form into English versions during the nineteenth-century dominance of the realist novel, and is still used, though less often, in the twentieth century. The English branch of the form tends to be treated individually, after reference to its antecedent in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, and as a school of fiction which is distinctive and worthy of attention as an English tradition from the 1840s onwards, excluding cross-cultural reference to its parallel developments in German fiction. Although later criticism has adopted a more multinational approach, work such as Jerome Buckley's has established itself as authoritative in its own establishment of what constitutes the *bildungsroman* form in its assimilated English tradition:

The *bildungsroman* in its pure form has been defined as the 'novel of all-around development or self-culture' with 'a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience'.³

Given the aptness of this summary as a description of much of James's work, it might seem surprising that his novels do not tend to be thought of as *bildungsromane*. Even plot details often adhere to the *bildungsroman* framework, since the immersion of a young person, inexperienced in the ways of the world, in an alien culture which is more sophisticated than anything they have encountered before, is a basic element of many of James's fictions. The answer lies in the absence, in James's fictions, of the successful resolution which ends most *bildungsromane* - that is, the protagonist's attainment of measures of

³ Jerome Buckley, *Seasons of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.13; hereafter referred to as Buckley.

worldly security such as a rewarding profession or at least a salary on which they can live; a happy marriage and often children; and a reconciliation with some of the childhood values that, during their maturing process, they have dismissed. In spite of Buckley's observation about 'the common difficulty of ending a *bildungsroman* with conviction and decision', most readers see James's inconclusive endings as something very different from novels like *Jane Eyre* or *David Copperfield*, which conclude by awarding characters overt security, while accommodating reservations in the form of background ambiguities (such as Jane and Rochester's exile at the unwholesome location of Ferndean).⁴ This tendency to categorise the fiction generically by way of its ending (often appropriate, since textual closure is largely dictated by generic convention) diverts readers from the relationship between the pattern which structures the main body of James's novels and the paradigm of the *bildungsroman*. James's approach to the difficulty of 'ending with conviction' shows a desire to utilise the *bildungsroman* form in a critical way, extending its possibilities for self-reflection, and producing a sceptical portrayal of its ideals while admitting that they cannot be dispensed with.

Michael Minden's discussion of the German *bildungsroman* notes the structural complexity of the form:

We have [...] the story of the erring individual whose excessive subjectivity is corrected by a process of education. The plot is thus linear. But it is also circular, because the hero's goal is related to his starting point, and so his subjectivity is vindicated and transposed onto a higher level.⁵

The protagonist's journey, unlike the linear narrative, will in fact follow an upward spiral path, ascending to new heights of self-knowledge as they learn

⁴Buckley, p.23.

⁵Michael Minden, *The German Bildungsroman: Incest and Inheritance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.28.

from their mistakes, while retaining their individuality. These patterns of entangled linearity and circularity are evident in James's early novels, which are often preoccupied not only with the idea of returning home but with the difficulty of determining where home is. However, maturity is not always straightforwardly identified with an upward spiral into a more rewarding life; even more disturbingly, neither is individuality finally or fully validated in James's versions of *bildungsroman*. Franco Moretti's study of the *bildungsroman*, in spite of not discussing James as a writer of *bildungsromane*, provides an insight into his methods:

Maturity and youth are therefore inversely proportional: the culture that emphasises the first devalues the second, and vice versa [...] the excessive development of the principle eliminates the opposite one: but in so doing, *it is the bildungsroman itself that disappears*.⁶

Moretti's portrayal of the competition between maturity and youth as being self-defeating for the *bildungsroman* is particularly relevant to James's fictions, which enact this extension of the *bildungsroman* process to its logical conclusion. The protagonists of James's fictions attempt to locate the optimum point at which they can retain desirable innocence while also having acquired rewarding maturity; however, the interrogation of the terms of the *bildungsroman* required to succeed in such a balancing act itself undermines the ideal of the form. Since full maturity eliminates the possibility of progress and growth, the *bildungsroman* writes itself out of existence, and while most traditional *bildungsromane* stop short of this by leaving their protagonists on the brink of a life of maturity, James carries his to the point where they see the penalties of becoming an apparently complete being, and the actual undesirability of such an ideal. As a result, his early fictions are not quite

⁶ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: the bildungsroman in European culture* (London: Verso, 1987), pp.8-9.

parodies of the *bildungsroman* (though some elements of them fulfil this role) but are certainly post-*bildungsroman* fictions, if such a term can be coined. As always, James is attempting to relate to literary tradition in what he envisions as the most productive way, taking up what is useful and transformable while also questioning its assumptions.

My examination of James's depiction of individual completeness, and aspirations towards it, will be focused, then, in terms of the *bildungsroman* - in particular, the English form of the *bildungsroman*, in the context of its popular adaptation by eminent English novelists such as Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Eliot and Hardy. James can be seen in his early novels to be explicitly employing and challenging the conventions of the *bildungsroman*, as a means of exploring ideas of individual completeness (in its various senses of consciousness, experience, education) and of novelistic completeness. His use of the form is an intentional appropriation of the narrative of individual development and completeness for use by protagonists whose experiences enact a questioning of the feasibility and value of that project of completeness. While the basic *bildungsroman* pattern can be interpreted broadly enough to encompass more or less any Victorian novel, and certainly most of James's oeuvre, his review of Goethe is only one of many instances which demonstrate that the difficulties James wishes to challenge in fictional conventions are intrinsically tied up with the characteristically Victorian ideal of the *bildungsroman*. When he later attacks these difficulties, the *bildungsroman* project is often, more or less overtly, in mind. In early works like *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*, the revision of this generic pattern is most overt. The pattern takes a more minor role in subsequent novels without being entirely forsaken; I will conclude this chapter by examining the reappearance of the *bildungsroman*

late in James's career, where it is more radically transformed in *The Ambassadors*.

Roderick Hudson and The American

The impulse to pursue the goal of completeness is one of which James's protagonists are often highly conscious, and its particular prominence in his early work can be seen from the placing of this speech by Rowland Mallet in the first few pages of *Roderick Hudson*:

'Do you know I sometimes think that I'm a man of genius half-finished? The genius has been left out, the faculty of expression is wanting; but the need for expression remains, and I spend my days groping for the latch of a closed door'. (*RH*, p.8)

Roderick Hudson is explicitly concerned with the search for both identity and vocation. This search is shaped by the question of where, geographically and culturally, it can best be done (small-town America, cosmopolitan Europe, the scenic Alps), what kind of profession might best afford it (being a lawyer or an artist) and what alternatives, outside the most obvious one of work, provide the opportunity for vocation. Rowland Mallet is most concerned with the third of these categories, asking his cousin by marriage, Cecilia, 'Pray, what shall I do? Found an orphan asylum or build a dormitory for Harvard College?' (*RH*, p.4) While these expectations are presumably too high, Rowland also feels that so far in life he has done too little, and the speech implies that it is evidently not enough to *have* genius if one does not *use* it. Another statement from James's review of *Wilhelm Meister* is relevant:

The bearing of *Wilhelm Meister* is eminently practical. It might almost be called a treatise on moral economy – a work intended to show how the experience of life may least be wasted, and best be turned to account.⁷

This view is especially important in both *Roderick Hudson* and *The American*, both novels which are particularly American in their concern with an Americanised, Protestant work ethic and the governing effect of this on the protagonists of these novels in their attempts to achieve completeness.

Rowland's anxiety, then, about how his inheritance may 'least be wasted, and best be turned to account' paves the way for a fuller examination of how, if at all, this can be done with other abstract qualities of life in general - namely, as James observes, experience.

Rowland's image of himself as 'half-finished' shows his desire to portray this emptiness as something beyond his control, which is part of his essential nature and which he is destined to suffer with. However, Cecilia focuses more practically on Rowland's lack of action, arguing that not perceiving what you are best fitted to do is not a good excuse for simply doing nothing. Rowland retorts with the remark about Harvard and providing for orphans, but follows this with:

'I'm not rich enough to do either in an ideally handsome way, and I confess that yet a while I feel too young to strike my *grand coup*. I'm holding myself ready for inspiration. I'm waiting till something takes my fancy irresistibly. If inspiration comes at forty it will be a hundred pities to have tied up my money-bag at thirty.' (*RH*, p.4)

The final aspect which affects one's choice of vocation is whether or not it is the right *time* to choose. Indeed, this is the only one which Cecilia accepts as excusing Rowland's inactivity. In spite of the uncertainty regarding Rowland's future career (and, as the novel continues, that of its other characters) it seems to be generally accepted that it will be governed by a *bildungsroman* pattern of development, of progression from one mode of life to another. As a young man

⁷ 'Wilhelm Meister', p.33.

Rowland went to college, entered his father's business at the lowest level, and became attracted to his cousin's bride; he did the things that were expected of him, 'submitted without reserve to the great national discipline' (*RH*, p.15) and fought in the Civil War. It is no longer the right time to do those things; even his understandable (and now admissible) attraction to Cecilia has 'died a very natural death' (*RH*, p.2). They are part of his career as a young man, which is deemed to be over. Neither of the obvious options - going into business or getting married - appeal to him, and he cannot find anything that does. Rowland has reached a new but troublesome level of maturity since leaving the army, having found a new perception of the world, but not a new role within it.

Roderick Hudson seems to be the answer to Rowland's problem, both in terms of what Rowland can, materially speaking, do for Roderick, and what Roderick can - in more ambivalently spiritual terms - do for Rowland. The alliance they forge is based on the mutual satisfaction they hope to gain. Just as Roderick is not in a position to be an artist without a patron like Rowland, Rowland is unable to use his bounty, as Cecilia urges him to do, without a suitable recipient. It appears that Rowland and Roderick complement each other, that acting together they make up, as it were, the complete man. They each endow the other with a new sense of social identity. Rowland's opinion of Roderick's work is enough in the eyes of Mrs Hudson, Mary Garland, and Mr. Striker to redefine him as a sculptor rather than a lawyer. Rowland is no longer going to Europe simply to do 'no great harm' (*RH*, p.3); he has a mission to carry out positive good, in himself 'sculpting' Roderick's career and artistic progression. In effect, then, Rowland's part of the bargain has - he thinks - been carried out by the time they set sail for Europe. He has paid in advance for

Roderick's works of art; the physical production of those works is the element needed to make things complete:

Rowland said at last simply, 'You've only to work hard'.
 'I think I know what that means', Roderick answered. He turned away, threw himself on a rickety chair, and sat for some moments with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. 'Work - work?' he said at last, looking up. 'Ah, if I could only begin!' (*RH*, p.37-38)

The response here - which is followed by Roderick smashing his bust of Mr. Striker - is less satisfactory than its apparent zeal might make it seem. Rowland has already presented his offer to Roderick in terms of a businesslike transaction; Roderick is being asked to promise that he will supply the required commodity, hard work. What he does instead is reply, 'I think I know what that means'. Analysis of the transaction is not something that Rowland (more provincial in this respect than he realises or admits) has considered. The nature of his input has not led him to question what the nature of Roderick's input will be. However, for Roderick, acting as an artist rather than a pseudo-businessman, the agreement centres not upon transaction but upon interpretation. Rowland has already answered the question of how much Roderick's talent means; enough to justify him devoting himself wholly to it. When told that the next stage of his development is to make that talent work, the question that concerns him is: what does work mean? It is not a question he has ever had to answer in his previous career as a fledgling lawyer, where the nature of his work is a given; it is perhaps the most profound question he faces in his life as an artist, where work will have to be sought out, and may be something for which he will have to wait. The meaning of work is something which Roderick and Rowland will interpret differently, and this will be crucial to the success (or otherwise) of their collaboration.

Roderick's 'Ah, if only I could begin!' is not so much an answer to Rowland as a rhetorical flourish of his artistic temperament, accentuated by his physically posing in the manner of an anguished artist, as if overwhelmed with pent-up creativity. This is expressed as a suitably melodramatic gesture - the smashing of the sculpture of Mr. Striker, his erstwhile taskmaster at the lawyer's office - but, as Rowland recognises, this 'beginning' is somehow wrong in being a destructive act, not a creative one. It could be argued that Roderick needs to destroy this representation of the life he loathes, in order to be able to move on from it, but having seen the works Roderick has produced so far, Rowland (and the reader) should be aware that it would not be in Roderick's best interest to give up every aspect of his experience in Northampton. His representations of 'Thirst' and of his dead brother Stephen are presented as having 'singular beauty' (*RH*, p.37); even the image of Mr. Striker has merit. Roderick's development, as it is imagined - though from different angles - by both Rowland and the community of Northampton, would involve his renouncing his daily life there, but not the experience which it has produced, which should all form part of his progression as an artist, serving to make him more complete. Roderick, however, sees the complete man he wants to become as being an *artist*, which means being complete as an artist, and in being nothing but an artist. The ideal of completeness demands an attitude of single-mindedness; this, though, is another of the things that Roderick and the world around him interpret differently.

The importance and meaning of 'work' and 'completeness' in *Roderick Hudson* are given an alternative interpretation in *The American*, where 'our hero' (as he is continually called) Christopher Newman is a type of man who is almost the *alter ego* of Roderick Hudson. If Roderick represents one extreme view, with regard to the question of how to become a complete man, then Newman is

located at the other extreme, with Rowland balancing uneasily between the two. Newman, unlike Rowland Mallet, is a true businessman. His career embraces both single-mindedness and diversity; he has moved through various jobs and business enterprises, having missed a formal education, but acquired a large fortune and total self-confidence in the process. Valentin de Bellegarde remarks on 'a sort of air you have of being thoroughly at home in the world' (*Amer*, p.141) and Newman himself recasts this as 'the proud consciousness of honest toil - of having manufactured a few wash-tubs' (*Amer*, p.142). Bellegarde's remark ironises Newman's forthcoming attempts to be 'at home' in his family, to be accepted as one of them, but the exchange reveals something of Newman's self-image and how it has been constructed. 'At home' in the world, he is not at home in any specific place; though examined as a representation of 'the American citizen', he is no longer attached to any American place of origin or background. When Claire de Cintre asks him, 'Where do you wish to live?' he replies 'Anywhere in the wide world you like', (*Amer*, p.243). In spite of this detachment, though, Newman is always committed fully to the current direction he has decided to take. He chooses a course of action - the one which dominates the narrative being the capture of Claire de Cintré - and pursues it single-mindedly.

Newman's success in diversity originates from being selective in his pursuits; he concentrates on one task at a time, following one trajectory to what he sees as its logical conclusion. In fact, Newman seems 'at home in the world' because he remains within himself and the path that he has cleared for himself. Wherever he is, he does not look to left or right and observe the foreignness of his surroundings; he only sees them as pertaining to the current project with which he is himself concerned. The Tristrams, for example, rapidly come to

represent links to the coveted object of Claire de Cintré, rather than friends in their own right, something which Mrs. Tristram comes to suspect and resent. Newman resembles the young copyist, Noémie Niöche, more than he perceives - in that without wishing harm or neglect on anyone else, both are supremely concerned with getting what they want, and pricing themselves correctly. Just as Newman believes himself deserving of the finest possible wife - 'I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market' (*Amer*, p.71) - so Noémie refuses to be humble in limiting her ambitions in the marriage market: 'What sort of a husband can you get for twelve thousand francs? [...] Grocers and butchers and little *maitres de cafes!* I will not marry at all if I can't marry well' (*Amer*, p.99). It is, paradoxically, an oddly selfless kind of self-centredness, supreme confidence without narcissism or introspection.

Like the good folk of Northampton, Massachusetts, Christopher Newman believes in the notion that life should be structured by a pattern of progress and development - of working towards completion. His own chosen pattern works in terms not of expanding consciousness and experience (as Rowland might have it), nor of Roderick's wholehearted but fragile devotion to the cause of the moment. Newman's guiding principles are accumulation and linearity, the necessary qualities of the successful *bildungsroman* protagonist:

His native coolness, shrewdness, and deliberateness, his life-long submissiveness to the sentiment that words were acts and acts were steps in life, and that in this manner of taking steps curveting and prancing were exclusively reserved for quadrupeds and foreigners - all this admonished him that rightful wrath had no connection with being a fool and indulging in spectacular violence. (*Amer*, pp.409-410)

Deliberateness, but not introspective analysis, defines Newman's character. To him, every act in one's life should be worthwhile and relevant to the aim on which one is focusing, whether that is success in business, becoming a man of culture, or acquiring the perfect wife. It is an inevitable consequence of this that

one's focus must therefore be narrow: 'in this manner of taking steps curvetting and prancing were exclusively reserved for quadrupeds and foreigners'.

Newman's pattern of progress is above all a *linear* one, excluding divergent interests and referring to the past only in terms of capital which can be used to accumulate for the future.

Newman's system might seem to have been confused by his arrival in Europe. He is initially shown to be at a disadvantage by not knowing French, and to be almost daunted by his first survey of Paris, particularly the Louvre. However, in such situations, he quickly reverts to type - reinterpreting them through the lens of his essentially accumulative nature. His lessons with M. Noiche drift away from instruction in the French language, and instead become focused upon the language of commerce, Newman's habitual mode of discourse:

Newman was fond of statistics; he liked to know how things were done; it gratified him to learn what taxes were paid, what profits were gathered, what commercial habits prevailed, how the battle of life was fought. M. Noiche, as a reduced capitalist, was familiar with these considerations.
(*Amer*, p.86-87)

Newman apprehends Paris not by engaging with its foreignness, but by drawing parallels between this French world and the world with which he is familiar. Yet its alternative consequence is that Newman fails to see the differences in Paris, so intent is he on perceiving the ways in which things there are the same as in America. His accumulative approach to life leads him to establish that there are social similarities between the place he is now in and places in which he has lived before; therefore, he sets about applying the methods of accumulation and investment that have proved successful in the past.

Rowland Mallet, while a more experienced and urbane traveller than his protégé, nevertheless finds difficulty in coming to terms with Roderick's approach to life in Rome. Unlike Newman, Rowland does not see life as

structured by the principle of accumulation. His feelings towards Rome, as they prepare to spend the winter there, are described as follows:

He could not have defined nor explained the nature of his relish, nor have made up the sum of it by adding together his calculable pleasures. It was a large, vague, idle, half-profitless emotion, of which perhaps the most pertinent thing that might be said was that it brought with it a relaxed acceptance of the present, the actual, the sensuous - of existence on the terms of the moment. (*RH*, p.171)

Part of this pleasure seems to derive from its 'large, vague, idle' nature, as something outside the work ethic he has recommended to Roderick, and, furthermore, outside Cecilia's charge to him to do some definite good. In being 'half-unprofitable', Rowland's pleasure in life is also becoming subversive, since his mission in Europe is to ensure that everyone profits, though not in a monetary sense; Roderick as an artist, himself as a patron, and Mrs. Hudson and Mary Garland in welcoming home the great man who will be an admirable husband and son. Rowland is well aware that to profit in this way, time must be spent on things that seem only indirectly worthwhile, such as Roderick's observation of Roman art, and of how art is practised by others in Rome. Yet 'half-unprofitable', though arithmetically an equal division of profitable and non-profitable experience, emphasises the *lack* of profitability in this mode of life. The indefinable pleasure of the moment masks, for Rowland, the fact that the notion of his task there is also becoming less sharply defined.

The ultimate profitability of Rowland's trip, the thing on which its completion will rest, is that he maintains an awareness of these future goals along with his pursuit of the moment - that he remembers that Rome is only a part of the overall progress of himself and Roderick, and not the whole. Rowland has been responsible for Roderick, and for their mutual progress towards completion, from the moment their joint venture to Europe was conceived. If they are to

succeed in the quest formed back in Massachusetts, he cannot afford to succumb to 'the actual, the sensuous' moment of their existence in Rome.

Roderick, having told Rowland in Northampton: 'I'm quite sick of my meekness' (*RH*, p.40) pursues the opportunity to lead a more reckless and hedonistic life, and the first new work he produces after his return from Baden-Baden is of a new kind:

Rowland looked at it and was not sure he liked it. It differed singularly from anything his friend had yet done. 'Who is it? what does it mean?' he asked.

'Anything you please!' said Roderick with a certain petulance. 'A "Lady conversing affably with a Gentleman".'

Rowland then remembered that one of the Baden-Baden conversers had had wonderful 'lines', and here perhaps they were. But he asked no more questions. This was, after all, a way of profiting by experience. (*RH*, p.143)

For the first time, Rowland is unable to 'understand' Roderick's art. The exchange here echoes his instruction to Rowland to work hard, answered by 'I think I know what that means'. Here Rowland puts the parallel question more straightforwardly, and gets a straightforward, though dismissive, answer. Meaning is no longer the product of hard work, and is not to be specifically linked with anything, even to be defined. Whereas earlier Roderick avoided the question of meaning, deflecting attention from this by the melodramatic action of smashing the sculpture of Mr. Striker, now he has become bolder as a result of his misdemeanours at Baden-Baden. He now challenges the whole idea that such a question can be asked, or answered. The sculpture can mean 'anything you please'; thus, all received ideas about the nature of work, or art, or social expectations, are no longer fixed as part of a transaction between himself and those around him, but open to interpretation. Roderick becomes, in fact, the interpreter of his own art - previous roles are reversed when Rowland, formerly the one with respected critical judgement, asks *him* 'What does it mean?' - and begins his attempt to free himself from previous interpretations, and from the life

pattern hitherto laid out for him. Wanting to view this difference in the most optimistic light, Rowland attributes the lines of the sculpture to someone encountered at Baden-Baden, and chooses to believe that not only Roderick's moral sense, but his artistic development, is 'profiting by experience', in the fashion of the 'moral economy' James identifies in *Wilhelm Meister*. The expansion of Roderick's life experience, Rowland tacitly argues, will (as well as teaching him how foolish it is to gamble) advance him further towards being that developed, complete being which represents the true artist. This position assumes, though, that the development of his self will be controlled and directed towards profit - specifically, the kind of profit already outlined as being Rowland's and the Hudsons' aim for Roderick.

The question of Roderick's hoped-for completeness, and what will bring it about, is seen from several different angles. Rowland's at-first revered critical opinion pronounces him to be talented but in need of training. 'They [Roderick's sculptures] were youthful, awkward, ignorant; the effort often was more apparent than the success. But the effort was signally powerful and intelligent,' (*RH*, p.37) describes the early deficiencies of Roderick's art. Gloriani, the world-weary artist, declares that even having blossomed in Rome, Roderick's development has a further stage yet to reach:

'My dear fellow, passion burns out, inspiration runs to seed. Some fine day every artist [...] must learn to do without the Muse! When the fickle jade forgets the way to your studio, don't waste any time in tearing your hair and meditating on suicide. Come round and see me, and I'll show you how to console yourself'. (*RH*, p.124)

The end of passionate inspiration such as Roderick's, though inevitable, is not the end of everything; merely of a phase in one's career. Gloriani, having followed this pattern himself, is, as the narrator says, 'almost too knowing' (*RH*, p.106). However, Roderick rejects this theory of development from passion to

dry professionalism. For him the artistic frame of mind is all or nothing: “if I break down...I shall stay down”, he states (*RH*, p.124). Completeness is not something which can be compartmentalised, broken down into phases, but must by its very nature be whole, even though it may not last.

Sam Singleton, the modestly successful painter, takes a different view again. As an ardent admirer of Roderick’s work, he explains this view to

Rowland:

‘Oh, I don’t envy Hudson anything he possesses’, Singleton said, ‘because to take anything away would spoil his beautiful completeness. “Complete”, that’s what he is; while we little clevernesses are like half-ripened plums, only good eating on the side that has had a glimpse of the sun. Nature has made him so, and fortune confesses to it! He’s in himself such a subject for a painter - a Pinturicchio-figure, isn’t he? come to life; he has more genius than anyone, and as a matter of course the most beautiful girl in the world comes and offers to feed him with her beauty. If that’s not completeness where shall one look for it?’ (*RH*, p.191)

Singleton’s speech concludes the chapter and completes the picture formed of Roderick as being, for all his faults, the ‘fortunate mortal’ Rowland calls him (*RH*, p.189). He is portrayed as the man with everything: talent, opportunity, and personal charm. Certainly to Sam Singleton, whose two years’ study in Rome have not yet brought him to the level of genius, Roderick seems inimitable. Singleton has only known Roderick as he is in Rome, from which he derives his vision of Roderick as ‘complete’; he has not seen Roderick’s frustrated career in Northampton, or his earlier, less refined efforts at sculpture. Yet Singleton’s idea of Roderick’s ‘completeness’ is more than the product of their brief acquaintance. Roderick has been brought to fruition by the ‘existence on the terms of the moment’ offered by Rome, and which Rowland has found so alluring. Roderick’s whole existence takes place ‘on the terms of the moment’, and, therefore, in this moment which is so completely favourable to him - in

which he is agreed to be the luckiest of men - he is, as Singleton says, 'complete'.

Roderick sees his own achievements and needs always in terms of 'a relaxed acceptance of the present', living for fulfilment *now*, and simply unaware of the need for progression towards any different kind of fulfilment (hence his violent rejection of Gloriani's prophecy about inevitably learning to do without the Muse). Though Roderick's life is divided into phases, after the approved fashion of Northampton, he sees only the phase of the moment, leaving a past stage behind completely, and becoming immediately complete in the identity of the new one. Thus, he smashes the bust of Mr. Striker and instantly feels himself to be a sculptor, and no longer a lawyer. Having taken to Rome, he declares that 'for a man of my temperament Rome is the only possible place [...] I shall never go home' (*RH*, p.173). This ability to put aside past experiences, and their emotional effect, so absolutely, is baffling and slightly disturbing to Rowland after the embarrassment of Baden-Baden:

The young sculptor reverted to his late adventures again in the evening, and this time talked of them more objectively, as the phrase is; with a detachment that flowered little by little into free anecdote - quite as if they had been the adventures of some other, some different, ass. He related half a dozen droll things that had happened to him, and, as if his responsibility has been disengaged by all this ventilation, wondered, with laughter, that such absurdities *could* have been. (*RH*, p.140)

Rowland wants to believe that Roderick has learned from his foolishness and will become wiser; that he will keep his experiences in mind in order not to repeat them, but instead to move on from them. However, rather than making his 'late adventures' into a hair shirt, Roderick regards them as part of another life. The Northampton idea of progress dictates that an episode of drinking, gambling and flirting should act as a moral marker, something one progresses and matures away from, but does not incorporate into life. Roderick's innate 'completeness'

does not involve selective discarding. The episode at Baden-Baden has made him more mature as an artist (and, he believes, as a man) and therefore no part of it can be rejected. What Roderick detaches himself from is his own previous naïveté; the idea that he could ever have found these things (which he now considers to be intimately part of him) to be strange and confusing is comical to this new, experienced Roderick, feeling himself to be a man of the world.

The observation by Roderick which seems to disturb Rowland most is the casual acknowledgement that 'he has been an ass, but it was not irreparable; he could make another statue in a couple of months' (*RH*, p.139). In defiance of Rowland's urgent plea not to 'speculate' on his talent, both Roderick and Christopher Newman are speculators, believing in a cycle of loss and gain with which they can favourably engage. Newman makes a statement very similar to Roderick's, when Valentin de Bellegarde asks him if he is afraid of anything:

What should I be afraid of? You can't hurt me unless you kill me by some violent means. That I should indeed consider a tremendous sell. I want to live and I mean to live. I can't die of illness, I am too ridiculously tough; and the time for dying of old age won't come round yet awhile. I can't lose my wife, for I shall take too good care of her. I may lose my money, or a large part of it; but that won't matter, for I shall make twice as much again. So what have I to be afraid of? (*Amer*, p.267)

In spite of his apparent arrogance, Newman's character is surprisingly sympathetic here.⁸ His confidence in his own abilities rests not on the belief that he could never lose, but rather on the likelihood that he may lose, but will always bounce back. In this scheme of the 'moral economy' of *Wilhelm Meister*,

⁸ The New York edition reads: 'What should I be afraid of? You can't hurt me unless you kill me by some violent means. That I should indeed regard as a tremendous sell. I want to live and I mean to live: I mean to have a good time. I can't die of sickness, because I'm naturally healthy, and the time for dying of old age won't come round yet awhile. I can't lose my wife, I shall take too good care of her. I can't lose my money, or much of it – I've fixed it so on purpose. So what have I to be afraid of?' (p.303) In this version, Newman's optimism and self-deprecation are replaced by unappealing self-regard which seems to have no secure basis. The statements about his natural health and inability to lose money characterise him as overly static, and detract from the avowedly self-improving aim of his tour of Europe, since he apparently has no room to improve.

he will retain the profit earned from experience in the circumstances of any other loss, and thus will convert this once more into material profit. The speech incorporates a combination of self-deprecation - acknowledging himself as 'too ridiculously tough' to be ill - and the naiveté which is integral to that simplicity and self-confidence. Newman's practical nature can list and account for all overt threats - illness, financial ruin, physical attack - but leaves unmentioned the threats which might come from more insidious sources; the presence of social pressures and expectations which strongly influence the lives of the Tristrams, the minister, Mr. Babcock, even the Nioches; and which govern absolutely the lives of the Bellegardes.

While Newman has his limitations, he is not insensitive to the effect of social expectations on those around him; rather, he views them as being, like the study of law to Roderick Hudson, relevant to the lives of some people, but not to him. An example of his detachment from such concerns occurs when he returns from the Middle East and settles in rooms chosen by Tom Tristram, 'in accordance with the latter's estimate of what he called his social position', only to say to Tristram: 'I didn't know I had a social position, and if I have, I haven't the faintest idea of what it is' (*Amer*, p.117). Newman's image of himself, as revealed by his speech to Valentin de Bellegarde, is of someone who is not perfect, but who, for his own purposes and needs is (except in one respect, that of having the right wife) complete. This completeness does not imply the impossibility of extending himself or improving his mind - Newman's attempts to learn to speak French and appreciate art belie that. It signifies instead that Newman does not think himself lacking in any important respect (in the way that, say, Noémie Nioche is deficient in respect for her father and that Madame de Bellegarde is in confining herself to her small, elite corner of Paris). He is

complete for the purposes of the sphere in which he moves, and should anything happen to disturb that completeness - financial trouble or illness - he will recover what he has lost.

The one important exception to this is, of course, Newman's feeling that it is time for him to acquire a wife. It is the noticeable weakness in his enumeration of his own strong points that he states blithely, 'I can't lose my wife, for I shall take too good care of her', ignoring both the fact that she is not yet his wife, and that a vague intention to take care of his wife will not necessarily secure him blissful and eternal happiness with her. Earlier, when Mrs. Tristram accuses him of being 'cold-blooded and calculating' in his quest, he attempts to explain and justify his desire:

Newman was silent a while. 'Well', he said at last, 'I want a great woman. I stick to that. That's one thing I *can* treat myself to, and if it is to be had I mean to have it. What else have I toiled and struggled for all these years? I have succeeded, and now what am I to do with my success? To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a beautiful woman perched on the pile like a statue on a monument. [...] I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market.' (*Amer*, p.71)

Newman's view of women as a commodity, as exemplified by this future wife being 'something I *can* treat myself to' and 'the best article in the market', represents the most unattractive aspect of his economically-minded businessman's character. Newman, however much he elevates his ideal in terms of being clever, wise and good, is at bottom in pursuit of a trophy wife. His statement: 'That's one thing I *can* treat myself to' implies that he has forgone many other things which were too sordid and unedifying for him to pursue. While Newman is confident in his own completeness, as a person, his ambition in a wider sense is to complete his trajectory of success. Having begun at fourteen, penniless and homeless, he sees a beautiful wife as 'the greatest victory

over circumstances' (*Amer*, p.72). In securing one, not only would Newman himself be complete, he would be completing his life's work.

This idea of how Newman's wife will function for him is made more explicit at the beginning of the ninth chapter of the novel, when he goes to see Claire, the morning after having told her brother what his intentions are. As she welcomes him, he examines her with satisfaction:

It was, in fact, Madame de Cintre's "authority", as they say of artists, that especially impressed and fascinated Newman; he always came back to the feeling that when he should complete himself by taking a wife, that was the way he should like his wife to interpret him to the world. (*Amer*, p.165)⁹

Gilbert Osmond sees Isabel Archer in very similar terms; Newman's image, then, of his wife as interpreting him to a wider social audience, is particularly dubious when the way this idea is developed in *Portrait* is considered. Newman's calculations are not consciously directed towards stifling his wife, as Osmond's are; yet his innocent limitations of Claire's freedom are in their own way equally ominous. Having Claire de Cintré as his wife will make Newman universally acceptable currency in the way he believes he already is, but in the eyes of the Bellegardes, is not. Claire will 'interpret' him to any audience; she will disprove the accusation that stings Newman most - that he is just a hard-headed American businessman. He says to Claire:

'You think of me, I guess, as a fellow who has had no idea in life but to make money and drive sharp bargains. Well, that's a fair description of me, though it's not the whole story. A man ought to care for something else, though I don't know exactly what'. (*Amer*, p.237)

In 'not knowing exactly what' he ought to care for outside his daily business, Newman's position is akin to Rowland Mallet's, who tells Cecilia, at the

⁹ In the New York Edition this reads: 'It was, in fact, her "authority", as they say of artists, that especially impressed and fascinated him; he always came back to the feeling that when he should have rounded out his "success" by the right big marriage, this way the way he should like his wife to express the size of it to the world.' (*Amer*, also p.165.) The vocabulary of 'completeness', which is used commensurately in *Roderick Hudson* and *Portrait*, is considerably modified, and again, the later text diminishes Newman's awareness of himself as requiring 'completion'.

beginning of *Roderick Hudson*, 'I want to care for something or for somebody' (*RH*, p.7). Both have reached a certain level of maturity and life-experience that Roderick has not. They each fought in the army, spent time in business and emerged from it rich - though Newman much more so than Rowland Mallett, and having made money himself rather than inherited it. Nevertheless, they both feel that having reached a plateau of achievement, they can and should expand themselves, and they each pursue a connection with the sphere of art and culture as the means of accomplishing this. For Newman, Claire becomes the means to this end; for Rowland, it is Roderick. The man himself, it seems, is never in fact a complete man, but needs someone else to facilitate that completion.

Claire de Cintr , then, comes to represent both a means and an end for Newman. She will act as the 'interpreter' to make accessible to him the finer life he wants to know about; she will also be his long-awaited reward for all the endeavours of his former life. Though on arrival in Europe, Newman professes that he aims 'to get the best out of it I can. I want to see all the great things, and do what the clever people do' (*Amer*, p.55) and 'to improve my mind' (*Amer*, p.51), the goal of marriage to Claire becomes the means by which all these impulses will be satisfied. What remains unarticulated is what exactly will happen when Newman reaches this coveted point of completion in his marriage. Not only are his plans for their future hazy (though they raise the subject of where they will live, no decisions are ever made, except that Mrs. Bread will accompany them there), but Newman's remarks produce the impression that life will somehow cease after his wedding and serene stasis will prevail. He says to Valentin: 'Spare me all discordant sounds until after my marriage. Then, when I have settled down for life, I shall be better able to take things as they come'

(*Amer*, p.266).¹⁰ The beginning of his marriage will mark an end to all obstacles, disappointments and unfulfilled longings; Newman seems to envision it as a condition of just *being*, rather than doing anything, and though Claire de Cintr  remains an enigma (one of James's feminine 'blank pages'), the novel suggests that on this point, at least, she differs quite substantially from Newman. After his first proposal of marriage, we are told: 'She had the air of a woman who had stepped across the frontier of friendship and, looking round her, finds the region vast' (*Amer*, p.172). Marriage to Newman promises to remove her from the confining family life she leads and open up a whole new life to her. Newman's image of this happiness is grounded in stasis; the contentment of knowing oneself to be complete and allowing others simply to admire that completeness. Claire's hopes of progressing from the cramping stability of her present life, of making a beginning rather than an end, may not be best served by Newman's vow that 'With me [...] you will be as safe [...] as in your father's arms' (*Amer*, p.242). With this remark, Newman practically seals Claire's fate; she does indeed enjoy the safety of her father's arms; he also hopes for recovery, but is eventually imprisoned at the mercy of his family. Condemned to a more enduring stasis than Isabel Archer, Claire suffers the fate of a female protagonist in a sensation novel, while having made the most modest and unsensational demands on life.

Much of Newman's speech is characterised by this desire to achieve an end, and by his conception of his marriage as an end to the narrative of his incomplete existence (one of his few feminised traits). Appealing to Claire to marry him, he says:

¹⁰The New York Edition reads as follows: 'Wait till I'm through with my business – to which I wish to give just now my undivided attention – and then we'll talk.' (*Amer*, p.302) This removes again the references to Newman's aspirational completeness and emphasises, instead, his response to personal relations in terms of business strategy; the later version is a more 'masculine' statement in tone and imagery, detracting from Newman's earlier, feminised focus on the goal of marriage.

'Are you unhappy? You give me a feeling that you *are* unhappy. You have no right to be, or to be made so. Let me come in and put an end to it'.
(*Amer*, p.170)

Having secured her acceptance, he announces it to Madame de Bellegarde with the words: 'My suspense came to an end yesterday' (*Amer*, p.246). Newman's tendency to order his progress through life according to a linear model is shown in his language as well as in his exploration of Europe; the programme of expansion outlined to Tom Tristram early in the novel is reshaped into the more clearly defined quest of marrying Claire de Cintr . When this is denied him, the completeness he has envisioned for himself is placed permanently beyond his reach. His choice involves a different end which is still not a completion, but is a more appropriate end for him. He pays what is to be his last visit to the Carmelite convent which is now Claire's home, and finally accepts that 'the woman within was lost beyond recall' (*Amer*, p.445). Newman has given up the idea of finding another person who will make him complete, and in this acceptance he finds a kind of peace:

He would never stand there again; it was gratuitous dreariness. He turned away with a heavy heart, but it was lighter than the one he had brought. Everything was over, and he too at last could rest. (*Amer*, p.445)

Mrs. Bread is left, as Newman's substitute, to wait in Paris; Newman's end is an end to Paris, to Europe, and to his project of self-improvement. In a sense, though, his aim of self-completion has been achieved; in accepting a life without Claire and all the things she represented, Newman has achieved the stasis he expected to gain from marriage. The permanence of his incompleteness brings him as near as is possible to satisfying closure.

Though where exactly Christopher Newman goes, and what he does, after giving up Claire de Cintr  is unknown, Roderick's end is more explicit, as is *Roderick Hudson* as a whole. While at any point in *The American* we have a very

limited view of Newman's future, the narrative of *Roderick Hudson* regularly moves forward to a point beyond Roderick's narrative. For example, in chapter five, which sets the scene of Roderick and Rowland settling in Rome, we are told that, 'Afterwards, when those who loved him were in tears, there was something in all this unspotted brightness that seemed to lend a mockery to the causes of their sorrow' (*RH*, p.102). James's first approach to the difficulty of concluding a *bildungsroman* is therefore to construct it as overdetermined – to augur, throughout the text, the inadvisability of either Roderick himself or anyone else idealising him as complete, since that invites the ultimate completing act of death. In *The American*, he switches tactics in refusing to provide a conclusion for Newman, stopping him in the act of reaching for the burnt letter; though certain epilogic comments make it clear that Newman will never return to Paris. Even this level of closure, however, is removed in James's next and considerably more disconcerting attempt at post-*bildungsroman*, *The Portrait of a Lady*.

The Portrait of a Lady

The earliest episode recounted from Isabel Archer's life shows her being made aware of the nature of individuation. While growing up she spends a great deal of time at her grandmother's house in Albany – the place where she is discovered by Mrs Touchett – but turns down the opportunity to attend the primary school in the Dutch house across the street, after trying it for a day and finding it unsatisfactory:

In the September days, when the windows of the Dutch house were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table – an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mixed. (*P*, vol.1, p.29)

These contradictory emotions encapsulate the dilemma presented to the protagonist of a *bildungsroman*, often (as with Isabel here) while they are still children: the wish to belong to a group, but also to have an identity of their own and space in which to develop their identity. Isabel's childhood is more removed than is usual from these experiences; while she is spared the suffering at the hands of other children and cruel adults imposed on David Copperfield or Jane Eyre, she is also denied supportive companions of the calibre of Helen Burns, Mr. Dick, or Agnes Wickfield. Isabel's self-development is intensely self-cultivated (such as her attempts to learn about German Thought) and thus she can hardly help being self-centred, having few peers against which to measure herself – other than Henrietta Stackpole, whose role in the novel is particularly interesting in this respect. To some extent Henrietta functions as the feminine contrast and ethical alternative to Isabel in a way common in nineteenth-century novels. Her practicality, activity and pro-Americanism contrast with Isabel's more cerebral and cultural aspirations, as does Helen Burns's stoicism with Jane Eyre's volatility, or Jane Fairfax's genuine talents with Emma Woodhouse's manipulative charm. However, Henrietta and Isabel's respective careers deviate significantly from the familiar pattern of these roles. Moreover, Henrietta represents a powerful alternative to Isabel in terms of an example of what women could and should do with their lives. Gender is extremely important in determining the scope of a *bildungsroman* and the focus of its protagonist's aspirations, so much so that a female *bildungsroman* has on occasion been defined as an inherently contradictory form.¹¹ In James's earlier work, as we

¹¹ See *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel and Marianne Hirsch (Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1983), especially Susan J. Rosowski, 'The Novel of Awakening', pp.49-68; also Elaine Hoffman Baruch, 'The Feminine *Bildungsroman*: Education Through Marriage', *Massachusetts Review*, 22 (1981), 335-57, and Rita Felski, 'The Novel of Discovery: A Necessary Fiction?', *Southern Review*, 19 (1986), 131-48.

have seen, *bildungsroman* is a strictly male-only opportunity. Even relatively strong and intelligent women, such as Cecilia Mallett, Mary Garland, or Mrs Tristram, can aspire only to marriage and motherhood for personal fulfilment, while the few who venture into the masculine world of artistry, such as Noémie Nioche or Miss Blanchard, are characterised as clearly limited; though Noémie is a skilled copyist, this is emblematic of her cynical and predatory nature, while Miss Blanchard, we are told, 'had a small fortune, but was not above selling her pictures' (*RH*, p.110). These secondary plot strands of James's early novels show that women who not only take up a masculine role in the form of a creative occupation, but have the temerity to attempt earning money by it, are kept firmly in their place; that is, until the introduction of Henrietta Stackpole into the narrative of *Portrait*, in the context of the question of women's occupation and independence:

It was one of her [Isabel's] theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state. [...] She had a friend whose acquaintance she had made shortly before her father's death, who offered so high an example of useful activity that Isabel always thought of her as a model. Henrietta Stackpole had the advantage of an admired ability; she was thoroughly launched in journalism, and her letters to the *Interviewer*, from Washington, Newport, the White Mountains and other places, were universally admired. Isabel pronounced them with confidence 'ephemeral', but she esteemed the courage, energy and good-humour of the writer, who, without parents and without property, had adopted three of the children of an infirm and widowed sister and was paying their school-bills out of the proceeds of her literary labour. (*P*, vol.1, pp.69-70)

The importance of the work ethic in *Roderick Hudson* and *The American* has until this point been considerably less prominent in *Portrait*. However, this summary of the 'model' represented by Henrietta for Isabel reinstates the perceived importance of having a worthwhile occupation seen in those earlier novels; furthermore, it extends that responsibility, for the first time, to women. At various points Henrietta is portrayed as unfeeling, unsubtle, and deficient in

feminine virtues and charm. Yet in this description her personal qualities are entirely favourable; she has achieved success and admiration in her professional field, and is shown to have admirable family loyalties upon which she acts. Henrietta embodies a middle way for female workers in James's fictions, being neither a cynical whore trading on her sexuality like Noémie Nioche, nor an artistic and sexual failure like Miss Blanchard (Rowland Mallet feels with both Miss Blanchard and his cousin Cecilia that he ought to be attracted to them, but isn't, and while this is a comment on Rowland's sexuality, it also establishes unfavourable judgements of their femininity). Henrietta's professionalism is unqualified here by any mention of her gender; she is simply a good journalist. Although both her profession and her role as guardian to her sister's children (especially since she takes on the paternal function of financial provider) could be seen as masculinising, her maternal concern for the children's welfare prevents this from compromising her femininity – which overcomes any imputations of doubt during the novel by way of her eventual marriage to Mr. Bantling.¹² Isabel's 'confident' pronouncement that Henrietta's work is 'ephemeral' shows how threatened Isabel feels, in spite of her genuine admiration for Henrietta, by the example she sets. The rest of the novel follows two parallel but divergent attempts by Isabel and her shadow, Henrietta, to shape their own *bildungsromane* and, in doing so, overcome the obstacle of being female.

Isabel is more overtly challenged by traditional expectations of female progress than is Henrietta; the general curiosity about what she will do is invariably linked to her marriage prospects. From the start, Isabel's individuality

¹² Although Bantling's name is feminised and diminutive, suggesting that Henrietta is the relatively masculinised partner in the marriage; in this light, 'Stackpole' takes on a comically phallic air.

is viewed by the other characters in terms of its potential to enhance and be enhanced by someone else. Even before an explicit approach to marrying her is made by Lord Warburton, she becomes an entertaining spectacle for the Gardencourt residents, even at the level of adding aesthetic contrast to the garden when she appears on the scene. This continuous appropriation of Isabel as an adjunct to the lives of others makes her preoccupation with her own destiny seem less self-centred and more of an understandable corrective impulse. Interestingly, it is just after the first description of Henrietta that Isabel muses on her own desire for independence and current aversion to marriage:

Few of the men she saw seemed worth a ruinous expenditure, and it made her smile to think that one of them should present himself as an incentive to hope and a reward of patience. Deep in her soul - it was the deepest thing there - lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little it ended in alarms. It often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself; you could have made her colour, any day in the year, by calling her a rank egoist. She was always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress. (*P*, vol.1, pp.71-72).

Isabel, in short, is aware of her future as *bildungsroman* material. Rowland Mallet, however, indulges in the same kind of musing (and even does so aloud, to his cousin Cecilia) without experiencing the same kind of guilt or censure. While his reluctance to *act* is seen as a deficiency, careful consideration of his future plans is not in itself an extravagance for Rowland, or for Christopher Newman, both (relatively) young men with capital, literal and otherwise, to invest. Neither is it portrayed as a weakness for Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton or others to spend a perhaps disproportionate amount of time thinking about Isabel and what she will do; she is clearly a subject who justifies this level of interest. Why, then, is Isabel's tendency to think about herself, 'planning her development, desiring her perfection', a cause of guilt? The sentiments she

expresses earlier in the quotation, especially in context as the sequel to the introduction of Henrietta Stackpole, give some indication.

The idea of a female protagonist consciously planning her progress, 'desiring her perfection', is one that, as James is keen to show, troubles even the protagonist herself. Masculine protagonists need to plan either to gain or maximise their capital; again, James's notion of *Wilhelm Meister's* 'moral economy' encourages them to use experience profitably – for women, experience diminishes their capital. Since the capital available to most heroines (including Isabel) is their sexual appeal, the idea of thinking about it and, presumably, planning how to trade on it most profitably, seems unpleasantly mercenary – Isabel could be seen as no better than Noémie Nioche, scornfully declaring that she will not marry at all if she can't marry well. Indeed, Isabel's thought that 'few of the men she saw seemed worth a ruinous expenditure', alludes too clearly for comfort to metaphors of ruin linking financial and sexual capital; she seems uncomfortably cognisant of and realistic about her sexual worth, even in her rejection of trading on it. The passage presents two aspects of Isabel as disturbing, redeeming them by the assurance that she is at least aware of her own hubris in terms of excessive self-concern. The first is an awareness of sexual market conditions and a high valuation of herself in that respect. In this sense Isabel belongs to a tradition of female protagonists who realise that their individual value is located in their sexual appeal, and that their greatest opportunity for control of their lives lies in shrewd sexual bargaining, often (though not always) in terms of marriage.¹³

¹³ This tradition might include (in nineteenth-century fiction) Rosamund Vincy, Bathsheba Everdene, Becky Sharp, Cynthia Kirkpatrick, and even Jane Eyre, who is realistic about the location of Rochester's attraction to her in 'difference' and to some extent sexual unattainability.

The second disturbing aspect of Isabel, however, goes beyond this. We are told that it was 'the deepest thing in her soul' that 'if a certain light dawned she could give herself completely', although 'this image was too formidable to be attractive'. While this hints effectively at a specific wariness towards sexual intimacy - the inevitable but to Isabel perhaps regrettable consequence of her predicted marriage - the image has broader implications. Completeness is frequently given importance in James's work because it is apparently unattainable; to finish, to make or be made complete, is a goal which seems more attractive because it will never be fully achieved. It is unusual, then, to see the associations of completeness explicitly portrayed as what they are often implicitly revealed to be - not only disappointing in actuality, but also threatening and detrimental in effect. Giving herself completely, as Isabel's ultimate goal, involves not a perfection and full development of the self, but rather a total subsumation of the self within another; the sinister aspect of Isabel's projected future is that completeness will be achieved at the cost of entirely renouncing her individuality. Yet the image is not wholly formidable. Since achieving individuality is so difficult in itself, and is made more so by external pressures on Isabel to seek fulfilment in socially approved avenues such as marriage, the idea of seeking completeness in the act of submission has its own appeal - especially when, as in the case of Osmond, one seems to be submitting to a particularly admirable lifestyle. However, even partial resistance by Isabel to this notion of completeness is seditious. She maintains an unwillingness to reject the aim of finding completeness in her individuality, and in it alone. Therefore, on a more superficial level, she expresses doubts about the worth of marriage, and by implication all the traditional valuations of progress in life which belong to the traditional *bildungsroman*. It is not until Kate Croy that

readers of James's novels encounter another heroine who is motivated entirely by personal judgement (rather than by political aims, as in *The Bostonians*) to openly question the value of marriage as an institution, regardless of their own suitability for it. Isabel's wish to make for herself a *bildungsroman* whose markers of progress are internal, rather than socially determined, is formally self-contradictory, producing unease for both the other characters and her readers, and even herself. While the *bildungsroman* expects and even encourages its protagonists to challenge the integrity of their opportunities for advancement – refusing the marriage proposal of the wrong person, or leaving a job which compromises their ethical principles – Isabel goes further in challenging the *bildungsroman*'s structuring and valuation of those opportunities.

Isabel's progress is littered with both the tropes of the *bildungsroman* and the markers of gendered experiences and opportunities. In conversation with Ralph, she rejects immediate marriage with the statement: 'There are other things a woman can do', prompting a surprising blindness on Ralph's part to the gendered implications of what they are discussing:

'You want to see life – you'll be hanged if you don't, as the young men say.'

'I don't think I want to see it as the young men want to see it. But I do want to look about me.'

'You want to drain the cup of experience.'

'No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself.' (*P*, vol.1, p.213)

Isabel is very conscious that her path of progress, even her mode of vision, will necessarily differ from a man's. It is perhaps because Ralph has been too unwell to pursue a traditionally masculine route to adulthood that he is unaware of the greater extent to which women are excluded from the experience. Consciously employing a cliché, he uses the metaphor employed in *Roderick Hudson* - and literally created by Roderick in the form of sculpture - forgetting that for women,

'experience' is almost always perceived negatively, something which drives Isabel's rejection of both the vocabulary of 'the young men' and their approved path. Even though Ralph is attracted to Isabel, he treats her at times (including this one) almost as an honorary man. Sympathetic characters react to Isabel's resistance towards feminine models of progress by allowing her, in conversation, to assume a more masculine role; she is permitted the temporary illusion that she can act like a man, provided that she does not extend those illusions outside the bounds of the conversation. Discussions of this kind verge on ungendering Isabel, who is aware in her more far-sighted moments that she is all too firmly gendered. Her articulated goal is not to act (as a man could do), nor to keep still (as a woman is expected to do), but to define a middle ground of controlled effort, by 'seeing for herself'. This image of vision, an action, but one which does not involve palpable exertion, is to govern Isabel's future pattern of progress.

The importance of physical movement in the traditional *bildungsroman* – often made prominent in the form of a Grand Tour, or a move from the protagonist's provincial home to a big city – is present in *Portrait* as an indicator of how Isabel's progress is impeded or assisted, and also of how sympathetic characters will be towards what she is trying to do. Osmond's small-mindedness is demonstrated in his consistent opposition to physical movement on his own or anyone else's part: his reluctance to move from his hilltop villa is well-known, and his private conviction of the worthlessness of movement emerges in this conversation with Isabel about her travelling plans:

'I'm glad, at any rate, to hear you talk of settling. Madame Merle had given me an idea that you were of a rather roving disposition. I thought she spoke of your having some plan of going round the world.'

'I'm rather ashamed of my plans; I make a new one every day.'

'I don't see why you should be ashamed; it's the greatest of pleasures.'

'It seems frivolous, I think', said Isabel. 'One ought to choose something very deliberately, and be faithful to that.'

'By that rule then, I've not been frivolous.' (*P*, vol.1, pp.380-81)

Again, Isabel is embarrassed at this evidence of time spent thinking about herself and planning events for her own gratification, which she imagines will be perceived as 'frivolous'. Osmond is less concerned about her potential narcissism – something for which he is a living endorsement – than he is about her 'roving disposition'. True self-centredness is found (as Osmond shows) in wishing to contemplate only oneself; the idea of movement, which appeals so much to Isabel, demonstrates a, to him, undesirable interest in the affairs of others. Isabel's cultivation of her own individuality will not by definition prevent her from reflecting Osmond's glory; he is merely concerned that she remains still in order not to obscure everyone's view of this reflection. Osmond's use of the vocabulary of keeping still – as in his assertion that 'My daughter only has to sit perfectly quiet to become Lady Warburton' – is a sign of his antagonism towards *bildungsroman* (*P*, vol. 2, p.181). My previous chapter touched on the series of attempts made in *Portrait* to restrict Isabel's movements and to objectify her as a static entity, against which her final rebellion is to run away from Casper Goodwood, and to leave the narrative still running. The principle of progress through movement is essential to the *bildungsroman*, and Isabel's efforts to keep moving demonstrate her desire for a *bildungsroman* of her own. However, her avoidance of 'settling', reaching the point of rest and satisfaction with her achievements which is supposed to conclude a *bildungsroman*, subverts the form she started out wishing to appropriate. James's efforts to employ this form in *Roderick Hudson* and *The American*, while displacing its usual strategy of closure for the individual in the form of marriage and professional success, is

advanced further in his construction of Isabel as a doubly embattled *bildungsroman* protagonist.

The significance of choosing is prominent in *Portrait* (as earlier in *Roderick Hudson*) especially with reference to Isabel, as she makes clear to her aunt:

'I always want to know the things one shouldn't do'.
 'So as to do them?' asked her aunt.
 'So as to choose', said Isabel. (*P*, vol.1, p.93)

However, Isabel's emphasis on her wish to choose has disadvantages as well as empowering qualities. This is first seen in her childhood decision not to attend school, resulting in 'the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion'. Choosing overcomes passivity, but also necessitates the exclusion of alternatives. Initially, Isabel is unaware of this because she is enjoying the pleasure of actually making choices, as shown in her actions after saying goodbye to her sister Lily and her family, who are returning to America:

She walked back into the foggy London street. The world lay before her – she could do whatever she chose. There was a deep thrill in it all, but for the present her choice was tolerably discreet; she chose simply to walk back from Euston Square to her hotel. (*P*, vol.2, p.36)

The ability to choose from a Miltonic new world of opportunity engenders, paradoxically, a desire to delay choosing and to relish the potential from which to choose, while in the meantime taking comfort and pleasure in the familiar and mundane activities at hand. The 'deep thrill in it all' lies in being about to make a choice, rather than making one; Isabel, typically, prefers the anticipation to the 'formidable' idea of having to abide within the restrictions and consequences of having *made* a choice. Protagonists in *bildungsromane* generally experience uncertainties and doubts both about what to do (as in *David Copperfield*'s choice of career) and about whether their recent choice has been the right one (for instance, *Jane Eyre*'s decision to leave Thornfield). Isabel, though, experiences

doubts about what could be called metachoice; her process of making decisions about what to choose becomes an examination of the nature of choosing, its penalties and rewards. This presents a challenge to the received wisdom of the *bildungsroman*, which is that opportunities are presented to protagonists so that they may wisely select from them; to vacillate over it for too long is, like making the wrong choice, a waste.

Rowland Mallet, as we have seen, is trying to avoid just this fate at the beginning of *Roderick Hudson* in attempting to be decisive, though not rash or premature, about how to use his inheritance. Neither is it a weakness usually felt by Christopher Newman (though also a weakness of his that he *doesn't* experience it) until he encounters the unsettling moral ambiguities of dealing with the Bellegardes. Isabel's desire to choose is often, in practice, a negative process of elimination, where she chooses *not* to do things others want or expect her to do (marry Warburton, marry Goodwood, resist the advances of Osmond, stay in Italy, stay in England). However, she reaches a point, during and after her travels to the Far East and back with Madame Merle, where she believes herself to have 'seen it for herself', to have completed her survey. The pattern of a *bildungsroman* dictates that, after a certain point, a continued pursuit of general rather than specific goals can no longer assist an individual's progress towards completeness, but will instead detract from it. Having apparently achieved completeness of breadth, Isabel's compulsion to adopt a narrower and more intense focus for her career - the pressure to *select*, as Rowland puts it to Roderick - eventually becomes overwhelming, resulting in the change of policy she attempts to justify in this conversation with Ralph:

'You must have changed immensely. A year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life.'
 'I've seen it', said Isabel. 'It doesn't look to me now, I admit, such a inviting expanse.'

'I don't pretend it is; only I had an idea that you took a genial view of it and wanted to survey the whole field.'

'I've seen that one can't do anything so general. One must choose a corner and cultivate that.'

'That's what I think. And one must choose as good a corner as possible.'
(*P*, vol.2, p.65)

Ralph's perceptive comment on Isabel's old ideal of 'liberty' provokes her to deny it entirely, stating that 'one can't do anything so general'. Having dwelled happily in the moment of anticipating her future, Isabel's method is not to look back. Though her decision to marry Osmond involves accepting the *bildungsroman* notion of choosing a focus, she rejects its principle of accumulating wisdom. Rather than seeing her previous phases of discovery (her stays at Gardencourt and London, and her subsequent trip 'around the world') as part of her whole narrative, she has mistaken them for the whole – judging, as does Roderick Hudson, that her previous ideas were not a stage in her development, but an outright mistake.

The danger of linearity, then, is that a protagonist will miss out on the opportunities available by looking around and taking a general view of life. Christopher Newman's career is inverted in that he pursues a linear course very successfully from his teenage years, until deciding that what he now wants in life is breadth. Though he can at least benefit from his habits of accumulation (both in terms of money and experience), his ingrained habit of 'looking neither right nor left' undermines his efforts to succeed in Paris. In contrast, Isabel's total rejection of her earlier, exploring self in favour of a narrowly-focused, entirely linear one, cultivating a corner of life, leaves her trapped in that very corner. The penalty of linearity is embodied in the metaphorical description of her life with Osmond:

She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. (*P*, vol.2, p.189)

Gilbert Osmond has certainly been the most significant contributor to his and Isabel's miserable marriage; moreover, Isabel could not have discerned, during their courtship, the darker depths of his character which are eventually revealed. However, the description of how Isabel's view changes abruptly from 'the infinite vista of a multiplied life' to 'a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end' illustrates her error. The usual *bildungsroman* pattern involves the protagonist marrying at the end of the novel; certainly, any marriage intended to be happy and lasting will be delayed until then, while ill-judged marriages generally occur partway through, to be dissolved in favour of wiser ones at the end.¹⁴ Any protagonist's marriage in a nineteenth-century novel that takes place substantially before the end of that novel has a less than promising chance of success, and *Portrait* is no exception. Marriage is the reward for professional success and secure social and financial status in life, and by implication it is also one motivation for achieving those things; realistic novels of the period are in this sense reflecting the ideal of their society. Marriage is also, however, a marker of internal maturity; *bildungsromane* generally reserve marriage to the end of their protagonist's journey so that they have become a mature, complete individual by the time they undertake a life partnership with another individual. One of the ironies of Isabel's situation is that, as someone not only aware of the form within which she is a protagonist, but who attempts to develop and extend that form in bold and innovative ways, she then makes one of the most obvious, conventional and even banal mistakes characteristic of the *bildungsroman* protagonist – she makes a foolish marriage, and enters it before she is fully

¹⁴ For instance, David Copperfield's marriage in mid-novel to Dora Spenlow is portrayed as a premature marriage of immature (though well-meaning) partners, and makes way for his 'true' marriage to Agnes Wickfield, for which David is not ready until almost the end of his narrative.

mature, in the belief that her marriage will give her maturity, individuality, and identity with which she is secure.

Isabel was, until now, convinced that the phase of the moment was the prevailing one; that her vision of the moment was the whole vision. In her night-time vigil where she sits alone and considers the events of her married life, she is able, to some degree, to correct this process. While in the previous passage she continues to think in terms of moving from whole to whole – an infinitely multiplied vista becomes a dead end – here her experiences, separate incidents, effects, and feelings gather to produce a cumulative impression of Osmond:

He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half of his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now – she saw the whole man. She had kept still, as it were, so that he should have a free field, and yet in spite of this she had mistaken the part for the whole. (*P*, vol.2, p.191)

Isabel's realisation of a more complete vision is, in a sense, second in importance to the realisation that previously she did *not* have a complete vision. The natural and cyclical nature of the metaphor, that of the movements of the moon around the earth, convey the inevitability of this process, something Isabel's intelligence could never have subverted. Isabel's self-centredness is penalised by her extending to Osmond a concern she did not exercise on her own behalf; that he would be deceived in having only a partial view of the complex individual she knows herself to be. Her mistake is embodied in her 'keeping still', an act (or rather non-act) which has become an intrinsic tool of Osmond's attempts to control and restrict her. Most importantly, Isabel articulates her error in terms that apply not only to Osmond but also to her process of choosing, and her hastily-revised view of marriage: she has 'mistaken the part for the whole' in all cases. It is particularly Jamesian that her fullest realisation of her own individuality is achieved in the acknowledgement of her – to a great extent, self-

imposed – incompleteness as an individual. The paradox of completeness in James's work is often that completeness is best attained by reaching an awareness of one's own incompleteness.

The progress of Henrietta Stackpole, in comparison, provides a useful parallel both to Isabel's progress and to the *bildungsroman* paradigm. Henrietta, unlike Isabel, has an external structure that manages her life, at least in the short- to medium-term; that is, her profession. Her routine is dictated by the aims of her current assignment, and her motivation comes from the need to support herself and her adopted family. Thus, while Henrietta seems more 'modern', outspoken and independent than Isabel, her path in life is vindicated by relatively traditional and conservative values: the work ethic and the ideal of the family. These are both unavailable to Isabel, the orphaned heiress, who as a result has to endow her life with structure and meaning on her own behalf. Henrietta's escape from this fate is illustrated by her remarks about Pansy Osmond in conversation with Isabel:

'I consider that my conversation refers only to the moment, like the morning papers. Your stepdaughter, as she sits there, looks as if she kept all the back numbers and would bring them out some day against me'. (*P*, vol.2, pp.285-86)

Henrietta's simile and outlook are characteristic of her professional identity as a journalist, but signify more than the 'ephemerality' Isabel attributes to her work. The 'morning papers' have a long-term, large-scale pattern imposed on them by editors and proprietors, but to the daily reader and the individual contributor (like Henrietta) their primary requirement is to be sufficient to the moment.¹⁵ The contrasting approach Henrietta senses in Pansy derives from the converse need, on Pansy's part, to locate any impulse of the moment in the context of how, in

the longer term, it will please or displease her despotic father, or the nuns at the convent (who are, *in loco parentis*, a more benevolent form of equally strict discipline). Pansy exists in extreme contrast, among James's *jeunes filles*, to Daisy Miller, whose vulgarity is located by Mrs Costello in her thinking only of the present moment. Osmond's system exemplifies the disturbing extremes reached by subjugating every momentary impulse to the demands of posterity: it produces the perfectly and perversely controlled Pansy. However, this quality is also possessed to a lesser degree by Isabel, and is at least partly responsible for her and Osmond's mutual attraction; each sees the other as an opportunity not only of the moment, but for the culmination of their long-term plan.

Henrietta, meanwhile, stands wholly outside this philosophy and indeed finds it horrific. She is consistent in valuing the bird in the hand above two in the bush, as seen in her advice to Isabel to marry the solid and faithful Caspar Goodwood, rather than holding out for a better alternative. Henrietta's support for Goodwood is another factor, though, which aligns her with the work ethic exemplified by his cotton-mills in Massachusetts, and represents the more conventional aspect of her function in the novel; that is, as the mentor who advises caution and conformity. In this respect she again resembles more closely than does Isabel the usual *bildungsroman* protagonist, who in the course of their narrative will initially rebel against, but ultimately receive support from, social institutions.¹⁵ Henrietta emerges from *Portrait* as the true heroine of the *bildungsroman* it might some years earlier have been, and from which it has

¹⁵ These issues were discussed in relation to James's periodical publishing in chapter three; the article from which I quoted there by Margaret Beetham gives an excellent account of the paradoxes inherent in periodical publication.

¹⁶ *Jane Eyre*, for instance, is finally rewarded with her uncle's legacy for enduring the horrors of a malevolent family earlier in life, and then overcoming her prejudice against the family as an institution in her relationships with the Riverses. The use of this trope of the legacy from a relative in the middle of *Portrait*, rather than at its end, is another aspect of James's skewing of the *bildungsroman* form: it is Henrietta who concludes the novel with a fresh inheritance.

departed in its focus on and presentation of Isabel. She is deemed to have served her apprenticeship in battling past obstacles to succeed in her profession, establishes herself as sympathetic in earning respect and affection from Isabel and Ralph, and proves her allegiance to the work ethic and to the family ideal in her determination to carry out the tasks she is set in Europe and by providing for her family in doing so. For all this she is rewarded with, firstly, a suitably prosaic marriage to Mr. Bantling, and secondly, her own capital in the form of Ralph's legacy to her. This marriage combines conventionality (which disappoints Isabel most) with the 'modern' outlook Henrietta likes to be perceived as advancing. Henrietta will clearly, to the satisfaction of both parties, be the dominant partner in the marriage, and does not regard it as a renunciation of her independence: 'Isabel saw that she had not renounced an allegiance, but planned an attack' (*P*, vol.2, p.401). This 'attack' is made possible for Henrietta, as it was intended to be for Isabel, by Ralph's intervention and provision of capital. He bequeaths his library to Henrietta 'in recognition of her services to literature' with the recommendation that she sells it at auction: Mrs Touchett reports to Isabel that 'with the proceeds she'll set up a newspaper. Will that be a service to literature?' (*P*, vol.2, p.423) Ralph's phrasing of the request is a characteristic joke, but it could also be seen as James's own metafictional joke, recognising the literary imperative of having a character like Henrietta to play this role in a *bildungsroman*, and his own requirement of Henrietta as a 'true' protagonist in the background of the narrative, to contrast with Isabel, the 'false' but pioneering protagonist of James's choice.

Because the process of choosing from alternative life paths is integral to the *bildungsroman*, its psychological content often contains reflections by the protagonist not only on future choices, but also on the choices they have made

and the different paths they could have taken. This kind of reflection is frequently used to mark one of the final determining stages in a protagonist's narrative. While they recognise that to attempt to undo things they have done is futile, they are often motivated to make other efforts to change their situation, in the light of their awareness of their own *bildungsroman* pattern of choice and alternatives. Maggie Tulliver, for instance, cannot erase her elopement with her cousin's fiancé, but acts to repair the damage and change her own course of action by returning unmarried and alone to St. Ogg's. What this stage of development often involves, then, is a wish for *reversal* – that a point in the past could be returned to and relived differently – followed by an acceptance that this is impossible, and then a *return* to some aspect of the protagonist's past that has altered, but which is now available completely and satisfyingly to the protagonist in a way it was not before: for Maggie Tulliver, it will eventually be a reconciliation with her brother, while for David Copperfield or Jane Eyre it is represented by their 'true' partners, Agnes and Rochester, with whom they can now be fully united. Isabel reaches this late stage of development soon after she arrives back at Gardencourt to see Ralph, and is waiting for her aunt to greet her:

It suddenly struck her that if her Aunt Lydia had not come that day in just that way and found her alone, everything might have been different. She might have had another life and she might have been a woman more blest. She stopped in the gallery in front of a small picture – a charming and precious Bonington – upon which her eyes rested a long time. But she was not looking at the picture; she was wondering whether if her aunt had not come that day in Albany she would have married Caspar Goodwood. (*P*, vol.2, p.404)

This reflection represents a dramatic change in Isabel's mode of thinking.

Marriage to Goodwood has always seemed the most unthinkable of her matrimonial options; he is presented from the beginning as a contender who, in spite of his positive qualities, has already been deemed unsuccessful. It is Isabel's first concession to the idea that she might have been persuaded to make a

choice recommended by others, and furthermore, that it might have been better than the choice she has made for herself. This act of reflection does not indicate that Isabel will eventually marry Goodwood (after all, Maggie Tulliver is not rewarded with marriage to Stephen Guest, or indeed anyone). It does, however, support a more positive interpretation of the novel's ending than is often advanced, since the outcome of such a reflection on the part of a *bildungsroman* protagonist is for them to take affirmative action to change the unsatisfactory course of their lives.

Until now, Isabel has been particularly resistant to the concept of returning, as befits her adherence to extreme linearity; she prefers to imagine herself continually moving onwards to new things, never repeating old experiences or mistakes. Although she technically returned to Italy to marry Osmond, Isabel did not conceptualise it as such; since she refuses to allow returning to play an aesthetic or utilitarian role in her life patterning, she also denies that she ever does it. However, this phase obliges her to recognise the appeal of returning. She is compelled to reverse and retrace her steps, since going forward from her unhappiness, to see the dying Ralph, involves going back to Gardencourt. Thus Isabel finds her system of progress in total disarray when she finally comes back to face Caspar Goodwood:

'If only you'll trust me, how little you'll be disappointed! The world's all before us – and the world's very big. I know something about that'. Isabel gave a long murmur, like a creature in pain; it was as if he were pressing something that hurt her. 'The world's very small', she said at random; she had an immense desire to appear to resist. She said it at random, to hear herself say something; but it was not what she meant. The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out all around her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. (*P*, vol.2, p.435)

Because of James's doubts about whether the individual can ever truly reach completeness, Isabel's solution to the mistake of her original marriage departs

from the usual *bildungsroman* pattern of correction by way of a second, happier marriage. James advocates something much more disturbing; the avoidance of marriage altogether. In later novels, he focuses much more overtly and cynically on the irony of marriage being employed as simply a formal gateway to behaving like adults, an act which must initially take place before any progress toward maturity can be achieved – as in the case of Little Aggie in *The Awkward Age*, protected from any hint of adulthood and married as soon as possible so that she too can participate in the social circle of gossip and adulterous affairs. It is in that novel that Nanda Brookenham concludes by retiring from this social circle because she is too wise and too good (in spite of her supposed contamination with adult knowledge) for marriage; having seen what it is meant to confer and what it actually offers, she demonstrates – as James's representative of the truly wise and mature person – that it has nothing to offer. Isabel's return to Rome, similarly, counters a *bildungsroman* pattern in a number of ways, not least its suggestion that learning from one's mistakes is not inevitably and visibly rewarded. Rather than pursuing the *bildungsroman* as described by Minden, an ostensibly linear pattern which is also in many ways circular, Isabel's narrative follows a sequence of linked and consequential actions, that can be reconsidered but not necessarily redone, in the form of a happier second marriage. Maturity may have to be accomplished within the confines of a protagonist's chosen life pattern, permitting only temporary returning movements, rather than believing, as does Roderick, and initially Isabel, that they can disconnect from their youthful errors. Moretti's description of how the *bildungsroman* erases itself is successfully subverted in James, where maturity seems to be conditional on retaining the responsibilities unthinkingly shouldered in youth, a paradox strongly present in James's own 'return' to the *bildungsroman* in his later phase.

The Ambassadors

While discussion of *The Ambassadors* occupies a larger role in the next chapter, it needs to be briefly examined here, in conclusion, as the coda to James's treatment of the *bildungsroman*. The plot of the novel enacts a return to Europe, explored as virgin territory in *Roderick Hudson* and *the American*, while the novel itself similarly represents a return to the now displaced fictional ideal of the *bildungsroman*, at a time when - since the literary climate in general was now more in sympathy with the subversive attitude towards the form which James's novels had employed back in the late 1870s - his subversion of the *bildungsroman* could be advanced even further.

The Ambassadors reshapes, as does *Portrait*, the pattern of the *bildungsroman* while still paying conscious homage to it and, in this instance, to its importance in James's earlier work. It is a narrative of displaced *bildungsroman* because its protagonist, Lambert Strether, contravenes the most basic requirement of a *bildungsroman* in being well past his youth, but is nevertheless undergoing the *bildungsroman* experience, while aware that his experience disrupts the usual model of linear progression:

There were 'movements' he was too late for: weren't they, with the fun of them, already spent? There were sequences he had missed and great gaps in the procession: he might have been watching it all recede in a golden cloud of dust. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.88)

Strether begins the journey, as it were, at the wrong end of the track; it is his last chance rather than his first opportunity, and as such his *bildungsroman* is almost self-parodic. All his development is futile since it is happening out of sequence, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, Miss Barrace is able to tell him, near the end of the novel, 'We know you as hero of the drama, and

we're gathered to see what you'll do' (*Amb*, vol.2, p.179). Strether is the spectacle here, as Isabel is throughout *Portrait*, and this confirms him as Chad's replacement in being the true *bildungsroman* protagonist (like Henrietta Stackpole, Chad has merely been the conventional foil, under cover of which Strether has been able to emerge as a more advanced type of *bildungsroman* hero). His choice, his process of deciding what to do with himself, is the novel's proper object of scrutiny.

Strether initially fails to recognise the *bildungsroman* potential seen in him by Maria Gostrey because his purpose in travelling to Paris is devoid of the degree of selfishness and the aim of self-cultivation inherent to the *bildungsroman*. His journey is perversely altruistic, undertaken for the benefit and development of primarily, Chad, and indirectly, the Newsome clan. Whereas most *bildungsroman* protagonists begin their journey with self-centred purposes, but must learn the benefits of thinking of others before receiving their reward, Strether reverses this pattern. Like Isabel, he feels guilty about time he chooses to spend on self-development, but also becomes more aware of his previous reliance on others' judgements and social expectations. However, James is not, and could not be, rewriting *Portrait*, not least because of the importance of gender in a *bildungsroman*.¹⁷ Strether's adventure effects a conscious return to the plot of young men visiting Europe used in *Roderick Hudson* and *The American*, but distorts the governing idea of linearity which remained intact in the early novels. Their common starting ground can be seen in Strether's initial view of himself as a failure in the context of the American work ethic and the

¹⁷Even so, the novel provides ample demonstration of the effect of the choices of others, and the expected life path of fulfilment in marriage, on women's opportunities for *bildungsromane*; Madame and Jeanne de Vionnet's options are defined by Chad's choices, while Maria Gostrey's final chance of the closure of marriage is similarly denied by Strether's negative choosing process.

struggle to generate capital as representative of masculine success, brought out by a comparison of himself with his peer and travelling companion Waymarsh:

He *was* a success, Waymarsh, in spite of overwork, of prostration, of sensible shrinkage, of his wife's letters and of his not liking Europe. Strether would have reckoned his own career less futile had he been able to put into it anything so handsome as so much fine silence. [...] [Waymarsh] had held his tongue and made a large income, and these were in especial the achievements as to which Strether envied him. (*Amb*, vol.1, pp.27-28)

Waymarsh's stoic endurance of his estranged wife's bitterness represents the psychological aspect of this successful persona, in its approved masculine resilience, acquisitiveness, and assurance of its own moral superiority. Though Maria states that Strether has done well to avoid this aspirational model, its authority lingers until Strether finds a tangible replacement in the artist, Gloriani, transferring his aspirations from external success in favour of psychological security and individuality. Strether has already, however, surpassed the spectre of Waymarsh's achievements to detach himself from the majority judgement of what success is, and what an acceptable life path might be. When Waymarsh, having heard from Strether the difficulty of making out what is going on in Europe, asks, 'Then what did you come over for?' Strether replies, 'Well, I suppose exactly to see for myself – without their aid' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.109). This attitude echoes Isabel's, and shows Strether developing a healthy degree of egotism that he was previously completely lacking. 'They' are assumed by Waymarsh to be the population of Woollett, but its inclusiveness sets Strether alone as an individual against the rest of the world; even at this stage of life, learning to see for oneself is synonymous in James with progressing to adulthood. Nevertheless, as Isabel before him finds out, simply seeing is not necessarily satisfying, nor does it guarantee either happiness or completeness.

The initial altruistic focus for Strether's actions is of course Chad, who functions as his partner in *bildungsroman* and as a complementary figure to

Strether in the way that Roderick and Rowland appear to be to each other. This invites the same error of thinking each has the potential to make the other complete, in providing what they need – Chad, the youthful vigour (and, ironically, experience) that Strether misses; Strether, the power of the respected elder to intercede for Chad and sanction his chosen lifestyle. However, as with Roderick and Rowland, the project of collaborating to achieve completeness eventually leads Chad and Strether to draw strength vampirically from one another by their actions, rather than generate more than the sum of their parts. Strether comes to believe that success in his mission will result not in saving Chad but sacrificing him (and Madame de Vionnet); Chad, in turn, proves willing to sacrifice Strether's potential happiness to his own choices. As is often the case in James's fiction, the opportunity to enjoy emotions or abstract experiences – love, friendship, or passion – is finite; similarly, *bildungsroman* is a finite resource for which Chad and Strether must compete at one another's expense. The narratorial presentation of Strether's first evaluation of Chad portrays them as counterparts, and thus potential rivals, observing 'If Strether was to feel young, that is, it would be because Chad was to feel old [...] The question of Chadwick's true time of life was, doubtless, what came up quickest after the adjournment of the two' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.142). The passage prepares us for Chad and Strether's reciprocal usurpation of the other's role, each exerting themselves to follow what they believe is the true path of the *bildungsroman*.

Since the *bildungsroman* is a young man's game, its outcome ought to favour Chad, who externally emerges victorious as an eligible young homecoming executive. This final vision of Chad is repugnant to Strether, yet its seeds are present from Chad's first appearance, showing that the ideal of the complete man is more rewarding as an aspiration than an actuality. In their first

private conversation Strether muses that, 'he was face to face, as matters stood, with the finished business' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.150), that 'at these instants he [Chad] just presented himself, his identity so rounded off, as such a link in the chain as might practically amount to a kind of demonstration' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.156), and appraises Chad as 'smooth' and 'polished' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.152). Strether here envies Chad his poise as a finished, polished article, an example of the complete, well-rounded individual – but he finally sees this finished article as repellent in its completeness. Chad's smoothness, polish and finish have sealed him off from the appeals of others; while he has grown, he cannot grow further to appreciate the advanced state of consciousness and judgement attained by Strether, and cannot empathise, as Strether can, with the claim Madame de Vionnet feels she has on him. The finished article, like Roderick (whose 'beautiful completeness' is lauded by Sam Singleton) and Madame Merle who is 'all surface', is isolated from all around it by its completeness. It becomes a kind of horror which justifies James's portrayal, in many of his fictions, of the danger to the finished article in being irredeemably limited, even damaged, by its own success.

The resemblance of the Strether-Chad relationship to that of Roderick and Rowland is the central, though not the only, aspect of *The Ambassadors* that makes the novel in a sense a return to and revision of *Roderick Hudson*. Several of Strether's encounters echo dialogue involving Roderick and his progress towards completeness, such as the conversation in which the American tendency to be 'converted' to Europe, referring particularly to the capitulation of Little Bilham, is discussed:

Miss Barrace appealed again to Strether - 'don't let it discourage you. You'll break down soon enough, but you'll meanwhile have had your moments'.
(*Amb*, vol.1, p.205)

This is a direct rephrasing of Roderick Hudson's statement: 'If I break down, I shall stay down', to the earlier version of Gloriani who appears in that novel as an older, world-weary artist advising his successors, and predicts for Strether the same fate of enjoying the European experience to the full, only to have it reach an irrevocable end. While we do not visibly see Strether's final breakdown in the way that we are vividly shown Roderick's, the novels share the approach of clearly indicating the projected end for their protagonists (in complete contrast to the way this is withheld in the cases of Newman and Isabel Archer). *The Ambassadors* shares with *Roderick Hudson*, among other things, a policy of framing each moment of personal growth and inspiration in the context of its inevitable failure on the terms of the conventional *bildungsroman* ideal.

The effect on Strether of his stay in Paris forms a parallel to the development of a more relaxed attitude on Rowland Mallett's part during his summer in Rome, when he adopts 'a relaxed acceptance of the present, the actual, the sensuous - of existence on the terms of the moment'. Strether's existence and identity take on a similarly quiescent character:

The early summer brushed the picture over and blurred everything but the near; it made a vast warm fragrant medium in which the elements floated together on the best of terms, in which rewards were immediate and reckonings postponed. (*Amb*, vol.2, p.59)

While this passage is typical of James's later work in its use of a picture-painting metaphor, it is remarkably similar in setting and sentiment to the earlier episode. More sinister here is the hint of reckonings to come, thus acknowledging that the principles of linearity and progress cannot simply be halted when it seems convenient (as Rowland, Newman and Isabel are all to find out). However, it is also an indicator of the *bildungsroman* protagonist's incompleteness for them to aspire to a condition of stasis - Rowland and Strether do here, as Newman does when he imagines married life, and as Isabel does in her vision of contented

seclusion within the walls of Osmond's villa. The narratorial observations in *Roderick Hudson* and *The Ambassadors* foreshadow the eventual impossibility of 'existence on the terms of the moment', since in these two novels, the knowledge and fear of what the future will hold when the protagonists 'break down' – when Roderick's talent fails him, or when Strether returns to Woollett – act as deliberately displaced episodes of closure. The excessive linearity of Isabel and Newman produces the opposite punishment; they have no idea what a future beyond the narrowly conceived and ultimately unsuccessful ones they have aspired towards might hold. Excessive emphasis on 'immediate rewards' is a conventional element of the 'straying' of a *bildungsroman* protagonist; James ironises this by also making it an inevitable consequence of their wishing to pursue his version of a *bildungsroman* narrative, and thus a contribution towards their failure to attain its usual markers of success.

Strether's growing awareness of his status as a flawed aspirant towards *bildungsroman* leads him to appraise his awkward adoption of the role for Maria Gostrey in this way:

'Of course I'm youth – youth for the trip to Europe. I began to be young, or at least to get the benefit of it, the moment I met you at Chester, and that's what has been taking place ever since. I never had the benefit at the proper time – which comes to saying that I never had the thing itself. I'm having the benefit at this moment; I had it the other day when I said to Chad "Wait"; I shall have it still again when Sarah Pocock arrives. It's a benefit that would make a poor show for many people, and I don't know who else but you and I, frankly, could begin to see in it what I feel. I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But nevertheless I'm making up late for what I didn't have early. [...] They may say what they like – it's my surrender, my tribute, to youth.'
(*Amb*, vol.2, pp.50-51)

Just as Strether's *bildungsroman* originated in his pledging himself to the cause of others, he continues and renews it on the grounds of his contact with others – Chad, Maria, Sarah Pocock - and their reaction to the new, more complete Strether. His is a *bildungsroman* in which individuality will never be attainable

independently of the way in which it is constructed by others, and while this may be no less the case in James's earlier novels, Isabel, Roderick and Christopher Newman are at least permitted moments of belief in this illusion of their absolute individuality. For all his naiveté, and his growing confidence in his own judgement, Strether never subscribes to the possibility of being able to define himself on his own terms – he is 'youth for the trip to Europe', rather than being essentially youthful or any other thing. Here, Strether characterises himself as an anti-Roderick – in effect, a satire of the earlier youth in Europe. Strether's caricature of the kind of youth he isn't, as in: 'I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets', is (besides substituting more conventional sonnets for sculptures) strongly reminiscent of Roderick in Rome. *The Ambassadors* becomes not only a revision of James's earlier work on the subject, but also an affectionately cynical rewriting of both *bildungsroman* conventions and his own original response to them. James's 'tribute to youth' here is comparable to Ralph's legacy to Henrietta for her 'services to literature' – his final and even more overt subversion of the *bildungsroman*.

Many critics have by now observed James's ability to appropriate literary forms and genres, generating complex texts that engage seriously, if not always favourably, with contemporary literary fashions and interests. While James's relationship with realism is frequently discussed, the specific links between certain of his novels and the *bildungsroman* tradition are less well recognised. An examination of his deliberate engagement with a genre which was utilised with great success by many of James's most admired Victorian predecessors is one of the most focused and productive ways to tackle the much more diffuse problem of the relation in James's fiction between the individual and

completeness. *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors* stand out as instances where James deliberately revisits and revises a great novelistic genre of the mid-nineteenth century in the context of the subsequent period and of his own less assured, more subversive approach to the ideal of the complete individual.¹⁸ A final passage from *The Ambassadors* demonstrates James's complex use of the form:

That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed – a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well as within; it was in the long watch, from the balcony, in the summer night, of the wide late life of Paris, the unceasing soft quick rumble, below, of the little lighted carriages that, in the press, always suggested the gamblers he had seen of old at Monte Carlo pushing up to the tables. This image was before him when he at last became aware that Chad was behind. (*Amb*, vol.2, p.211)

It is telling that Chad appears here as a figure rather like the devil, behind Strether, a sinister presence countering the appeal of the revised values of the *bildungsroman* as developed by its true practitioner. However, the passage also reveals the permeability of what is defined in character terms as Strether's youth – which signifies his inverted progress, his attempts to experience individuality and his aspirations towards fulfilment – it is 'in the outside air as well as within'. Here, in fact, the *bildungsroman* is emphatically what surrounds Strether, the sphere of life in which he is enveloped and the structure of progress in which he is irrevocably engaged, much more so than being anything within him, or indeed confined to any individual.

The *bildungsroman* is important in James's work not just as a structural method of focusing on an individual, but as a self-reflexive interrogation of its own principles of form and setting. In evading traditional *bildungsroman*

¹⁸As I stated in chapter four, James's development as a novelist and his use of particular genres and tropes is not continual and homogeneous; this area of interest is most prominent, and

strategies of closure, James produces what appear to be incomplete *bildungsroman* and incomplete protagonists, but in doing this, maintains the tensions that define the form - maturity and youth, linearity and returning – and thus questions both the structural ideals of the form and the ideological and psychological ideal of the ‘complete’ individual. As a result, the ideal of individual completeness, while remaining finally unattainable and even undesirable, becomes something very like Strether’s youth: ‘a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear’.

Chapter Six

'A way of not balancing': the mathematics of completeness in James's later work

James's critical writings and prefaces show an obvious interest in applying quasi-mathematical formulae to discussions of structure and the novel – as in, for example, his well-known remarks on the 'circle of experience' in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*. This passage was among those examined in chapter one of this thesis, after which I discussed more broadly (in chapter two) James's advancement of theories of the novel, with particular regard to 'completeness'. One of the developments in James's later work is that mathematical formulae, figures and references appear more and more frequently within the novels, as metaphorical expressions of the characters' feelings. An example is a statement made by Lambert Strether soon after his arrival in Paris in *The Ambassadors*:

Everything he wanted was comprised in a single boon [...] Oh if he *should* do the sum no slate should hold the figures! (*Amb*, vol.1, p.83)

On examining this image, it seems that Strether's excitement has temporarily obscured his mathematical abilities: though in process the sum may indeed expand, to correctly complete it one would expect the result to be smaller, not larger, than the original figures. The interesting aspect of this, then, is why Strether selects a mathematical image to express his feelings of elation, when his sense of mathematical operations is apparently fairly limited. The idea of the 'sum', it seems, is not one which corresponds in any exact way to real mathematical operations, but which is appropriate as a metaphor for the nature of experience in the world of *The Ambassadors* and James's other late novels. The previous chapter of this thesis examined James's use of the *bildungsroman* model in his early novels in particular, focusing on the process by which

protagonists in those novels seek completeness as individuals. In this chapter I intend to examine the next stage in a Jamesian protagonist's search for completeness, which involves a problem that is a constant concern for James in his critical writings on novels: the way in which parts are fitted together to make a whole. In the texts themselves, this is represented by the relation of an individual to a social or familial group. This process, its aim of bonding various individuals into a satisfactory multiple unit, and the use of mathematical metaphors to describe and explain it, is the subject of this chapter.

James himself was by no means a keen mathematician – in fact, quite the reverse. His autobiographical writings make a number of references to the blight it put on his schooldays, as shown by this recollection of his time at Forest's in the winter of 1854:

When I wonder why the scene was sterile [...] the reason glooms out again in the dreadful blight of arithmetic, which affected me at the time as filling all the air. The quantity imposed may not in fact have been positively gross, yet it is what I most definitely remember – not, I mean, that I have retained the dimmest notion of the science, but only of the dire image of our being in one way or another always supposedly addressed to it.¹

The scene presents a somewhat Dickensian picture of pupils tormented by systems that spoil their childhood innocence without ever being of practical use in life – nevertheless, James's inability to grasp mathematics does seem to be a sore point which occupies disproportional importance in his memory of the time. He further remarks of this period that:

They [the other boys] kept in their heads such secrets for how to do sums – those secrets that I must even then have foreseen I should even so late in life as this have failed to discover.²

¹ Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), reprinted in *Autobiography*, ed. F. W. Dupee (London: W.H. Allen, 1956), p.127; hereafter referred to as *A Small Boy and Others* and *Autobiography*.

² *A Small Boy and Others*, p.128.

A secret, to any fictional Jamesian protagonist, is something it is unthinkable not to pursue – this narratorial voice is strongly reminiscent of the narrators of James's 1890s short stories, artists and critics searching for the elusive key either to understanding a work of art or to creating a successful one. Even when sure of failure, the subject in question is unlikely to lose its fatal fascination.

Without drawing too rigid a parallel between art and life, the 'secret' of mathematics seems to have exercised something of this fascination for James. He comments on it again when describing a later phase of his education, his attendance at the Institute Rochette in Geneva in 1855:

I so feared and abhorred mathematics that the simplest arithmetical operation had always found and kept me helpless and blank – the dire discipline of the year bringing no relief whatsoever to my state; and mathematics unmitigated were at the Institute Rochette the air we breathed [...] If I couldn't tackle the smallest problem in mechanics or face without dismay at the blackboard the simplest geometrical challenge, I ought somehow in decency to make myself over, oughtn't really to be so inferior to almost everyone else. That was the pang, as it was also the marvel – that the meanest minds and the vulgarest types approached these matters without a sign of trepidation even when they approached them, at the worst, without positive appetite.³

James's experience is characterised by the sublime – his fear and conviction that mathematics is something inherent and natural ('filling all the air' and 'the air we breathed') while also, and to him personally, something overpowering and awesome, but with which he nevertheless feels he must get to grips. He can barely comprehend the indifference of the 'meanest and vulgarest' pupils around him; his own extreme reactions range between fascination and terror.

At the time of composing his autobiography, 'even so late in life as this', James characterises himself as still an inept mathematician; nevertheless, the novels he wrote in the intervening years draw on mathematical images and metaphors repeatedly. This can be explained firstly by the observation that

³ Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), reprinted in *Autobiography*, p.241.

mathematics functions as a sublime element for James, exciting both fear and fascination, and secondly, by theories of mathematics and neuropsychology which contend that mathematical abilities are misunderstood by the average person, in the way that James does, as something difficult, alien and painful to learn.

The sublime is linked with mathematics, together becoming extremely important, in these later novels. Neil Hertz, writing of the mathematical sublime in relation to literature and criticism, describes it thus:

There is, according to Kant, a sense of the sublime – he calls it the mathematical sublime – arising out of sheer cognitive exhaustion, the mind blocked not by the threat of an overwhelming force, but by the fear of losing count or of being reduced to nothing but counting – this and this and this – with no hope of bringing a long series or a vast scattering under some sort of conceptual unity. [...] In illustration, Kant alludes to ‘the bewilderment or, as it were, perplexity which it is said seizes the spectator on his first entrance into St. Peter’s in Rome’.⁴

Hertz’s article relates this experience to current conditions of academic publishing, which parallel in some ways the conditions of fiction publishing in the 1890s. However, this grasping after some kind of unity – something which, in James’s own term, ‘groups together’ the disparate elements with which James’s protagonists encounter, is prevalent in the later novels. The mathematical sublime is a condition prevalent both within the world of the later novels and also in the conditions of their production.

James had a professional fear of and fascination with the masses, especially in their character as the popular readership for fiction – a body whose attention he craved without success, and of whose tastes he despaired. On re-entering the arena of novel publication in 1895, after several years spent writing

⁴ Neil Hertz, ‘The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime’, in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.62.

for the theatre that ended with the notorious production of *Guy Domville*, James's increased anxiety about being judged irrelevant by the majority of readers emerges in his fictions. It appears overtly in his 1890s short stories, which often focus on authors and their attempts to negotiate between popular and literary appreciation. Nevertheless, this anxiety penetrates beyond tales with a metafictional interest.

If James's own creative crisis occurred in his spectacular theatrical failure of 1895, it mirrors, uncannily, the crisis affecting the form to which he would return, the novel. In 1894, the change in book-buying policy announced by circulating libraries heralded an end to the dominance of the three-decker novel, which was replaced in popularity by fiction in single volumes. While it had been recognised for some time that the insistence that a novel should be arranged in – and probably stretched to fill – three volumes was unnecessary, and that the custom was in any case being undermined by the availability of cheap one-volume reprints of novels, it was a version of the mathematical sublime which eventually motivated the libraries to change their long-standing policy. Peter Keating states: 'Too many three-volume novels were being written, and as the active life of most of them was short, the libraries faced serious difficulties in disposing of surplus stock [...] market forces were expanding so fast and changing so much that libraries and publishers could not longer collaborate effectively.'⁵ In fact, the market for fiction was expanding in many directions and including a number of new audiences. The 1890s saw the publication of a substantial number of cheap one-volume thrillers and romances, and a considerable expansion of the market for short stories and periodicals. Keating reports that in 1886 there was a sharp rise in the number of novels published

⁵ Keating, p.26.

which continued until the First World War, and that there were two peak years within this period of expansion: 1897 and 1906. By 1906, James was working on short stories and travel commentaries, having already published what was to be his last completed novel. While Percy Lubbock attributes James's inability to finish *The Ivory Tower* to the cultural shock of the Great War, it is interesting to note the coincidence of the final stage of his career, in which the completion of full-length fictions proved impossible, with a period in which the amount of published fiction swelled to previously unimaginable levels. In 1897, however, James's stated determination, after the embarrassment of *Guy Domville*, to return to novel-writing with increased vigour, began to gather steam. His first publication, *The Other House*, demonstrated the combination of previous influences and new theatrical ideas filtering into his fictions. However, by 1897, in spite of the weight of published material crowding his efforts, James was producing fictions which were both engaging with and transcending the new world of literary production.

The late, or post-theatre novels, then, best demonstrate these preoccupations with numbers and counting. My previous chapter argued that James's early novels engage specifically with the recent precedent of the *bildungsroman*, using and subverting its pattern in order both to place James's work within a dominant literary tradition, and to advance James's ambitious ideas and projected aims for the novel form ahead of current conventions. Late James novels are *not* rite-of-passage novels because their protagonists have already taken on a role of maturity - Maggie Verver as her mother's replacement in being effectively a life partner to Adam; Maisie Farange, Fleda Vetch and Nanda Brookenham as children who adopt a parental role (often towards their

own parents); Milly Theale in being a solitary mistress of her inheritance, and in having to face the certainty of her own imminent death; Strether, most obviously, by having reached the age and position of ostensible maturity. They are performing this mature role publicly, without having achieved a mature consciousness or understanding of certain inward and intimate aspects of human relationships. Thus, their rite of passage is initially deemed, by both themselves and others, to have already taken place, and they begin their narratives from a position within the adult social system into which Isabel, Roderick and other early protagonists attempt to insert themselves. Newman, who has taken on a mature role in some ways, is still a contender for a rite-of-passage narrative because he himself believes that he needs one. He is comfortable with the idea that his work of self-development is not yet complete – he has explicit goals, finding a wife and exploring European culture, yet to achieve. In contrast Strether feels he should be content with his experience and ready to settle (especially since he has visited Europe before) but recognises very quickly on his second arrival in Europe that he isn't, and that he has missed out important stages of self-development. *The Ambassadors*, as something of an anomaly among the later works, partakes of both patterns in providing an avowedly belated rite-of-passage for Strether, but one which bypasses conventional forms and which is experienced to a large extent vicariously. For these reasons, it has been discussed in the previous chapter, but will also feature in this one.

James's early novels foreground the individual and are less concerned with imposing symmetry on the text – a perennial interest of James's in his criticism, which later infects his characters. If, as it is commonly perceived, a common theme of Victorian fiction is to fit an individual into the right place in their community, and if modernist texts are popularly supposed to reflect the

fragmentation of that community in a way which both alienates the individual, and also valorises his rejection of it in favour of an idiosyncratic path of freedom, James's late novels can be seen to fuse elements of both traditions. The situations portrayed in the novels written after his time in the theatre seem to hark back, more than might be expected, to the ideals of subduing individual will to the collective good. However, the groups portrayed are generally parasitical – instances of the Victorian community that have gone horribly wrong, or in the appropriate 1890s parlance, degenerated. Yet this ideal is tempered with yearning to explore the possibilities of the de-institutionalised individual – when the potential of both group and individual are considered, then some kind of resolution, however dubious, can be achieved, as in *The Golden Bowl*. It must, however, be remembered that the resolution provided by Victorian novels is often more problematic than its stereotypical image, as encapsulated by James himself in 'The Art of Fiction', would suggest.⁶

James's characters often conceptualise the peculiar personal relations surrounding them in terms of mathematics and figures – as in Strether's 'sum'. For instance, Maisie Farange in *What Maisie Knew* imagines the choice she must make between her alternative families as being 'like an impossible sum on a slate' (*WMK*, p.341). In *The Awkward Age*, the consequence of the Duchess's efforts to look attractive is that 'the air of distinction almost mathematically resulted', while Nanda's precocity is described in these terms: 'the sum would be done with the figures now on the slate. On little Aggie's slate the figures were yet to be written.' (*AA*, p.52 and p.238-39). While these images are reminiscent of James's schoolboy experiences of mathematics, more adult metaphors of

⁶ D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: problems of closure in the traditional novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) are among many works which discuss this issue.

calculation and figures of payment are also frequently used. Milly Theale characterises Kate Croy's more mysterious aspects as 'not wholly calculable' (*W*, vol.1, p.190), while Strether ruminates, early in his initiation into Chad's circle of friends in Paris, that 'his having abetted the lady [Miss Barrace] by an excess that was rare with him would count for little in the sum – as Waymarsh might so easily have added it up – of her licence' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.115-16). In *The Golden Bowl*, Bob Assingham's response to his wife Fanny's ruminations on the relationships of her friends is: 'What I can't do with is the figures you make of them. And when you take to adding your figures up!' (*GB*, vol.1, p.279) while Maggie sees her emotional debt to her father as 'a column of figures', and considers that his marriage has 'made the sum wrong' (*GB*, vol.2, p.81).

In all these novels mathematical cognition is invoked to represent understanding of human relations, exemplified by another of Fanny's statements about Adam Verver to her husband Bob:

'I believe in him, and I was right, at first, in knowing I was going to. So I haven't' – and she stated it as she might have quoted from a slate, after adding up the items, the sum of a column of figures – 'so I haven't, I say to myself, been a fool'. (*GB*, vol.1, p.75).

In spite of James's own declared antipathy to mathematics, this is not so inappropriate or perverse as it might seem, when examined in the light of ideas about numeracy and human mathematical abilities. Brian Butterworth's statement that to understand the relationships between numbers is to understand something very abstract and difficult to grasp could also be applied to understanding the relationships between James's characters.⁷ Indeed, James's use of mathematical and numerical metaphors points to a significant parallel between calculations and relations in his later fictions, which I will explore here. The first

⁷ Brian Butterworth, *The Mathematical Brain* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.4; hereafter referred to as Butterworth.

chapter of this thesis presented evidence of James's personal fixation on figures and 'doing the sums', in his obsessive concern with the word counts of his novels and with predicting (usually inaccurately) their eventual 'correct' length. As his writing career progresses, this anxiety is expressed more and more frequently within his novels, and by his characters.

Butterworth's discussion of mathematical ability is useful here. He contests the claim by the philosopher and psychologist, Jerry Fodor, that the ability to count is a central process - something that has been manually invented and must be learned by each individual. Butterworth's own argument is that it is cognitive, innate and performed (even if at a very basic level) automatically by an individual, though such abilities need training if they are to advance. James's characters approach relations, and negotiating them, as a central process which must be painfully learned; yet they overlook the extent to which such procedures are cognitive. They cannot help counting things - their experiences, their peer group, and the number of potential partners, confidantes and antagonists around them. This is intended to reassure them of their place in this ordered sequence of figures, and to determine that the sum adds up. Symmetry, a dominant feature in James's fictions, is envisioned as the means of achieving completeness: by pairing everyone and everything up, a perfect design can be constructed, made up of parts which are regular, relate proportionally to one another, and fit smoothly together. This cannot, ultimately, be achieved for three reasons. Firstly, there is always an 'odd one out' (of which more later). Secondly, the implied 'fixing' of such a design in a static pattern is disrupted from within by its own fluidity. Thirdly, there is the intrusion of something sublime - an element which overwhelms the protagonists to the point of psychological collapse, and provokes a breakdown of their calculative sensibility, after which, in these later novels,

they are compelled to put aside their former reliance on symmetry and proceed through an unsymmetrical world, regrouping as they do so. While a full discussion of the sublime in James's work would be a lengthy undertaking in itself, one particular aspect of it relates closely to James's pursuit of completeness, which is the notion of the mathematical sublime, as presented in relation to literature by Hertz.

The concept of pairs, and pairing, is also important. Butterworth refers to the theory of 'two-counting' – that is, that primitive societies developed basic counting patterns using the numbers 'one' and 'two', and counting higher in terms of multiple pairs, e.g., three twos.⁸ More sophisticated societies, it seems, develop methods for progressively counting higher, as opposed to counting in multiple pairs or registering large numbers only as a 'mass'. This is also important – as Keating's observations show – in James's work. Images of numbers of people, and of their relations to one another, can be seen to follow the patterns documented in Butterworth, focusing on either pairs or masses. Difficulties arise, as we shall see, when protagonists such as Lambert Strether attempt to progress from one system to another. The narrator of *The Sacred Fount* states in the midst of his puzzling narrative:

Things in the real had a way of not balancing: it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion. (*SF*, p.130)

James's protagonists, then, are drawn to the appealing symmetry offered by mathematical systems for making sense of the world, yet also baffled and overwhelmed by it. This chapter examines the process by which they reach an awareness that things have 'a way of not balancing'.

What Maisie Knew and *The Awkward Age*

In *The Awkward Age* and *What Maisie Knew*, characters pair and are paired with one another in a series of different combinations – Maisie with various governesses and parents, and all of them with each other; Nanda with her mother, Van, Mr Longdon, Mitchy, Aggie and so on, as well as other pairings among that group. In spite of the different number of pairings produced in the novels, a critical tendency is to attempt to identify the truest and most significant set of oppositions. For instance, Walter Isle states:

James, as usual, works in balances and symmetries; one character is paired off with another, usually to show contrasting versions of a general type. The six major characters (if we exclude for a moment little Aggie, whose role is more symbolic than dramatic) fall into three pairs: Nanda and Mrs Brookenham; Mitchett and Vanderbank; and Mr Longdon and the Duchess.⁹

While Isle's pairings are plausible enough, the characters mentioned above could be arranged in different pairings just as plausibly, and in many more permutations; James's 'balances and symmetries' are not only much more complex than Isle admits; they are not always in fact symmetrical. Little Aggie's inclusion in the above list would make seven major characters, but her omission allows the other protagonists to be conveniently paired up and related. Similarly, 'the action of the novel revolves around the relations between Nanda and Aggie and two men, Mr Vanderbank and Mr Mitchett', according to Ian Ousby's *Guide to Literature in English*, in which Mrs Brook does not even rate a mention. James's system of pairings seems to present itself as a way of simplifying the movements of the narrative and making sense of them, and is used as such by

⁸ Butterworth, p.32.

⁹ Walter Isle, *Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels, 1896-1901* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.

Isle and Ousby. Yet it is actually a structure within which characters change places, even while that structure retains its shape and symmetry. The pairings in the interpretations above are not inaccurate, but they are presented as fixed, when in fact they are almost *too* fluid.

Both *Maisie* and *The Awkward Age* portray a situation in continual flux, where pairs of characters are converging, heading for a collision or a union that never actually happens. Instead, it is averted and the movement is repeated with a different pairing. *The Awkward Age* constitutes a series of conversations where two people try, and ultimately fail, to meet on common ground; Maisie moves between competing pairings represented by her parents' opposing households and whoever controls them. All adult parties view Maisie as the empty vessel which is at the centre of their game, and therefore as a space in which images of all of them can and should be held – in mathematical terms she is a metaphorical equals sign, the part which relates all other parts to one another. As the central consciousness of the text, this is also Maisie's function for the reader. However, as a *character* in the drama of the novel, she searches for meaning for herself, exploring her potential to enter into a pairing with another character, as all her parental figures seem to do so easily. Maisie's task, and the reader's, is to discover what she is best fitted for – singleness or convergence, standing alone or finding happiness in a certain partnership. The ending combines elements of both; Maisie is physically secured in Mrs Wix's company, but mentally independent of Mrs Wix and her confining 'moral sense'.

In *The Awkward Age*, Nanda too is finally placed within an unconventional pairing, about to retire with her elderly mentor Mr. Longdon to his country house. She speaks of herself as inherently single – 'I shall be one of the people

who don't. I shall be at the end one of the ones who haven't' (AA, p.232).

However, this manifesto of singleness is compromised in two ways: both by its own indication that Nanda is 'one of the ones', thus part of a community, even if it is a virtual community, linked by their isolation as individuals. Secondly, Nanda, like Maisie, does achieve some sort of pairing in her projected life of companionable singleness with Mr. Longdon; they are both affected, however, by the issues of control and choice involved in entering a pairing.

As adolescent girls, Maisie and Nanda exemplify the kind of individual who is most vulnerable to entering oppressive pairings, and who is least empowered to make their own choices and fulfil their own preferences. James is particularly concerned, in these middle-period novels, to examine socially derived instances of individuals whose circumstances render them vulnerable to isolation from the pairing mechanism that seems to dominate their community - sensitive young women with a penchant for art and aesthetic harmony, as represented by Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton*; children of acrimoniously separated parents like Maisie; and daughters who represent a sexual threat to their mothers' femininity, such as Nanda. In his preface to *The Awkward Age* James declares the contemporaneity of his subject:

Half the attraction was in the current actuality of the thing: repeatedly, right and left, as I have said, one had seen such a drama constituted [...] *The Awkward Age* is precisely a study of one of these curtailed or extended periods of tension and apprehension, an account of the manner in which the resented interference with ancient liberties came to be in a particular instance dealt with.¹⁰

While James insists, as a critic, that this kind of referentiality and historical specification is not a necessary part of any novel, it is certainly central to his intentions in the novels published during the last years of the nineteenth century. *The Spoils of Poynton*, the first in this group of novels, depicts the problems of

pairing in the context of a set of triangles, a structure James used to good effect in *The Bostonians* and *Portrait*. The interest, in the context of this chapter, produced by *Maisie* and *The Awkward Age* is in their expansion of the idea of narratives of pairing to include a bewildering number of multiple pairings; they inaugurate the shift in James's later work towards realising the attractions and fears generated by the idea of both endless multiples (as in the mathematical sublime) and multiple pairings.

Maisie and Nanda both struggle with the burden of two antagonistic roles. One is as a blank space onto which everyone else projects their vision of the social group and its operations. The other is as a potential adult, seeking meaning for themselves as members of that social group. During the course of their respective novels, the two are paired with different characters to whom they are, for various reasons, drawn – Maisie to Miss Overmore, Sir Claude, Mrs Wix and even her biological parents on occasion; Nanda to Tishy, Aggie, Mitchy, Van and finally Mr Longdon. Their difficulty in handling these relations often derives from the fact that they are not taken seriously as potential members of a pairing. Maisie is seen as just a child by her parental figures, in spite of the sexual overtones of her companionship with Sir Claude; even the bonding effect of their time in France cannot persuade him to see her as the female partner he wants. Mrs Brook and her set spend much of their time discussing the problems presented by Nanda's growth towards adulthood, but maintain their image of her, and thus their relations with her, on the basis of her being a child. Mrs Brook's dismissal of Nanda and Van as potential partners is characteristic:

'Nanda's in love with old Van?' – the degree to which she had never suspected was scarce to be expressed. 'Why, he's twice her age – he has seen her in a pinafore with a dirty face, and well slapped for it – he has never thought of her in the world.' (AA, p.88)

¹⁰Preface to *The Awkward Age*, in Blackmur, pp.102-103.

Mrs Brook's interests are served by perpetuating, in her circle of friends, this static image of Nanda as a child. Her statement that Van has 'never thought of her in the world' is more than a figure of speech; to be 'in the world' is to have a social identity – which Nanda is denied – and would also denote movement, as opposed to Nanda's experience of being moved around or kept still to suit others (as Isabel Archer is by Madame Merle and Osmond).

Maisie and Nanda attempt to project themselves as partners or opponents to other characters in these novels, but within their texts they are viewed largely as agents of convergence, acting only on behalf of others. Maisie's repeated, triumphant cry of 'I brought you together!' to Sir Claude and Mrs Beale is ironic not only because of the consequences of this union, but because of her delight in the ability which is actually her curse. In bringing people together, her role prevents her from partnering anyone herself. Yet as Maisie emerges as an independent being, she makes more and more desperate attempts to attach herself to a companion. These become focused on Sir Claude, who appears to promise Maisie a more adult relationship than she could expect from anyone else, but nevertheless evades taking her fully into his confidence:

If she was still a child she was yet of the sex that could help him out. He signified as much by a renewed invitation to an embrace. She freshly sprang to him and again they inaudibly conversed. 'Be nice to her, be nice to her', he at last distinctly articulated; 'be nice to her as you've not even been to *me!*' On which, without another look at Mrs Wix, he somehow got out of the room, leaving Maisie under the slight oppression of these words as well as of the idea that he had unmistakably once more dodged. (WMK, p.263-64)

Maisie's function in this and many other conversations is to 'help out', and James is more overt than usual here about the gender implications of this as a female burden. Without being literally sexually active, both Maisie and Nanda endure treatment redolent of sexual exploitation: the overtones of people

constantly hugging Maisie, or seating her on their lap as they light their cigars, construct her as someone who will bear and even welcome such adult, quasi-erotic relations without needing to be regarded as an adult. Nanda, too, receives the contempt due to a sexually promiscuous woman without participating in the practices available to the 'adults' around her; she is expected to understand and compensate for the activities and inconsistencies of others. Yet, as always, convergence is 'unmistakably dodged' – this apparent coming together of Sir Claude and Maisie brings her not greater understanding but greater oppression by the weight of what she is expected to understand. Similarly, in Nanda's final succession of interviews with all her potential partners for whose shortcomings she is expected to compensate, she must maintain the balance of everyone else's relations, thus being prevented from entering into a meaningful one herself. The final pairings offered to her and Maisie are done so on the assumption by Mrs Wix and Mr. Longdon that Nanda and Maisie will be static partners; Nanda will inhabit the image of her dead grandmother, Lady Julia, while Maisie will be forever a precocious child. These are the only terms on which pairing is available; they barter movement for partnership.

The 'middle period' novels, then, show the germination of James's interest in odd numbers. Narratives which seem to be about pairings and symmetrical line-ups actually contain an odd one out (most obviously Maisie in her novel, but potentially one of several protagonists in *The Awkward Age*) – which, by its very existence, makes critical pairings like Isle's false. The often-overlooked existence of the Principino in *The Golden Bowl* is an example of this in the later novels, which will be discussed shortly. Isle's mention of balances and symmetries is characteristic of many critical insights into the spatial patterning of the novel. He echoes the novel's system in imposing a pattern of

symmetry upon it. In fact, the novel's symmetry is inconsistent and misleading; not an ideal but a red herring for characters and readers alike.

James's next full-length publication after *The Awkward Age* was *The Sacred Fount*, a narrative which takes the absurdity of multiple pairings to its limit. However, the peak that it represents is something I intend to discuss later in the chapter in conjunction with *The Golden Bowl*, James's most successful attempt to counter the kind of fragmentation it describes. Having examined relatively early attempts to enter the world of multiple pairings, I will investigate James's development of this structure in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors*. These two novels are linked by their convoluted compositional history, which provided James with the opportunity to explore different implications of the problems of pairing, in both instances creating a number of pairings which are more strongly individuated from one another than is the case in *Maisie* or *The Awkward Age* (where his intention is to crowd the narrative with a bewildering number of homogeneous pairings).

As I discussed in the previous chapter, *The Ambassadors* is in part a conscious revisiting of the ground of James's early fictions, which enabled him, in rewriting old themes, to comfortably refine a new narrative approach. This may explain its interruption of *The Wings of the Dove*, which – as Leon Edel reports – appeared as a notebook entry in 1894 and was begun in 1900, but then dropped in favour of *The Ambassadors*. On completing *The Ambassadors*, though, James didn't pursue its publication but instead returned to work, with unusual fluency and confidence, on *Wings*.¹¹ The two novels seem to have functioned, to a certain extent, as divergent but complementary instances of the

¹¹Edel reports that: 'So confident was James of completing his novel at an early date that he sent off five hundred pages of the manuscript to Constable and was reading proof of the book even

themes preoccupying James at the time, themselves a kind of pairing. The intermittent process of their composition does not seem to have unduly affected their construction: James spoke with pride of both as fictions with which he was particularly pleased. Without wishing to oversimplify the novels, both are concerned with the opposition between outward and inward perception, with *The Ambassadors* narrating the process of a transition from a narrow view to a broader one, and *Wings* being focused, conversely, on the increasing intensity and inwardness of a set of relationships as they move from the public domain to an almost suffocatingly private one.

The Wings of the Dove

James begins the novel with an existing, and seemingly well-constructed pairing, that of Kate Croy and Merton Densher:

Of the strength of the tie that held them we shall sufficiently take the measure; but it was meanwhile almost obvious that if the great possibility had come up for them it had done so, to an exceptional degree, under the protection of the famous law of contraries. Any deep harmony that might eventually govern them would not be the result of their having much in common – having anything in fact but their affection; and would really find its explanation in some sense, on the part of each, of being poor when the other was rich. (*W*, vol.1, p.50)

It seems to be the case that, as with Roderick Hudson and Rowland Mallett, Kate and Densher's individual qualities are complementary, thus making a complete person from their Platonic halves. This echoing of James's early novel warns of a similar disillusionment, and so Milly enters and disrupts the relationship, a third party to separate the matched pair - though their match is only *potentially*

while writing its final two sections' (Edel, *The Master*, p.109) James's work certainly seems to have proceeded with remarkable ease after the pause to compose *The Ambassadors*.

perfect.¹² This is not unusual, given that a third party, or odd one out, is a frequent presence in Jamesian relationships: two people having an exclusive emotional partnership seems considerably more perverse. As with any pairing, then, Kate and Densher's 'deep harmony' is an illusion based on the exclusion of others, which becomes compromised and unworkable. Kate is able to adapt to and accommodate the idea of Milly as a third party on a temporal basis, but can't stomach it for all eternity, whereas in the end Densher has naturalised their three-party relationship and cannot exclude Milly. Milly herself shows that while being a third party may not lead to happiness, a desire for permanent pairing is an even more destructive one; those who have too fervent a desire to possess another person exclusively must die.

As we have seen, James's novels of the late 1890s not only contain a number of fluid pairings, but also show paired roles being reversed and adopted in turn by 'opposing' characters. For instance, both Nanda and Maisie take on responsible, parental roles towards their mothers, who act more like children; Maisie's step-parents become a couple themselves and replace her biological parents; the superficially innocent Little Aggie not only takes Nanda's place as Mitchy's wife, but becomes actually corrupted, while the virginal Nanda is labelled as damaged goods in Aggie's place. These reversals are to a large extent indictments of a social scene in which responsibilities and liabilities can be passed along so easily. The inability of the Beales and Faranges, the Brookenhams, or Vanderbank, to remain 'fixed' is something to be criticised, and is quite different from the helpless feeling of *being* 'fixed' which is experienced by characters like Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant.

¹²Eventually, Kate and Densher's 'deep harmony' will maintain their complementary status; one will be rich at the expense of the other's poverty. The 'famous law of contraries' does not

Excessive fluidity of this kind is damaging and detrimental to protagonists like Nanda and Maisie. Yet role reversals also hold the promise of empowerment, particularly appealing to protagonists at the mercy of authority figures such as parents, or in the case of Milly Theale, doctors:

It wouldn't have taken many minutes more, on the basis in question, almost to reverse their roles as patient and physician. What *was* he in fact but her patient, what was she but physician, from the moment she embraced once for all the necessity, adopted once for all the policy, of saving him alarms about her subtlety? (*W*, vol.2, p.125)

Milly's fantasy of herself as able to exchange positions with Sir Luke Strett, of being part of a reversible pairing, allows her to re-envision their partnership as symmetrical, one of equals. However, symmetry in James's novels is generally deceptive – either in being actually not symmetrical at all, or by offering false promises of fulfilment and completeness. In short, often it does not exist, and if it does will actually disappoint, but is portrayed as appealing nonetheless. While Milly finds comfort in exchanging the *role* of patient, she cannot exchange its material reality – her illness and its consequences. Michael Moon cites one of the novel's most disturbing aspects as being 'the way in which it equates Milly's deathbed ordeal with Kate's bedding with Densher, as if the two phenomena were analogous'.¹³ The imposition of symmetry equates Milly's role and circumstances with a number of others, glossing over the material conditions which she cannot exchange. Only in more superficial scenarios can she enjoy the duality practised by others, most skilfully by Kate in her transition between poor relation and favoured heiress. At the party she hosts in Venice, for instance, Milly is able to accomplish this exchange of roles, at the expense of the acquiescent Kate:

guarantee permanent stability; in Blakean terms, it promotes progression, but not necessarily togetherness.

As a striking young presence she [Kate] was practically superseded; of the mildness that Milly diffused she had assimilated her share; she might fairly have been dressed tonight in the little black frock, superficially indistinguishable, that Milly had laid aside. (*W*, vol.2, p.216)

Kate's compliance in this exchange prevents her from being disempowered at this point. Indeed, this pairing seems to have progressed beyond the difficulties experienced by Rowland and Roderick (or even Kate and Densher) in being a mingling, rather than just a meeting, of contraries; Milly and Kate are drawing on and profiting from one another's qualities.

This progression to a new level of exchanges and rotations produces, along with its sense of empowerment, a corresponding erosion of the subjectivity of these characters. In other novels, James's characters often employ a vocabulary of being 'placed' and 'fixed'; Isabel Archer and Charlotte Stant are prominent examples of those who fear and rebel against this fate. In *Wings*, references to characters being 'fixed' are comparatively rare; instead, they are constantly in danger of becoming palimpsests, repeatedly 'superseded' and overwritten by others. Since they progress through their relationships with others, that network defines them, and their identities as individuals become comparatively unimportant. After her conversation with Mrs Lowder about Densher, Milly sees Kate's physical presence as merely a representation of him and his imminent return: 'It was for several seconds again as if the *total* of her [Kate's] identity had been that of the person known to him' (*W*, vol.2, p.272). Often, in the novel, the total of each protagonist's identity is consumed by their relation with another of the protagonists; every person's presence implies a second presence, and they are perceived to be acting as one of a pair. The social scheme of *Wings* is enthusiastic about pairings, as long as they are not prioritised above the relation

¹³Michael Moon, 'Sexuality and Visual Terrorism in *The Wings of the Dove*', in *Criticism*, Fall 1986, 28:4, 427-443; p.433.

of the pair to the general social network – Kate and Densher’s feelings for one another threaten this system. Exchanging roles is, therefore, a healthy sign that one is not excessively and exclusively attached to any particular partner, but willing to regroup for the good of the whole – as would be represented by Kate’s graceful relinquishment of her poor suitor to the dying heiress who can make best use of him.

This pattern of paired exchanges is represented as a microcosm of relationships on a much larger scale. Kate’s remark to Milly that ‘the working and the worked were in London, as one might explain, the parties to every relation’, exemplifies James’s portrayal of a social sphere which obsessively imposes binary oppositions on itself and its structures.¹⁴ As is often the case in James’s fictions, *Wings* dramatises the consequences of treating potentially infinite and abstract qualities, such as love, as if they were finite and needed to be counted out. In this novel, though, James furthers this interest by constructing a deliberate, and deliberately grim, narrative of reciprocity. Conversely, finite and scientifically quantifiable things – such as the nature of Milly’s illness, or the exact amount of her vast fortune – are treated only in the abstract, as if precise figures or definitions belong to another realm entirely. This sphere of interchangeability, then, results in abstractions being treated like mathematical problems, and measurable details and quantities being regarded as indefinite and immeasurable – hence Sir Luke Strett’s unscientifically abstract remedy of a distracting flirtation for Milly’s illness.¹⁵ The novel depicts the inevitable breakdown of personal relations when governed by symmetry and mathematics.

¹⁴*Wings*, p.169.

¹⁵My reading of Sir Luke’s prescribed activity for Milly is that rather than being kind in a hopeless situation, he is actively negligent, following the distorted methods of judgement reproduced in the society around him in recommending an obscure and ill-defined solution for what, to him, should be a quantifiable problem. His advice has neither the sincerity of Strether’s injunction to ‘Live all you can!’ nor Sir Matthew Hope’s care for the Touchetts; moreover,

While an 'odd one out' is a regular presence in the relationship networks of James's fiction, the situation is most overt in *The Wings of the Dove*. In this novel, the self-contradictory, multiple exclusive relationship is a given; the uncertainty for readers and characters is about who, at any point, is the *odd* one, and alternatively, who is the *dominant* one of the group. The protagonists, after the fashion of the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, observe these shifts of power and attempt to discern some logical, geometrical law that explains these movements, as Milly does after her discussion with Mrs Lowder about Kate and Densher:

There was a possible account of their relations in which the quantity her new friend had told her might have figured as small, as smallest, beside the quantity she hadn't. [...] This abrupt extrusion of Mr. Densher altered all proportions, had an effect on all values. (*W*, vol.1, p.187-88)

This is comparable to Maisie's grammatical calculation that 'as she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? [...] she soon should have learnt All.' (*WMK*, p.213) Again, relations are viewed as finite and regulated; the potentially vast size of Kate and Densher's relationship makes Densher himself seem larger and Milly, and her role in the relation, seem smaller. James's expansion of a pair into a threesome disrupts the symmetrical ideal of the pairing, so that the narrative focuses on a now *necessarily* unequal balance of power.

In such a three-way network, the 'odd' one can be either dominant over the other pair, or can be the forlorn one, marginalised by the pair. While this maintains a role for all three, their perception of the changing advantages and disadvantages of each role come under scrutiny – as when, for example, Densher observes the silent interaction between Kate and Mrs Lowder:

doctors are in general suspect authority figures in James's work, as exemplified by Austin Sloper in *Washington Square*.

It was as if the drama – it thus came to him, for the fact of a drama there was no blinking – was between *them*, them quite preponderantly; with Merton Densher relegated to mere spectatorship, a paying place in front, and one of the most expensive. (*W*, vol.2, p.35)

Densher's jealousy obscures the point that the drama is indeed between *them* at this moment, without excluding him from a place in its overall scheme (especially since he constitutes the major bone of contention between Kate and her aunt). What he resents is this moment, however temporary, of exclusion, which figures him as currently the 'odd one out' – in contrast to his central place in the affections of two women with regard to his relations with Kate and Milly. No-one wants to be the 'odd' one; Densher often finds it more comfortable to be neither dominant nor marginalised, but the passive centre of these workings and thus the major recipient of their benefits. Kate and Milly exchange the odd and dominant roles frequently, and thus carry more of the burden of exchange. This regular movement furthers the illusion that the whole situation, and the relations of the group, are themselves regular; that, in total, the sum adds up correctly and that none of them are truly being short-changed. On these terms, Densher persuades himself of the expediency of their plan as the best way for all parties to achieve completeness:

The parts, as he now saw, under her [Kate's] hand, did fall more or less together, and it wasn't even as if she had spent the interval in twisting and fitting them. (*W*, vol.2, p.16)

However, as is often the case, the denial that things have been 'twisted and fitted together' only serves to emphasise that some careful and subtle arranging has certainly played a part, and that this apparent balance is less than balanced.

The short-term exchange of roles conceals the longer-term identification of Milly as the marginalised one, since her illness will eventually remove her from

the exchange. Kate and Densher attempt to conceal this, and to avoid acknowledging that the completeness of the relation they are constructing can only be temporary, by making a show of shifting dominance away from themselves and onto Milly:

He then fairly perceived that – even putting their purity of motive at its highest – it was neither Kate nor he who made his strange relation to Milly, who made her own, so far as it might be innocent; it was neither of them who practically purged it – if practically purged it was. Milly herself did everything. (*W*, vol.2, p.239)

The kind of fluid exchange perfected by the social butterflies of *Maisie* and *The Awkward Age*, and taken to the extreme in the partner-sharing of *Wings*, is based on a projection of indefinite, never-ending rotations among the group, which will not be impeded by ‘fixing’ events, such as the marriage (to an outsider) or death of a participant. Introduce one of these elements, and the game ends. Kate and Densher exalt Milly’s dominance, her power to ‘do everything’, because it perpetuates the illusion of their exchanges continuing indefinitely. To acknowledge otherwise would be to admit that their future completeness - projected to come from their successful and exclusive pairing – will only be achieved outside their society’s preferred mode of social operations, and through the incompleteness of Milly as an individual.

A larger sense of relations as governed by a kind of social geometry, beyond the sometimes stifling interchanges between its protagonists, is an important presence in *Wings*. The dictates of the social body do not pass without comment or dissent made directly by characters in the novel, as Kate’s comment about ‘the working and the worked in London’ shows. However, these generally serve to reinforce the point that the novel’s discourse of empowerment is most fluently used by those who overcome their apparent disadvantages by utilising mere representations of empowerment, as opposed to the actuality of being able

to move and act independently. In short, those who criticise the operations of the network are also those who quietly gain advantages from its continuation – Kate herself, as well as Lord Mark, certainly does. Furthermore, in *Wings* James incorporates a further level of perspective into his portrayal of hierarchical groups, in which an uber-group, the majority who constitute society, are present in an abstract but nevertheless menacing form as a ‘mass’ which threatens to supersede, and thus disarrange, the power structures of carefully ordered social ‘sets’ like that of Mrs Lowder. An example of how the novel articulates this unease can be found in comments made by Lord Mark to Milly:

There was no such thing to-day in London as saying where anyone was. Every one was everywhere – nobody was anywhere. He should be put to it – yes, frankly – to give a name of any sort or kind to their hostess’s ‘set’. Was it a set at all, or wasn’t it, and were there not really no such things as sets in the place any more? – was there anything but the groping and pawing, that of the vague billows of some great greasy sea in mid-Channel, of masses of bewildered people trying to ‘get’ they didn’t know what or where? (*W*, vol.1, p.150)

This speech conveys a whole range of relational tensions, from micro- to macro-level. Firstly, their own ‘set’, as a relatively small collection of individuals, is portrayed as difficult to place and define, characterised (if at all precisely) by this locational instability – ‘everyone was everywhere – nobody was anywhere’ and in being unclassifiable – Mark cannot ‘give [it] a name of any sort or kind’. The idea of the ‘unnamable’ clearly has an affinity with the effect of the sublime, and Lord Mark’s language also links it with the problems of mathematical cognition discussed by Butterworth, and thus the mathematical sublime. Not only their ‘set’, but all the sets that make up London, and society at large, are dissolving into a state of being ominously uncountable.

Asa Briggs, examining the use of the terms 'mass' and 'masses' in nineteenth-century culture, comments on the metaphorical resonance of the terms:

The words 'mass' and 'masses' were being treated as more than numerical aggregates. Like the word 'multitude' which preceded them, they already had connotations of value. Just as the 'multitude' could be conceived of either as a 'many-headed monster' or as a source of popular strength, so the terms 'mass' and 'masses' could carry with them a sense either of fear (and mystery) or of power.¹⁶

These connotations, and their effects, are exemplified by Lord Mark's speech and its simultaneous anxiety about numbers, but also about a quality which is beyond counting and arithmetical classification – more than the sum of its parts. It must be acknowledged, too, that while this anxiety pervaded the novel, presenting it as Lord Mark's viewpoint roots it to a certain extent in issues of class-related conflict and prejudice; Briggs points out that 'a sense of identification of the 'mass' or 'masses' with the working class had never been entirely absent'.¹⁷ The sublime effect of the growing influence of the masses is represented as a disruption to the familiar procedures of calculation used by the likes of Lord Mark. The novel therefore creates, as an effective backdrop to the tightly-focused emotional transactions taking place within its small group of protagonists, a sense of the whole structure of counting, on which social movement has been based, as crumbling under larger, yet incalculable, pressures – as well as being dismantled from within, as it were, by the presence of the same sublime effect in the relations between Milly, Kate and Densher.

Without representing any credible authority, moral or otherwise, Lord Mark is nevertheless used as the mouthpiece for many statements about the

¹⁶Asa Briggs, 'The Language of 'Mass' and Masses' in Nineteenth-Century England', in *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville*, ed. David E. Martin and David Rubinstein (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p.66; hereafter referred to as Briggs.

¹⁷Briggs, p.73.

nature of the society portrayed in *Wings*, and though this role is linked to his 'lordly', privileged social status, it is not unique to that status.¹⁸ The apparent difficulty of 'saying where anyone was', that Lord Mark describes, conveys the tension between an obsessive need to place and fix people according to the social system, and a dependence on limited subversion, carried out by performing 'fixed' roles but exchanging and rotating them among players. Unpleasant images of 'groping and pawing' and a 'great greasy sea' may be intended to convey Lord Mark's self-righteous distaste, but their reliability is undermined when one considers that, as Edith Wharton's heroine Lily Bart says to Selden, her weak-willed lover in *The House of Mirth*, these people spend a great deal of time immersed in the element they profess to dislike.¹⁹

Lord Mark not only recognises but is also indebted to the power of the social system *en masse*, a factor which emerges in the opening sentence of his entreaty to Milly in Venice:

'I speak as one of the lot. You weren't born simply to torment us – you were born to make us happy. Therefore you must listen to us'.
 [...] 'No, I mustn't listen to you – that's just what I mustn't do. The reason is, please, that it simply kills me. I must be as attached to you as you will, since you give that lovely account of yourselves. I give you in return the fullest possible belief of what it would be' – And she pulled up a little. 'I give and give and give – there you are; stick to me as close as you like and see if I don't. Only I can't listen or receive or accept - I can't *agree*. I can't make a bargain'. [...]
 'You want somebody of your own'. He came back, whether in good faith or in bad, to that; and it made her repeat her headshake. 'You want somebody, you want somebody.'
 She was to wonder afterwards if she hadn't been at this juncture on the point of saying something emphatic and vulgar - 'Well I don't at all events want *you!*' (W, vol.2, p.160-61)

¹⁸Yeazell remarks that 'One sometimes feels that Lord Mark in *The Wings of the Dove* exists less as a character in his own right than as the vehicle by which the lovers' clandestine plan may similarly reveal itself' (p.32). An extension of this role as a mere vehicle for plot development is his role in articulating statements such as the one quoted about the society which forms the novel's backdrop, which illuminate Kate, Densher and Milly's actions, but which they themselves are too self-absorbed to observe directly.

¹⁹Edith Wharton, *the House of Mirth*, 1905 (London: Penguin, 1993), p.70.

Mark speaks both as one of 'the lot' (which in terms of his privileged lifestyle seems fantastic) and as one who observes the characteristics of 'the lot'. His function seems to be to articulate the viewpoint of one who is both representative (at least of their social group, in terms of his curiosity about Milly) but also distinguished from the mass, and not immersed in it or its operations. His is a rather confused role, requiring him to understand the nature of pairing around him but apparently be immune to it; though he represents a potential partner for both Milly and Kate, he is not sufficiently sexualised, or rounded as an individual, to make a convincing lover. Meanwhile, Milly is repulsed by this image of herself as a goddess for the masses; she is more aware than Nanda and Maisie that to relate to a large group tends to supersede any potential for a lasting, exclusive pairing that is her goal and her chance of life. To sacrifice herself to the needs of a group, as Nanda and Maisie do, will 'absolutely kill her'. Milly is not unwilling to relate to the mass around her, to the group at large that she has entered in London society, but she does not want that to be *the* meaningful relation for her, in the way that Lord Mark implies.²⁰ To Milly, his speech articulates the imperative of multiple pairings and exchanges that is the given mode of interaction in the world of this novel. It is so well established that Lord Mark's charge that she wants somebody for herself can be presented as something shameful which Milly must deny. Expressing antipathy to a relation, in a broad sense, with any particular person, or indeed 'set', would be unusual (hence Milly's repression of the 'vulgar' antipathy to Mark in this instance). Conversely, however, desire for a singular person, on terms exclusive to those

²⁰Milly's willingness to embrace the mass of life around her is seen in her walk through London after leaving Sir Luke Strett's practice. Nevertheless, she does not want to be permanently immersed in it; that resembles the death that awaits her. The walk provides a refreshing 'solidity of specification', in Jamesian terms, which contrasts with the sinister vagueness of Sir Luke's advice.

two people, is generally regarded as somehow unwholesome – they are always required to maintain relations that balance their pairing. This is demonstrated early in the novel by Kate and Densher's remedy for the perverseness of their unsanctioned love, which is to keep it ostensibly in the public domain, meeting openly in the park and under Mrs Lowder's surveillance at Lancaster Gate. To 'want somebody' exclusively is a weakness, though surmountable; to desire an exclusive relation which is also private, remote from the approval, or otherwise, of 'the lot', is a fatal weakness, which Kate Croy manages to avoid in a way that Milly cannot.

The tension, then, between intense and exclusive pairings and mutable, inclusive ones proves disastrous not only to Milly Theale but to Kate and Densher, who fail to conduct their relation successfully on both lines at once. Moreover, the nature of group dynamics in a larger sense is critically scrutinised. Densher finds as the narrative progresses that it can be problematic to conduct even supposedly superficial relations in an ordered, mathematical way:

They [Densher and Susan] were not, as a pair, as a 'team', really united; there were too many persons, at least three, and too many things, between them; but meanwhile something was preparing that would draw them closer. (*W*, vol.2, p.192)

Amongst the social clutter that complicates the relation is this 'something', or the sublime. Though there may be no geometrical way to fit these parts together, something beyond numerical relations will affect their movements, and also the stable pattern that has apparently governed those movements. The aspirations of individuals towards symmetry are broken down by the continual reappearance of an 'odd' one, an 'awkward individual' who escapes convenient pairing, and are broken down, too, by the power of the mathematical sublime to transform James's complex, refined equations into a terror of the infinite, the massive,

irreducible figure, the unsolvable sum, rather like the repulsive masses of actual people who make up London. Milly fears being reduced to counting away her days of life, or being reduced to another number, in being merely the sum of the money she has in the bank (a fate from which the burning of her final letter to Densher at least rescues her); a series of numbers, without being part of a sum. Similarly, the thought that individuals like Kate, Milly and Densher may merely be part of this fearsome mass, and be overcome by it (or certainly no more individual than any one part of it) is a threatening shadow in the background of all their delicately-balanced exchanges, and indeed it eventually does overcome that balance. Briggs's final remarks on the terminology of 'mass' and 'masses' are, again, relevant to *Wings*:

'Thinking of the parts', as Hamilton recognised, involves thinking about relations. So does all social history. Use of the word 'class' necessarily involves an understanding of critical social relationships: use of the word 'mass' or 'masses' frequently involves a failure to understand and communicate. Real people are turned into abstractions.²¹

These processes of thinking about relations, about groups, and about 'masses', and the failures that result, as Briggs says, 'turning real people into abstractions', are central to *The Wings of the Dove*. These themes persist throughout James's late fiction, yet in this novel the shadowy presence of both the 'mass' and the sublime are distinctive.

The Ambassadors

The Ambassadors is in some ways a throwback, anomalous among the later works. Its large-scale setting (in Europe, moving from Liverpool to Paris, with the spectre of Woollett in the background) and its examination of the effect of

²¹Briggs, p.76.

European culture and of cultural conflict, removes it from the claustrophobia needed to construct a sphere where feelings are squashed to fit mathematical principles – the claustrophobia which effectively pervades the later novels, with their geographically narrower locations and narratives.²² Instead, Lambert Strether is faced with what his predecessor, Christopher Newman, thought of as ‘a new kind of arithmetic’:

It was interesting to him to feel that he was in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations, and that evidently here were a happy pair who didn't think of things at all as he and Waymarsh thought. Nothing was less to have been calculated in the business than that it should now be for him as if he and Waymarsh were comparatively quite at one. (*Amb*, vil.1, p.114)

Strether conceptualises his new mode of experience in terms of geometric proportions which also echo the language of commerce, with ‘measures’ and ‘scales’, and this is likely to be read as signifying the extent to which this commercial, capitalist mode of perception is naturalised in even liberal-minded Americans. However, since these metaphors are employed to describe the developing perception of most late Jamesian protagonists, their use indicates a tendency that appears to be cross-cultural, while it may well be exacerbated by cultural disorientation. Strether shares the experience of Milly Theale, Kate Croy, Maggie Verver, Prince Amerigo and the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* (individuals with a range of backgrounds and nationalities) in finding both that his calculations do not add up and, furthermore, that there are circumstances in which calculation breaks down altogether. However, the reappearance of the pairing motif (Little Bilham and Miss Barrace form ‘the happy pair’) here makes Strether uneasy, in that the disparity between him and Waymarsh does not prevent them from being, in the larger context of his Parisian experience, paired.

²²American City, in *The Golden Bowl*, does not possess the brooding presence of Woollett in this respect, its inhabitants being characterised as cheerfully uncultured rather than actively

The need to simplify, to group together, is not merely a crudity practised by unsophisticated Americans; it seems to be a cognitive, basic impulse. Even at this early point in the novel, Strether's innate abilities may be more impressive than he thinks, since he has now already become aware of the essential falseness of grouping by its ability to homogenise himself and Waymarsh, to serve the aim of balancing pairs neatly against one another. Already the attractions of symmetry are undermined; the ending of the sentence with 'at one' concludes with an idea of unity which contains a reassertion of individuation, since Strether is certainly more disposed to think of himself as 'one' (and potentially an 'odd' one) than as 'at one' with his compatriot.

What Strether discovers – and states more overtly than is the case in *Wings* – is that symmetry becomes virtually impossible when something odd, misshapen, and asymmetrical forms the centre of the narrative pattern. In *Wings*, the central fact of Milly's terminal illness is veiled and mysterious, a sublime and unapproachable centre whose shape, because of this, cannot be determined as asymmetrical until its practical consequences can no longer be hidden – i.e., when Milly is on the brink of death and then actually dies. The protagonists, therefore, proceed through the narrative working on the assumption that this central principle *may* be symmetrical – that they can, in principle, arrange themselves symmetrically in relation to it. In contrast, the protagonists of *The Ambassadors* are very conscious of the presence of a central focus which is starkly asymmetrical:

The central fact of the place was neither more nor less, when analysed – and a pressure superficial sufficed – than the fundamental impropriety of Chad's situation, round about which they thus seemed cynically clustered. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.116)

While the exact nature of Chad and Marie de Vionnet's attachment may be unclear to Strether, the fact of its unseemliness in terms of an *expected* pattern of movement (particularly Chad's movements as transgressions from the *bildungsroman* pattern discussed in my previous chapter) is not. Their 'clustering' around it, too, seems to define that surrounding arrangement itself as being, like its central point, irregular. Not only the centre, but also its periphery, must be rearranged to fit together; hence Strether's willingness to become embroiled in this network personally. If the centre can be reshaped into something more aesthetically and geometrically pleasing, though, then the 'clustering' will in turn become more regular and symmetrical. This substantiates Strether's distress at the idea that Chad is simply 'tiring' of Madame de Vionnet, as something which goes beyond his own emotional attachment to her; better that no relationship exists at all than one which will become more and more asymmetrical in its one-sidedness. While the end result of this conforms to the will of the majority (as led by Mrs Newsome), the process valorises the kind of movement and exchange within pairings which presents a danger in *Wings*, but which is nevertheless preferable to the alternative of being fixed. For himself, Strether finally chooses 'oddness' over the symmetry of a permanent pairing – and, to some extent, this is an inevitable consequence of battling for so long against the attempts of the Woollett contingent to impose symmetry.

In the previous chapter I discussed *The Ambassadors* as an epilogue to James's early fictional subversions of the *bildungsroman*. One of the best ways to find points both of similarity and of difference between James's early and late novels is to compare the experiences of Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether, both Janus-like creations looking forward and backward between a number of polarities. As protagonists, moreover, they have a tendency to polarise and to

regard things simplistically; because this is more overt than in many other Jamesian protagonists, their learned awareness of the grey areas between and in which they will come to reside is also given more pronounced treatment. Shortly after meeting Chad, Strether is overcome by the difficulty of trying to communicate to Mrs. Newsome the complex impression he has received of Chad and Paris, musing on the problem in a style reminiscent of the young Isabel:

Whether or no he had a grand idea of the lucid, he held that nothing ever was in fact – for any one else – explained. One went through the vain motions, but it was mostly a waste of life. A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, didn't care if they didn't. From the moment they cared if they didn't it was living by the sweat of one's brow. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.141)

This presentation of Strether's developing consciousness demonstrates the link between James's pioneering portrait of Isabel Archer and his treatment of the exploring protagonist in his final group of completed novels. Strether's thought that 'nothing ever was in fact – for any one else – explained' is strongly reminiscent of James's own statement in his notebooks, about *Portrait*, that 'the whole of anything is never told' (*Notebooks*, p.15). Since at this point Strether is under pressure to compose a telegram which will enlighten Woollett about Chad's spiritual wellbeing, he is inclined to dismiss any idea of mediating between extremes, of attempting the impossibility of explanation. Instead, he mentally outlines a philosophy to which not only his own behaviour, but that of almost any Jamesian character, is utterly contradictory. A situation where people 'either perfectly understood, or, better still, didn't care if they didn't' is extremely rare (if not non-existent) in James's fiction; the natural order of things, in fact, is for characters to be sweating, in Strether's parlance, over exactly the question of understanding the nature of their own and other people's personal relations. To make things even more difficult, Strether's thoughts here raise

questions about one of the fundamental elements of the problem – on which Strether, again in the manner of Isabel Archer, makes a simplistic assertion – that is: what, in the first place, constitutes a ‘personal relation’?

What, then, is a relation? Something, it seems, whose use is taken for granted, but whose properties are intangible and problematic. Butterworth says of understanding numbers: ‘Numbers are not properties of objects [...] To understand numbers – to understand, for example, the difference between five and four – is to understand something very abstract indeed’.²³ Yet, as he goes on to argue, while understanding numbers is difficult: ‘everyone can count and tally up small collections of objects, and can carry out simple arithmetical operations, whether they are Cambridge graduates or tribesmen in the remote fastnesses of the New Guinea highlands. Even cultures which have no words for numbers still count, calculate and trade’.²⁴ As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, a basic and innate level of mathematical ability is, according to Butterworth, based on a simple counting system using single items, pairs, and the idea of ‘many’ or a ‘mass’ to signify sums larger than a number of pairs. Beyond this ‘two-counting’ are more developed systems that allow more complex calculations.

The Ambassadors narrates Strether’s attempts to go beyond pairing into a context of larger numbers which, in contrast to the figuring of the masses in *Wings*, are more a fascination than a fear. At the same time, however, this presents him with cognitive and cultural difficulties – as Butterworth shows, while counting is innate, moving from a simple pairing system to more sophisticated Western mathematics requires a cultural rather than a cognitive education, though it tends to be thought of as the other way around. One of the many example of this cultural difference in calculation methods can be found in

²³Butterworth, p.4.

an early conversation between Strether and Maria Gostrey, who is attempting to become familiar with the main figures in Strether's Woollett life:

'Who in the world's Mrs. Jim?'

'Chad's sister – who was Sarah Newsome. She's married – didn't I mention it? to Jim Pocock'.

'Ah yes', she tacitly replied, but he had mentioned things - ! Then, however, with all the sound it could have, 'Who in the world's Jim Pocock?'

'Why, Sally's husband. That's the only way we distinguish people at Woollett', he good-humouredly explained'. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.71-72)

The reader is directed here to sympathise with Maria's evident frustration that Strether cannot construct for her an idea of these people as individuals. However, the Woollett way of distinguishing people is not so unusual a method of calculation. As Butterworth argues, the usual way to identity a number is in relation to other numbers; defining it and its properties out of context is a considerable challenge. Woollett's failures here are more universal failures than shortcomings specific to Massachusetts. Strether's joke is that a relation to the Newsomes is the best way to distinguish oneself, but presents the question of how an individual is to be defined if not in terms of his relations (which is consonant with the *bildungsroman* element of the novel previously discussed). Like *Wings*, the social impulse in the world of *The Ambassadors* is to define and place people in terms of pairings, but cultural displacement provides them with the opportunity to go beyond that.

Butterworth's hypothesis that latent mathematical ability is present in everyone is illustrated by the capacity of 'basic' mathematicians to develop very quickly. He states: 'What is really striking about all these people is how quickly they become numerate and skilled in a full Western system of number words, Arabic numerals, counting, and calculation. In PNG [Papua New Guinea], within

²⁴Butterworth, p.5.

a single generation a stone-age culture has produced enough numerate graduates to run a modern society'.²⁵ This is very much the kind of transition being made by Strether, whose rapid development is signified by his consideration of the conceptual nature of relations and transactions. The sums he is attempting in Paris leave him struggling with vast abstract qualities, trying to determine what among the mass forms a relation, since the counting system of Woollett dictates that such things as relations exist and, furthermore, that they are supposed to be regular, even and symmetrical.

Strether's learning curve takes him from basic counting, to more sophisticated 'Western' (in his case European) mathematics – but then, beyond even that, to the limits of what can be counted before reaching a state where 'no slate should hold the figures', the point of being overwhelmed by the mathematical sublime. His perceptions of Marie de Vionnet, in particular, exemplify his growing fascination for the sublime, as something that escapes easy calculation:

He couldn't help it; it wasn't his fault; he had done nothing; but by a turn of the hand she had somehow made their encounter a relation. And the relation profited by a mass of things that were strictly not in it or of it; by the very air in which they sat, by the high cold delicate room, by the world outside and the little splash in the court, by the first Empire and the relics in the stiff cabinets, by matters as far off as those and by others as near as the unbroken clasp of her hands in her lap and the look her expression had of being most natural when her eyes were most fixed. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.249)

It is perhaps understandable that in this confrontation with the sublime, Strether's impulse is to construct himself as a passive recipient; nevertheless, it indicates the remaining shortcomings in his perception of relations. Strether's willingness to impute the act of making a relation to Marie is belied by the conclusion, here, that her expression was 'most natural when her eyes were fixed'. The

²⁵Butterworth, p.62.

application of the term 'fixed' to Marie links her with the other women in James's late novels, being, like Charlotte Stant or Nanda Brookenham, at the mercy of relations that are made for her to a much greater extent than she is empowered to make relations. Moreover, Strether naturalises this condition as being the essence of Madame de Vionnet's charm, being able to gloss over the sexual politics and gendered implications of power from his relatively secure position.

Strether's estimation of Madame de Vionnet here is comparable to Densher's and Kate's construction of Milly Theale as a powerful, dominating figure, in contriving to present an acceptably balanced set of relations, rather than the imbalance which truly exists. Chad projects a similar rebalancing of relations in which he constructs himself as subordinate, but for the benefit of Strether:

Twice during dinner he had met Chad's eyes in a longish look [...] 'You see how I'm fixed' was what they appeared to convey, yet how he was fixed was exactly what Strether didn't see. However, perhaps he should see now. (*Amb*, vol.1, p.271)

Chad's projected image of himself as the 'fixed' party in his relations, either with Madame de Vionnet or his mother, has little credibility, but demonstrates his adeptness at using the vocabulary of this system of movement and 'fixing'; the promising future he imagines for himself in advertising is all too plausible. Strether eventually sees that Chad isn't fixed at all – in fact, enjoys greater freedom of movement than anyone else, and escapes efforts to influence that movement. Strether's dual task lies in beginning to comprehend a new system and arrangement, while also regulating that arrangement by imposing approved movements on its central component, Chad. This aspect of his experience seems so Herculean that Strether adopts the strategy for confronting the sublime and incalculable described by Hertz, refining the multiple problems facing him into

this single blockage, as he describes it to Little Bilham: 'The only thing I've any business to like is to feel that I'm moving him' (*Amb*, vol.1, p.176). The full extent of Chad's actual movements are encapsulated in the heightened mobility of his partnership with Madame de Vionnet, moving not only out of Paris but freely through the countryside which Strether himself envisions as a static landscape portrait - who could possibly be less 'fixed' than someone steering their own boat down a river? - which, unsurprisingly, impacts on Strether in the form of a sublime, overwhelming disruption to his existing calculations.

However, Strether's perception of Marie de Vionnet reveals his developing strengths as well as his persistent limitations. Just as there was an 'air' of *bildungsroman* surrounding Strether at certain points of the novel, so there is, at others, an atmosphere pervaded by the sublime. In the passage quoted which describes his apprehension of Madame de Vionnet and the 'mass of things' which enhance that relation, notions of order, systems, and even collections of disparate things are dissolved into a single cumulative experience. Strether's sense of relations expands into a network connected 'by the world outside and the little plash in the court, by the first Empire and the relics in the stiff cabinets, by matters as far off as those and by others as near as the unbroken clasp of her hands in her lap'. This deconstruction of spatial, chronological and cognitive structures is something for which Strether tries to account in terms of counting (with a characteristically Jamesian use of 'profit' to describe such an experience), while being simultaneously excited by the fact that it exceeds apprehension on such terms. While an increasingly complex understanding of the mathematics of relations has got Strether to this point, it is at this point that the limits of its usefulness begin to become apparent, and the idea that he might be, like Kant's tourist in St. Mark's basilica, 'reduced to nothing but counting' supersedes his

original brief to rearrange Chad's relations into a symmetrical pattern. Strether's ideal of the 'sum', for which 'no slate would hold the figures', shows him to be particularly susceptible to imbibing, from the whole of something, considerably more than the sum of its parts. This is something of an equivocal gift of perception, since it extends beyond and irrevocably disrupts even the greater mathematical powers he has learned to exercise. He leaves Europe with the memory of a sublime experience - which is, at least, more than Milly Theale will retain after the 'folding of her wonderful wings' - but in doing so, he chooses an alternative to permanently accepting the sublime, in the way that (as I shall discuss shortly) Maggie Verver consents to do.

In depicting the transition from one system of cognition to another, *The Ambassadors* represents continuously pioneering and fluid approaches to group relations, with Strether adopting a new system only to find that it, too, necessitates adaptation. The idea of 'balance' that seems dominant in this novel, as in other late Jamesian fictions, is itself only part of a system in which sublimity and symmetry are balanced against one another. Simplistically, this opposes the rigidity of Woollett to the sensuousness of Paris - but they represent not only alternative lifestyle choices, but also cognitive processes. Chad manages to switch all too fluently from one to the other; Strether tries to master both, but eventually decides that such duality is not for him, and that the kind of partnerships open to him within this system would damage his integrity as an individual - although, ironically, his return to America itself suppresses the individuality only created through his time in Europe.

While Strether's journey has involved a steep learning curve, it has also entailed a significant element of self-deception in suppressing his awareness of his own cognitive processes. His arrival in Europe and acquaintance with Maria

Gostrey presents him with the opportunity to use the aptitude for counting that, according to Butterworth, has always been latent in him. Having developed that ability, he denies the extent of his knowledge because the workings of the sublime, which once fascinated him, are now something to be feared for their disruptive power; therefore, self-censure about his new knowledge of relations is once again required:

He had hitherto observed in that particular [discussing Mrs Newsome with Maria] a discretion and a law; considerations that at present broke down quite as if relations had altered. They hadn't *really* altered, he said to himself, so much as that came to; for if what had occurred was of course that Mrs. Newsome had ceased to trust him, there was nothing on the other hand to prove that he shouldn't win back her confidence. [...] His relation with Maria as well was, strangely enough, no longer quite the same [...] her pail was scarce touched now, and other fountains had flowed for him; she fell into her place as but one of his tributaries, and there was a strange sweetness – a melancholy mildness that touched him – in her acceptance of the altered order. (*Amb*, vol.2, p.47-48)

Strether's assumption here is reminiscent of Christopher Newman's assertion in *The American* that he cannot really lose his fortune, since if he did, he would make just as much again. Both men assume that relations have only altered if they have altered irrevocably and permanently. This attitude might seem progressive in its apparent acceptance of flux as inevitable, but it involves a more complicated denial of flux in terms of denying its importance - dismissing the movements initiated by others as ephemeral, something that will be overcome by the stable, fixed logic of the way these protagonists perceive things. It is significant that in both instances a male protagonist – Newman or Strether – dismisses as peripheral a change in relations attributed to female characters – Mrs Newsome, Maria, Claire de Cintré and her mother. While they may have assimilated, to a certain extent, the movements to which Europe has introduced them, they are still uneasy about issues of exactly who has power to initiate and influence movement.

In my previous chapter I observed the presence of self-confidence, without arrogance or narcissism, that characterises Newman; this is again paralleled by Strether's view of the relational network of which his friendship with Maria is a part. Their relation, once a potential pairing, has become part of a larger group dynamic: Maria 'fell into her place as but one of his tributaries' giving way to Madame de Vionnet, who is now Strether's projected partner. Since their pairing would never be exclusive – Strether is aware that he would merely be a substitute for Chad – this constitutes a rejection of the notion of exclusive pairing in favour of the larger relation enacted by the group, a mentality to which even Sarah Pocock and Waymarsh are susceptible. Significantly, while the more worldly-wise Maria 'accepted the altered order', Strether (whose consciousness is the channel for this observation) exercises a kind of doublethink in denying to himself that there has been, in any real sense, a change of order, preferring to believe in the permanence of the system he has left behind, the 'law' he is used to observing with regard to Mrs Newsome. While he may evade and defy its edicts, as an individual, his time in Paris has merely convinced him of the superiority of a different group – extending his innate methods of counting and grouping into something more culturally sophisticated. Acceptance of the group as primary is a given; the sublime alternative for Strether promises, as Neil Hertz says, 'sheer cognitive exhaustion'.

The Ambassadors, like James's other late novels, presents the ideal of a symmetrical arrangement, and portrays the potential of its opposite and alternative, the sublime, to disarrange it. It differs from *Wings* and *The Golden Bowl*, however, in presenting the idea of a group, or even of oddness contained within a group, as being in opposition to the idea of partnerships. Strether's articulated wish 'not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself', is,

paradoxically, his reaffirmation of himself as an individual, since all along his identity is validated by membership of a group, whichever group it is, rather than a partnership such as either Marie de Vionnet or Maria Gostrey might offer (*Amb*, vol.2, p.326). Although Maria seems to lose by this logic, she is similarly indoctrinated in the primacy of the group, as is demonstrated by her response to Strether's plans for the integration of Marie de Vionnet with the POCOcks:

'What I should have liked to manage would have been *her* going'.

'To Switzerland with the party?'

'For Jim – and for symmetry. If it had been workable moreover for a fortnight she'd have gone. She's ready' – he followed up his renewed vision of her – 'for anything.'

Miss Gostrey went with him a minute. 'She's too perfect!' (*Amb*, vol.2, p.228)

Maria's concession to the brilliance of Marie de Vionnet is a recognition of the imperative of symmetry, as raised by Strether, and also of the fact that Marie de Vionnet, like herself, is aware of the true relation between pairing and the group as a whole. The latter represents order, symmetry, the regulation of the individual, and movement *en masse*, as a group; the former represents disorder, the indulgence of individuals, and a movement away from the group – all the aspects of Chad and Marie's trip down the river that upset Strether most. In the typical Jamesian world, emotions, fulfilment and enjoyment are finite qualities; one person's gain of them is another's loss, and thus pairings drain resources from the rest of the group and the individuals within it. Both women succumb to this logic, duly subordinating themselves to the primacy of the group, even in the matter of conversation with Strether, whose awareness of this principle is still less developed than theirs.

The Ambassadors contains many potential and interchangeable pairs – Strether and Waymarsh, Mamie and Jeanne, Marie de Vionnet and Maria. Yet criticism of the novel does not identify this capacity as something from which

fixed, 'true' pairings can be selected, as happens with *The Awkward Age*. Why, then, does *The Ambassadors* escape the imposition of the 'right' pairs on its deliberately fluid groupings? Its pairs seem less symmetrical from the start, and consciously non-homogenous; some pairings are always given priority over others – Chad and Strether, for instance – while pairings such as Mamie Pocock's and Jeanne de Vionnet's involve second-string characters, and are clearly secondary in the structure of the novel. All relationships in *The Ambassadors*, then, are odd and uneven; the narrative's first premise is to document everyone's various attempts to regularise them. In regulating the group, its members are performing the ideal of symmetry; even if it is never realised, they have nevertheless aligned themselves with its preferred order. Mrs Brookenham's 'set' in *The Awkward Age* has a similar aim, although the perverse regularity of those relations is based on regular shifting around and exchanging of partnerships. The difference between the two novels is that in *The Awkward Age* group socialising facilitates pairing, but in *The Ambassadors*, the reverse is the case. The new order in which Maria is 'but one of' Strether's relations illustrates how partnerships are inevitably subordinated to group relations. The individual is validated by their community, not in seeking a pairing – quite the opposite of Milly Theale's approach.

The ethic promoted, then, by both Europeans and Americans in *The Ambassadors*, is designed to subordinate everyone's movement to the needs of the mass rather than to prioritised individuals. No one in *The Awkward Age*, not even Mrs Brook or Vanderbank, convincingly contends to be the centre of the network. Both of them ultimately triumph as individuals, in that their strength of will is successful, but are defeated overall because their actions fragment the group which venerates them. This is because of their commitments to keep

moving on, as if they all have full dance cards that promise a different partner every time. The protagonists of *The Ambassadors* are reluctant to move without others – as in Chad’s statement that he is ready to leave when Strether is – and aspire towards the reassurance provided by moving simultaneously or *en masse*, as in Maria’s wish that Madame de Vionnet could have been included in the party travelling to Switzerland. Moving independently of one another, as free-floating individuals, would alter the distance between them and disrupt the peculiar characteristics of their network. It seems typical of the novel that even though it ends with Strether and Maria Gostrey parting, and the Paris scene being left behind, Strether locates them together in his final statement, ‘Then there we are!’ (*Amb*, vol.2, p.327). They will henceforth be in very different places, yet the idea and illusion of community must be maintained.

James’s three major late novels all contain a group of potential pairs, like the post-1895 experimental novels such as *Maisie* and *The Awkward Age*. However, the late novels differ in having a centre, albeit a troubled one. In *Wings*, this centre is hollow – the black hole of Milly’s death, the reduction of an individual, a component of their network, to nothingness, merely an influence by way of her permanent absence. *The Ambassadors* has a centre that is troubling in precisely the opposite way – in the (eventually) imposing physicality and presence of the relation between Chad and Marie de Vionnet. What seems to dominate *The Golden Bowl*, then, is a combination of both earlier scenarios; it revolves around a sexual relationship which is central to the movements of all its protagonists, but as the subject of a struggle between enshrining it as everything – the governing principle of their lives – or transmuting it into nothingness. However, before turning to *The Golden Bowl* I will examine the anticipation of this theme in *The Sacred Fount*, a novel which seems to represent all the most

bewildering excesses of James's 'later phase', but nevertheless acts as a prelude to that phase.

The Sacred Fount

The Sacred Fount forms a bridge between the pre-1900 novels and the three 'major' novels of James's late phase, but also acts as a cut-off point between the two phases. It has been critically regarded as an oddity, a text which stands apart in its bizarreness even from the rest of James's work, but this very quality has also invited readings which attempt not only to incorporate but centralise it within James's oeuvre – most famously Edmund Wilson's declaration that, 'if one got to the bottom of it, a good deal of light would be thrown upon the author'.²⁶ The novel enacts, in its depiction of 'events' during a stay at Newmarch, a country house, a wholly abstract, fleshless working out of the sums; a reduction of the problems narrated in *Maisie* and *the Awkward Age* to their mathematical essence.

The nameless narrator of *The Sacred Fount* exemplifies the hollowness of James's subject in this novel – the location of identity and self-worth entirely in the context of one's relations to others, and in determining what those relations are. He defines others in terms of their pairings, seeing an individual only as half of their mysterious larger group, and defines himself by his success in discovering and designing such relations between other people. Thus, even more than the rest of the characters in the novel – whom James makes deliberately 'flat' and difficult to distinguish from one another – the narrator has no centre as an individual, but exists only as a calculator. Nevertheless, he is able to express

²⁶Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers: Twelve Essays on Literary Subjects* (London: Lehmann, 1952), p.112.

acute observations relating not so much to his companions as individuals, but to the nature of relations and social interaction in James's fiction, such as his private deliberations on the abrupt ageing of Guy Brissenden, on his way to Newmarch:

Nothing could have been stranger than the way that, fatigued, fixed, settled, he seemed to have piled up the years. (*SF*, p.29)

The contradiction between Guy's apparent stasis, having achieved (it is assumed) happiness following his marriage to Grace, and his rapid acceleration towards old age, centre on the image of him being 'fixed'. As the middle adjective of the three applied to Guy, it is bordered by the negative 'fatigued', and the presumably more positive 'settled', a word which may not suggest excitement but at least implies contentment. This assessment of Guy, then, remains ambiguous, depending on what connotations the reader attaches to his being 'fixed'. 'Fixing' becomes an important term in *The Golden Bowl*, particularly in relation to Charlotte Stant; retrospectively, then, the sinister import of its application can be discerned here.

However, as the successor to his 'middle-phase' novels, most recently *The Awkward Age*, *The Sacred Fount* represents an intensification of the principles examined in James's previous novel – of forming pairs and of the apparent necessity of reforming and rotating those pairs. No-one in *The Sacred Fount* possesses the sense finally acquired by Nanda Brookenham in retiring from the endless game of pairing; while she leaves the scene an honourable loser, the narrator here is left alone and defeated, when Mrs. Briss declares him 'crazy' and makes her exit. His dogged pursuit is all the more remarkable because, unlike Nanda, he seems to have nothing to gain from his participation in the game. In

fact, he is unusual among the protagonists of all these novels in appearing to be untouched by the attraction of 'fixing' oneself with a permanent partner, which generally proves to be at best damaging and at worst, as with Milly Theale, fatal.

The narrator's fascination with the notion of the sacred fount does not seem to involve it appealing to him personally; he describes its volume to Ford Obert in this way:

'The sacred fount [...] may be sometime too much for a single share, but it's not enough to go round.' (*SF*, p.34)

Obert immediately begins to calculate – as does the narrator – the quantities available to the Brissendens, Mrs Server and the others. What remains unacknowledged is that the insufficiency of the fount to provide for everyone means, by implication, that the narrator himself will be excluded from enjoying its bounty. (Obert may or may not be involved in the pairings, and therefore may or may not merit a share.) However, he appears to be either unconscious of, or untroubled by, his own status as 'odd one out.' In fact, he almost revels in his ability to enjoy the movements of the others without himself having to rotate (though of course he does, in repeatedly changing his nominated chief suspect as source of the 'fount'). The shame implied by Lord Mark's statement to Milly that 'You want somebody, you want somebody', is inherent in *The Sacred Fount*, to the extent that the narrator's pleasure comes at least in part from being able to avoid this charge. One of his suspects, however, provides both the nearest thing to an exception to this rule, and also the greatest contrast with the narrator's approach to relations. Mrs Server's appearances enact the consequences of an uncalculated immersion in the sacred fount:

It stuck out of her [Mrs Server], her part in a relation; it hung before us, her part in a relation; it was large to us beyond the breadth of the glade. (*SF*, p.69)

While the co-respondent in Mrs Server's relationship remains unconfirmed, 'her part in a relation' is almost obscenely noticeable – there is an almost comic underlying sexuality in the narrator's choice of terms here. She is unable or unwilling to hide this embarrassment, and it is only this which draws the narrator into some semblance of empathy or emotion himself. Elsewhere, his frustrations, however subjective, centre on the flaws in his deductive methods, never his own humanity. As he says:

There was no point at which my assurance could, by the scientific method, judge itself complete enough not to regard feelings as an interference and, in consequence, as a possible check. (*SF*, p.203)

Yet it is exactly this quality – that of emotion and human suffering - in Mrs Server that (in all senses) arouses the narrator. In manifesting the significance of the effect of a relation – whatever it is, and with whomever – Mrs Server transforms what has been both furtive and cognitive – the subject of ever more tedious conjecture and mathematical calculation – into something sublime, which is both overwhelming and incalculable. The narrator's sights of her distract him from calculation, and also awaken in him a fear that after all, the sum of the relations he is painstakingly adding up may in the end be beyond his (or anyone's) cognitive powers; this fear accounts for his mingled erotic attraction to and repulsion by the spectacle of Mrs Server.

As relations become more manifest and 'real', it is perversely more difficult to work with them in the abstract sphere of calculation. The narrator expresses a more distanced wonder at perceiving something similar between Guy and Grace Brissenden:

The relation that has established itself between them *was*, for its function, a real relation, the relation of a fellowship in resistance to doom. (*SF*, p.107)

The narrator observes this ‘fellowship in resistance to doom’ as such things are alien to him. Like the characters in *Wings*, who wilfully ignore the real consequences of Milly Theale’s illness in favour of rhapsodising about its abstract beauty, the narrator is repulsed by the physical ‘reality’ (whether or not that physicality is specifically sexual) of the relations he studies. In his case such a reaction is considerably more extreme; while an aversion to discussing death and its imminence is understandable, the entanglements at Newmarch involve at their strangest a supernatural exchange of certain attributes, and at their most prosaic, a prolific level of sexual intrigue. An extreme delight in calculating the movements of such abstractions leads to an inability to deal with not even mundane, but simply ‘real’ relationships and their potential to erupt out of abstraction and disrupt its symmetry. For the narrator, the relation is ‘for its function’ (an appropriately mathematical term) ‘real’, acknowledging that for him it is not, nor would he wish it to be. As in *The Ambassadors*, this implicit assertion that relations can be ‘real’ or otherwise invites questioning – even more so in this novel, where the ‘reality’ of anyone’s relation exists only relatively, and all the sexual interaction at which it hints takes place effectively in abstraction, only in the mind of the narrator.

If this last condition is true, *The Sacred Fount* is narrated – if not by a madman, as critics (and Grace Brissenden) have suggested – by someone who develops a powerful fantasy of omnipotence. While this seems at odds with the narrator’s acceptance of himself as an ‘odd one out’, content to stand on the sidelines, it parallels the way in which Milly is both powerful and helpless – recognised by the others as fundamentally helpless, and reshaped, to assuage their guilt, as the most powerful and controlling individual among them. The difference between them is that she does not want to be: she ‘wants somebody’.

In contrast, the narrator wants no one exclusively; he wants mastery of everyone, of the whole network of relations, imagined by him to centre on himself as supreme, sublime observer. In a passage which begins with the narrator's anxiety that Lady John knows more than he does, and moreover also knows his motives for probing her about others in the party, he moves towards restoring himself from being an 'odd' one to be an exalted one:

I think there must fairly have been a pitch at which I was not sure that not to partake of that state was, on the part of others, the sign of a gregarious vulgarity; as if there were a positive advantage, an undiluted bliss, in the intensity of consciousness I had reached. *I* alone was magnificently and absurdly aware - everyone else was benightedly out of it. (*SF*, p.127)

The narrator prefers not to participate in order (he believes) to orchestrate. His disdain for those who are 'benightedly' unaware is directed, in the manner of Lord Mark, towards an image of the masses, partaking in 'gregarious vulgarity'. His knowledge distinguishes him from the distasteful mass, thus valorising his status as something that promotes him, rather than isolates him. Moreover, he envisions himself as a central part of the group, in being *in* the network but not *of* it, as one who interprets its movements but is not influenced by them himself.

However, it is the sublime patterning of the narrator's personal experience which disrupts his avowed goal - to arrange the pieces of the mystery into a satisfying whole. The apparent symmetry of the transactions between the two couples, which he believes can be discovered and quantified, will form his unified theory of the sacred fount - the oppositional force against which he is throwing himself, and which he believes he can overcome. Yet, unfortunately for the narrator's deductive ambitions, his tendency to intrude into this symmetrical picture, to position himself as its interpreter and therefore its hub, is what ultimately prevents him from forming a complete theory of the exchanges he has detected. Perfect symmetry and balance cannot be achieved with another object

in the picture. The final irony, furthermore, is that had the narrator observed the picture in terms of its components, rather than forcing those elements into a relationship with one another, he would have seen the complete truth: that the picture is not, and never will be, symmetrical or complete.

David Seed comments:

James himself set high store by balance, and saw the 'precious element of contrast and anti-thesis' as invaluable for increasing the drama at work. Indeed he altered the basic idea for *The Sacred Fount* to include *two* couples for precisely this reason - to intensify its drama. The narrator is as strongly attracted to symmetry as James himself but because he is in the situation which he is trying to organize and because characters are constantly shifting in relation to him he can never attain this desired symmetry.²⁷

Neither, in fact, can James himself. However, he is at least partially aware of its unattainability, whereas the narrator in *The Sacred Fount* is finally shocked to the point of mental collapse by this discovery. The expansion Seed notes, from one to two couples (and potentially many more pairings) increases specifically the mathematical nature of the problem, and also gives greater sense of a mass which outnumbers the narrator. This is a different kind of claustrophobia from that which is produced in *Wings* by focusing on a triangular relation which accommodates a pair and an 'odd one': the multiplicity of *The Sacred Fount's* relations has a closer affinity both to the imposed symmetry of *The Golden Bowl*, but also with the instability created by frequent (even if regular) movements among pairings in *Maisie* and *The Awkward Age*.

Symmetry tyrannises everything in the narrator's field of vision and beyond, as his experience out in the grounds of Newmarch illustrates:

My few steps brought me to a spot where another perspective crossed our own, so that they made together a verdurous circle with an evening sky above and great lengthening, arching recesses in which the twilight thickened. Oh, it was quite sufficiently the castle of enchantment, and

²⁷ David Seed, 'Completing the Picture: Deductivity and Creativity in Henry James's *The Sacred Fount*', *Études Anglaises*, 39:3, 1986, pp.268-80; p.272.

when I noticed four old stone seats, massive and mossy and symmetrically placed, I recognised not only the influence, in my adventure, of the grand style, but the familiar identity of this consecrated nook, which was so much of the type of all the bemused and remembered. We were in a beautiful old picture, we were in a beautiful old tale, and it wouldn't be the fault of Newmarch if some other green *carrefour*, not far off, didn't balance with this one and offer the alternative of niches, in the greenness, occupied by weather-stained statues on florid petals. (*SF*, p.98)

The narrator's view of Newmarch as 'quite sufficiently the castle of enchantment' does not prevent him from locating it as a very real (to him) centre of the world and representation of how the world should be – namely, symmetrically arranged, as portentously indicated by the four old stone seats. He makes the arrangement of Newmarch into a grand narrative which governs what lies beyond it, a microcosm of how the world is, and an exemplary network of relations. The emphasis on the venerability and established worth of Newmarch, as belonging to a pastoral vision from a 'grand old tale' again contrasts with images of the mass, of the 'great greasy sea' of those excluded from this sphere – at one remove, this constitutes the narrator's fellow guests, but at another it covers the urban population outside Newmarch. The most troubling element of this passage, however, is the narrator's assertion that 'it wouldn't be the fault of Newmarch if some other *carrefour*, not far off, didn't balance with this one.' Although he later remarks that 'things in the real had a way of not balancing', this realisation can only temper the frightening degree of importance which he imputes to these ideals of symmetry and balance – their unattainability may disturb, but does not deter, his fixation. The unbalanced nature of reality is something he still wants to correct, not accept.

The narrator has mistaken his 'scientific approach' for a more sophisticated branch of mathematics than it really is; in fact his calculations operate at a very basic level because, like the primitive mathematical systems

Butterworth describes, they are entirely specific to a certain location – in his case, Newmarch. Like Isabel Archer with Osmond, he has mistaken a part for the whole; he believes that the events at Newmarch (and, moreover, his own interpretation of those events) represent a universal formula for human relations. In fact, his deductions are based on principles that are untested in the ‘real’ world outside Newmarch. He takes pride in:

That special beauty in my scheme through which the whole depended so on each part and each part guaranteed the whole. (*SF*, p.156)

The narrator envisions a very balanced relation between part and whole, each ensuring the security of the other’s significance. However, only the first half of his assurance is actually borne out; ‘parts’ such as Grace Brissenden, Lady John and May Server perversely refuse to guarantee, and even undermine, the whole that is constructed at various stages by the narrator. The insistence of the parts, then, on behaving as individuals, making unexpected movements, and escaping from the pairings to which they have been assigned, disrupt the fixed relation imagined by the narrator to govern them. Moreover, the whole’s dependence on ‘each part’ is therefore a weakness rather than the ‘special beauty’ mentioned by the narrator.

The power of the whole – which, in the terms of this novel, is the party of guests (including those not named) at Newmarch – derives from other darker aspects of it, which are hinted at in one of the narrator’s presentations of his ‘scheme’:

‘I’ve spoken of it in my conceivable regret’, I conceded, ‘as already a mere heap of disfigured fragments; but that was the extravagance of my vexation, my despair. It’s in point of fact so beautifully fitted that it comes apart piece by piece.’ (*SF*, p.214)

The existence and importance of the relation between the parts and the whole are regarded as a given. Where the narrator and his fellow guests (as well as critics

of the text) differ is on how *ordered* this relation is. Here he refutes Grace Brissenden's imputation that it is (in his own words) 'a mere heap of disfigured fragments', replacing it with an envisioned scheme where its fragmentation is a positive asset, which contributes to, rather than detracts from, its general harmony and organic order, in allowing the observer to understand exactly how the pieces fit together. However, the narrator forgets that the party at Newmarch constitutes a moving picture – pieces are constantly rotating and exchanging places. Disruption, then, is generated by the sheer multiplicity of the whole, the 'great greasy sea' of the masses (in Lord Mark's terms) which powerfully counteract any individual's powers of calculation, defying them to complete their sums, by the weight of their numbers. Earlier the narrator casually remarked, on the subject of the suspected intimacy between Gilbert Long and Grace Brissenden, that he 'hadn't seen it occur among the many conjunctions I had already noticed', and this typifies the spirit in which he discovers such connections (*SF*, p.129). There are so many pairings being enacted at Newmarch that, as with the protagonists in *The Awkward Age*, attempts to 'fix' pairings can be only temporarily successful.

The narrator's eventual fate, foreshadowed throughout, is to be overwhelmed by the effect of the mathematical sublime; he simply cannot calculate the numbers in front of him, since they have become too large. Grace Brissenden is equally unable to make the count, but realises – and almost certainly exploits – the power of the incalculable, and therefore emerges as superior in their final exchange, explaining how she has done so to the narrator:

'I understand from you that everything has [been noticed]?'
 'Everything always is', Mrs. Briss agreeably replied, 'in a place and a party like this; but so little – anything in particular – that, with people moving "every which" way, it comes to the same as if nothing was.' (*SF*, p.216)

In a network of continual movement, the consequence, and consequences, of any single movement are eliminated – as Grace asserts, the observation of any connection ‘in particular’ can only be superficial among so many. Though this may suggest that the character of the mass obscures individuality, that is, in any case, what the narrator himself is trying to do. He exemplifies Briggs’s warning that when groups begin to be thought of as masses - in the way the narrator thinks of everyone around him – then ‘real people are turned into abstractions’. The overall effect of the novel is to portray the consequences of reducing relations, however material or physically grounded, to the rearrangement of abstract figures into a symmetrical group. *The Sacred Fount* takes the multiple pairings of the novels which precede it to an extreme. Having represented that extreme, James continues to pursue the subject in more specific, inflected settings in *Wings* and *The Ambassadors*, before returning to a situation not unlike *The Sacred Fount*, but with the potential both for greater optimism in its treatment of relations, and for a more complex group of characters, in *The Golden Bowl*.

The Golden Bowl

James’s last completed novel explores the ideas of pairing and groups that, as we have seen, are common to his later work; his previous novels, however, seem to have paved the way for a difference in his treatment of the mathematics of relations. *The Golden Bowl* portrays a desire for the sublime as a release from the confinement of symmetry. As with Lambert Strether, it portrays the learning curve of an individual who is attempting to manage relations around them. Maggie Verver, who emerges as the central protagonist in the second half of the

novel, accepts the operations of her family group – her father, husband, and former school friend turned stepmother - as something cognitive, innate to life and therefore unremarkable. She eventually adopts the idea of partnerships as a central process, something to be learned painfully, and thus succeeds in them by becoming aware of how she has taken cognition for granted. Balance in this novel, then, is not that of symmetrical parties against one another, but of the concept of symmetry against that of the sublime which threatens to deconstruct it. The novel's final solution is to find an uneven balance – to rest in disequilibrium.

When Prince Amerigo tells Fanny Assingham, near the beginning of the novel, that 'I can't sail alone; my ship must be one of a pair', his words establish the motif of pairing as important in this novel and introduce the conjunction that will become equally important in this novel: the fear of isolated individuality (*GB*, vol.1, p.26). The attitudes of these protagonists to their individuality seem to have a great deal in common with those of their immediate predecessors, and while to a certain degree they do, James incorporates a new element in this novel which develops the dilemma of being an individual into something more complex still. I have argued that the experience of being a 'odd one out' surrounded by pairings is an important strand of James's late novels, prominent in the experiences of Nanda Brookenham, Lambert Strether and (in turn) Milly, Kate and Merton Densher in *Wings*. Although such experience is often painful, it can also be self-affirming; the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* is the most extreme example of a protagonist who valorises his identity as an isolated individual, segregated from other people's relations but, by virtue of this, possessing knowledge about them, and their relations, which he regards as more than compensatory. Milly Theale, similarly, experiences moments of satisfaction from

the knowledge of herself as a singularly affected individual – who, for that reason, is permitted to exercise power over the group which surrounds her. In contrast, for the protagonists of *The Golden Bowl*, their satisfaction in acting as an individual – in knowing things that others, especially their partner (whether their husband or their father, in Maggie Verver's case) do not know, is ultimately directing towards the goal of pairing. They pursue individuality in order to be able to renounce it again, since it brings (much more unremittingly than in earlier novels) fear and pain rather than any kind of rewarding freedom. This logic produces Adam's marriage, which seems to be an action performed out of a desire for individuality – to do something purely for self-gratification – but is in fact undertaken for the benefit of his relation with Maggie. Adam's marriage also demonstrates how *The Golden Bowl* moves away from depicting actions such as this as escaping from the role of 'odd one out'; superficially Adam's motive appears to be the desire not to play gooseberry to Maggie and Amerigo, but it is actually to bind Maggie closely to him again by returning their relation to its formerly symmetrical condition.

Maggie, rather than Adam, is the centre of the novel, and the purpose of the narrative is to explore her consciousness as assiduously as it conceals Adam's. For this reason, however, representations of Adam experiencing a fear similar to Maggie's are even more valuable in establishing this as a general tendency within the novel. His marriage to Charlotte constitutes one such example; another can be found in James's description of him as the millionaire in his castle who is nevertheless besieged by the demands of nameless others:

Though conscious of a single near tie, one affection, one duty deepest-rooted in his life, it has never, for many minutes together, been his portion not to feel himself surrounded and committed, never quite been his refreshment to make out where the human appeal, represented by gradations of tint, diminishing concentric zones of intensity, of

impertunity, really faded to the blessed impersonal whiteness for which his vision sometimes ached. (*GB*, vol.1, p.126)

Few of Adam's professional activities are actually described; his efforts to bring culture to American City are usually reported, and not at length. This passage is unusual in its portrayal of a sensitive inner being behind the mask of the public figure, who occasionally (and understandably) wearies of his heavy responsibilities. Though the daily routine of an extremely rich philanthropist is no doubt draining, the audacity of the narrative appealing for sympathy in this quarter gives this instance the potential to be a subtle demonstration of something different. Its claims, in fact, generate cynicism: why isn't Adam able to retreat out of the range of 'human appeal', when he seems better placed than almost anyone to do so?²⁸ The answer is that he could do as he likes, but chooses not to. Like Eustacia Vye, who complains in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* about being trapped in her hilltop home on Egdon Heath, without anyone or anything discernibly binding her to it, Adam in fact has a freer will to exercise than he wishes to admit. Both his reported actions and his inner reasoning (as far as the latter is available to us) exhibit a fear of acting on his individual will alone. It is much more comfortable for Adam to feel himself to be 'surrounded and committed', bound by a network of relations to a certain course of action, than to think of himself as floating free in 'impersonal whiteness'.

Adam, moreover, wishes to avoid the accusation, articulated most succinctly by Lord Mark in *Wings*, that does remain effective and current in this novel: that he, like Milly Theale, 'wants somebody' singly and exclusively. Only Maggie educates herself out of the apparent shame of this. Adam manages to maintain an image of himself as burdened by numerous worldly connections and

²⁸Yeazell notes the almost complete lack of external compulsion affecting characters in late James novels (p.16).

responsibilities, while actually accepting a relation only with Maggie (and, as an extension of Maggie and himself, the Principino). He hides his desire for an exclusive pairing behind this projection of himself as being in a network of relations, while longing for the status of 'odd one out'.²⁹ Like Gilbert Osmond, he can only be disadvantaged by the few people with whom he has a relation moving and rearranging, and has a vested interest in getting them to 'sit perfectly quiet' (in Osmond's words) and maintain their current distance. Even the Prince becomes aware of this immobility in Adam:

Mr. Verver then, in a word, took care of his relations to Maggie, as he took care, and apparently always would, of everything else. He relieved him of all anxiety about his married life in the same manner in which he relieved him on the score of his bank account. (*GB*, vol.1, p.292)

Amerigo's thoughts here are primarily a vehicle for a metaphor linking emotional and financial transactions in the Ververs' world; beyond this point, however, the passage illuminates the similarities between the two men. Although Amerigo sees Adam as an enigma, he shares several characteristics with the man he appears not to understand: both prefer their relations to be fixed and limited in number, making minimal effort to form or maintain relations beyond their immediate partnerships. Fanny Assingham provides a useful example of this: in contrast to Charlotte's polished condescension, Amerigo makes little effort to preserve social niceties between himself and Fanny, and Adam, whom Fanny counts as a friend, has very little interaction with her and regards her as virtually part of the furniture. With the exception of Adam's strategic proposal to Charlotte, the men are almost entirely passive in their partnerships with Maggie

²⁹Since this desire for an exclusive pairing often (though not always) indicates sexual desire, the critical readings of the novel which declare Maggie and Adam's relationship to be incestuous can be regarded as a literalisation of connections which are certainly there in abstract – but are not meant to be resolved into physical evidence. Jane Ford's *Incest and Patriarchy from Shakespeare to Joyce* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1998) pushes such an 'incestuous' reading to its most literal limit, claiming that Maggie married Amerigo to conceal her pregnancy by her father.

and Charlotte, who shoulder the burden of social and emotional pressures.³⁰ The irony of Amerigo's statement that Adam takes care of his financial affairs and his relationship with Maggie 'as he took care, and apparently always would, of everything else', is that for both Amerigo and Adam, there *is* nothing else to take care of. What 'everything else' represents is in fact all the things that these men do *not* exert themselves to care about or interact with; 'everything else' is a world outside their fixed relations with which neither Amerigo or Adam is really concerned. Their relation with one another is the ultimate example of this: neither is really interested in the other except in terms of their mutual connection to Maggie. The Prince imagines Adam regarding him with 'a kind of apprehension in which the terms and conditions were finally fixed and absolute' (*GB*, vol. 1, p.298). These fixed terms are established early in the novel, and it satisfies both Amerigo and Adam that, in spite of one's affair with the other's wife, those terms do not change.

The comforts of symmetry, then, are never in danger or in question for the male characters in *The Golden Bowl* (Bob Assingham does little other than reflect the preferences of Adam and Amerigo for a life on 'fixed and absolute' terms). For the female protagonists, the attractions of symmetry are more complex, partly because the status of being an 'odd one out' is a more pressing reality for them. Certainly for Charlotte Stant, the social and financial disadvantages of being a single woman are considerable; however, as with Milly, Nanda, and the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, being unpaired, 'odd', can supply admirable qualities of its own, and Charlotte exemplifies this:

³⁰ Adam's passivity is enhanced by the textual hints of his impotence, in Charlotte's statements about their lack of children: 'Ah, if I could have had one -! [...] It's not, at any rate, my fault [...] And now I'm too sure. It will never be' (*GB*, vol.1, p.307)

Nothing in her definitely placed her; she was a rare, a special product. Her singleness, her solitude, her want of means, that is her want of ramifications and other advantages, contributed to enrich her somehow with an odd, precious neutrality, to constitute for her, so detached yet so aware, a sort of small social capital. (*GB*, vol.1, p.53-54)

Charlotte, like *The Sacred Fount*'s narrator, makes a virtue out of the distinction that separates her from those around her; as James points out, her 'want of means' and 'other advantages', is also a 'want of ramifications' which could itself be an advantage. The description, like that of Guy Brissenden, gives a balanced attribution of positive and negative aspects to Charlotte's situation ('singleness' is more positive, while 'solitude' would probably imply a negative state). Charlotte's gift is to epitomise this kind of balance, being 'so detached yet so aware', so that her solitude becomes 'an odd, precious neutrality' (again, the negative 'odd' balanced by the admiring 'precious'). James's adulation of smallness – as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis – promotes even this apparent disadvantage as an admirable aspect of Charlotte; after all, the Ververs have hardly made the best use of their potentially large social capital. Indeed, the first sentence in this passage contains the highest praise for Charlotte, as 'a rare, a special product'; it is significant, then, that this is coupled with the statement that 'nothing in her definitely placed her', implying a causal link between the two. To some extent this refers to social specifics – to Charlotte's cosmopolitanism, something James personally finds admirable, and which is indicated as one of the reasons Amerigo finds her attractive (Maggie is decidedly un-cosmopolitan, in contrast). It also suggests, though, a more abstract link between Charlotte's freedom and her exceptional qualities – between both senses of her 'singleness' – and thus that being 'fixed', in consequence, hampers either the development or the continuance of those qualities.

After Charlotte's marriage, though outwardly she is the same dazzling social performer, she speaks of herself as just the opposite of the way she was described earlier:

'It belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed – fixed as fast as a pin stuck, up to its head, in a cushion. I'm placed – I can't imagine anyone *more* placed. There I *am!*' (GB, vol.1, p.256)

If this circumstance 'belongs to Charlotte's situation' but has come about 'by no merit of her own', the responsibility for 'placing' her must lie with Adam and, by extension, her new family - though she may also intend a slight reproach to her listener and marriage broker, Fanny. An involvement with the Ververs seems to involve adhering to their own model of pairing – something which explains the necessity of Bob Assingham, who otherwise adds no value to the novel other than being Fanny's 'other half'; that is all he is ever needed to be. Charlotte's entrance into the Verver situation, then, binds her into its system of pairing which emulates the system which presides in the society of James's late novels, but lacks the attractions sought by other protagonists in those novels. Charlotte's pairing is not an exclusive one – as coveted by Milly Theale and her peers - but neither is it intended to be a movable one, since her situation has none of the potential for large-scale partnering and re-partnering seen in *The Awkward Age*. She has, in fact, become an 'odd one out' to Adam and Maggie, losing the benefits of her former 'singleness', and without even the only usual escape route open to 'odd ones', that of pairing, since she is already paired.

Charlotte, in short, lives daily with the worst aspects of both pairdom and singleness, while superficially enjoying the most privileged of existences, so that movement is, for her, deemed unnecessary. She provides, therefore, not only a demonstration of the dark consequences of being 'fixed' or 'placed' hinted at in the narrator's observations of Guy Brissenden and May Server in *The Sacred*

Fount, but also an example of how painful self-recognition of that situation – something which seems to be mercifully unavailable to the sufferers in *The Sacred Fount* – can be.

This dramatic change in Charlotte, from being independent to being fully immobilised, can only be attributed to her marriage to Adam and its specific consequences. However, her speech also carries the more general implication that marriage ‘fixes’ people and, most often in the case of the female partner, that being ‘fixed’ in such a relation is to their disadvantage. Both these ideas are a culmination of elements present in this late group of novels; *The Sacred Fount* demonstrates the power of marriage to both ‘fix’ and dramatically alter people (though Grace Brissenden is a rare example of a woman who profits from the transaction), while *Wings*, *The Awkward Age* and *The Ambassadors* supply various instances, both male and female, of characters who question the benefits of marriage both in a personal sense and as an institution, though male characters are far less likely to pursue the second line of thought. Unlike Kate Croy, Charlotte does not go as far as to interrogate the worth of marriage; she has already entered it with a typically balanced view of its worth, in that it provides social and financial security at the expense of not being her chosen partnership. (Admittedly, Kate’s pronouncement is motivated by seeing the consequences of marrying a poor man.) Nevertheless, while *The Awkward Age* expresses, as Leon Edel states, James’s ‘complete disenchantment’ with British society and, more specifically, with the institution of marriage, the novels which follow it provide a continuous, though more oblique, satire on the uses and purposes of marriage as a partnership contract.³¹ The metaphor of being ‘fixed’ is the thread by which James represents the connections between gender and power in a system of

pairings. The most common scenario he depicts shows that women are 'fixed' against their will, whereas men arrange the 'fixing' even when it applies to them and are thereby more contented with it, something demonstrated even in *Wings* (it is Densher who ultimately makes the terms of his relations with Kate and the dead Milly), and brought out boldly in the symmetrical design of *The Golden Bowl*.

The intersection of power, fixing and being fixed is, however, not wholly dependent on gender.³² Charlotte's talents for self-sufficiency are wasted due to her desire (both for emotional reasons, with Amerigo, and financial ones, with Adam) to be paired – a wish she lives to regret. Maggie, who begins with barely any notion of herself as an individual, must learn to act as one rather than act primarily in terms of her relations to others. However, both women have a common fear of 'fixing' as a counterpart to a fear of the mass, in the form of the sublime; this distinguishes *The Golden Bowl* from its immediate predecessors. This is at least partly achieved by James's setting of its opening scenario in a state of hyper-symmetry, more acute even than the consciously imposed symmetry of earlier novels. Symmetry has been the atmosphere breathed by the Ververs for as long as they have existed (paralleling Strether's immersion in *Bildungsroman* during *The Ambassadors*). Maggie moves from the fear of the sublime that characterises their lifestyle, in which she has been embedded from childhood, to realising the oppression of its opposite. After her conversation in the coach with Amerigo, where she tries with limited success to persuade him

³¹ Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895-1901* (New York: Avon Books, 1968); p.259.

³² William Veeder's discussion of gender in James is helpful here, asserting that the feminine is defined as such because it is vulnerable, and not the other way around, in his article, 'Henry James and the uses of the feminine', in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*, ed. by Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp.219-51.

that their quartet could be rearranged into an all-male and an all-female pair, 'the sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed rose before her' (*GB*, vol.2, p.66).

This is ultimately a productive obstacle, as Gustavo Guerra comments:

'This situation forces Maggie to stay within her community and to create a referential system different to the one most characters in the novel use'.³³ It is also important here that Maggie experiences feelings identical to those Charlotte expressed earlier, without the sense that she herself is not responsible, but with a sense, unlike Charlotte, that the movement which will lift her out of this 'placing' is not impossible. The continuation of the metaphor both joins the experience of Charlotte and Maggie and also shows it as a common fear in the novel. James makes more explicit statements in these later novels about the social disadvantages of women in the world he constructs and describes. Kate Croy's dismay at what marriage can bring you to leads to Maggie's statement, near the end of *The Golden Bowl*, that 'I see it's *always* terrible for women', a statement that applies to any of James's other novels, but is only articulated in this last one (*GB*, vol.2, p.349).

The aim of marriage for Charlotte is to lift herself out of the mass – an idea which forms a menacing background presence here as it did in *The Sacred Fount* and *Wings*. Charlotte, out socialising with Amerigo, imagines it in the following terms:

The intrinsic oddity of the London 'squash', a thing of vague, slow senseless eddies, revolving as if in fear of some menace of conversation suspended over it, the drop of which, with some consequent refreshing splash or splatter, never took place. (*GB*, vol.1, p.251)

This image has clear affinities both with Lord Mark's characterising of the 'great greasy sea' of London society, and with the more supernaturally sublime effect

³³Gustavo Guerra, 'Henry James's Paradoxical Bowl: The Reinstatement of Doubt in Fin-de-Siecle America', in *Style*, Spring 1998, 32:1, 60-79; p.68.

of the mass in *The Sacred Fount*. Charlotte and Amerigo consider themselves to be saved from discovery by the disguising movements of the social body, as did Grace Brissenden in *The Sacred Fount*. Paradoxically, then, Charlotte has climbed out of the mass by way of marriage to Adam, only to immerse herself in it again. The practice of living and socialising mainly in smaller groups is portrayed as a privilege of the rich; the relatively poor, such as the Assinghams, are obliged to deal with the masses – as shown by Maggie’s early remark about Charlotte that ‘she’s always with people, poor dear – she rather has to be’ (*GB*, vol.1, p.179). Yet Maggie and Adam’s segregation of themselves from the social body is depicted as unhealthy, as is the narrator’s assumption in *The Sacred Fount* that he is distinguished from the crowd around him. While the mass is associated with vulgarity, it still exerts both fascination and the power, as Charlotte’s image of it conveys, to overwhelm the individual. Interaction with the mass in *The Golden Bowl*, then, requires the correct balance, which avoids being either too exclusive within one’s pairing, or so indiscriminate as to be overwhelmed by an incalculable mass, or, indeed, by the menacing drop which, in spite of Charlotte’s view that it ‘never takes place’ is a real threat – or in Maggie’s case, as we shall see, a source of relief.

Maggie says to her father, after a long pause in one of their conversations, that ‘what has really happened is that the proportions, for us, are altered’ (*GB*, vol.1, p.167-68). Although this remark is described as ‘cryptic’ it is one of the less ambiguous statements of the novel, conveying the sense that an existing relationship is continuing to operate, but in a more confined space, with less freedom of movement. The proportional change lies in the scale of Maggie and Adam’s relationship being reduced since the overall relational network has expanded to include Amerigo and Charlotte. This increase in the number of

elements involved in the sum has a number of effects; primarily, it makes achieving balance and symmetry necessarily more complicated, even with such compliant integers as the Ververs' new in-laws. Strangely, too, while the symmetry of their group assumes ever greater importance, the equilibrium (a term which occurs frequently to describe the group's predicament) of this larger whole seems to be dependent on, and swayed by, tiny elements of the situation. On Amerigo's return from his adulterous visit to Gloucester with Charlotte, Maggie's concern is to prevent any disruption, however slight, in the relation between them:

Their equilibrium was everything, and [that] it was practically precarious, a matter of a hair's breadth for the loss of the balance. (*GB*, vol.2, p.17)

While a truly large event threatens their marriage – and Maggie is aware of its presence, though not its properties – her fear is directed towards the minutiae of their encounter, as being decisive in influencing the balance of their relation.

This reverses the movement that earlier led to the consummation of Amerigo and Charlotte's affair:

Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure. (*GB*, vol.1, p.312)

This image dramatises the sudden overwhelming force of the 'drop' Charlotte scorned; of the mass taking control – in exactly the way feared by Lord Mark, and other characters who profit from occupying a position above this 'mass', such as Adam, who overrides the preferences of American City's inhabitants to impose his individual choice of cultural improvement on them.

The triumph of the mass, however, only occurs with reference to a single individual in the form of the mathematical sublime, or, as in this instance, to a pair overwhelmed with the sublimity of achieving what appears to be an

exclusive pairing. While such an action might appear to be separating them from the mass, it identifies them with a movement contrary to the social strictures which control and impose approved forms of pairing. The dramatic metaphor employed, and its evocation of the forces of nature, constructs such pairings as Charlotte and Amerigo's in opposition to culturally produced groups and to scientifically produced calculations. Nevertheless, even such a force as the sea is not autonomous, and is in fact subject to the principles of science and mathematics.³⁴ What seems to be cognitive is revealed in time to be innate, so that Maggie's actions towards her husband are essentially similar in kind to Charlotte and Amerigo's response to one another as lovers. Pairing is naturally adjusted; indeed, what is unnatural as a permanent state is symmetry, and this establishment of this as the natural order is challenged by the movements within the novel. Maggie grasps the difficulty of surveying and comprehending a whole group in which all the component parts are moving. The process of focusing on the immediate, on minutiae, produces renewed value in allowing her to consider herself as a part, and her relation to the other parts as primary. Her previous strategy, similar to that of the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, was based on attempting to observe the whole and make the slight adjustments needed to complete a symmetrical arrangement. What the narrator, and at first Maggie, fails to realise is that the arranger, as an 'odd' element, will need finally to be inserted into it, and create a new round of disruption.

The new balance of *The Golden Bowl* is arranged around the acceptance of the 'odd' element which has actually been present all along. The Principino, for example, is made use of as a 'link' between Maggie and Adam, but should be regarded as a player in his own right. An analogy to the instance in *The Sacred*

³⁴Lisa Appagnesi's *Femininity and the Creative Imagination*, cited in chapter four, includes a

Fount where the narrator expects a counterpart to Newmarch to be the inevitable and right consequences of, and condition of, Newmarch's perfection, can be found in the pointed – and discussed – absence of a counterpart to the Principino, which is itself the aspect which has the most disruptive effect on the group, more by far than the affair of Amerigo and Charlotte. Maggie's developing intelligence about the nature of the group's balance leads her to begin to consider this:

She had wondered again if the equilibrium mightn't have been more real, mightn't above all have demanded less strange a study, had it only been on the books that Charlotte should give him a Principino of his own. (*GB*, vol.2, p.98)

Reality is once again envisioned as something gradated, measurable in different degrees; however, the novel's final notion is, appropriately, that there are different kinds of balance which may be worth achieving.

Interestingly, Maggie seems to accept the impossibility of there being a child of the Ververs' marriage as absolutely as Charlotte herself does, in her earlier conversation with Amerigo. Critical reflections on the cause of this address issues surrounding Adam's sexual and reproductive capabilities, but if examined in more abstract terms (leaving aside, for the moment, valuable attempts to historicise sexual behaviour in novels of this period) there would be no purpose, from Adam's point of view, to his producing another child. He has one, and through her has obtained a grandchild, so that further heirs are not required. In this respect Adam is quite happy to embrace the oddity of his child and grandchild as representing the right balance, in not diverting the linearity of the relationship between himself, Maggie and the Principino.

The intrinsic oddity of the group, in a mathematical sense, is also easy to overlook in favour of the protagonists' anxiety about the symmetry of their group

(and many critical readings follow this pattern). The odd number forms a subtext to which occasional overt references are made, as in this narratorial observation about their stay at Fawns:

[It was] only the second Sunday, of all the summer, when the party of six, the party of seven including the Principino, had practically been without accessions or invasions. (*GB*, vol.2, p.296)

The group is never as symmetrical as it believes itself to be, overlooking the Principino in the way that Isle's reading of *The Awkward Age* necessitates ignoring the presence of Little Aggie, and as that novel's social rearrangements always result in one person – whether it be Nanda, Aggie or Mr Longdon – being left over. The omission is more insidious since the Principino, as a non-speaking character, does not play an active role in the group. Yet the influence of his existence on the group dynamics has an important practical and metaphorical effect. He represents a disturbance at a physical and sexual level, acting as a reminder of the sexual differences and dysfunctionality which divides the two married couples, and divides the individuals within from their former partners. Even more simply, though, the Principino represents an extra body that makes the numbers uneven; this symbolic function in itself makes James's point effectively.

Meanwhile, the protagonists attempt to do sums while working, as it were, with the wrong figures, and pursuing an ideal of equilibrium which is, unsurprisingly, elusive. Fanny Assingham's sorrowful statement that 'I had fallen in love with the beautiful symmetry of my plan' reveals a limited understanding of the problems of symmetry, but without the understanding finally reached by Maggie: that symmetry has, all along, been only an illusion (*GB*, vol.1, p.296). Maggie's first attempts at resolving their situation involve invoking movement without revoking the governing principle of symmetry, by

manoeuvring her father and Amerigo into a period of companionship and doing the same herself with Charlotte:

It divided them again, that was true, this particular turn of the tide – cut them up afresh into pairs and parties; quite as if a sense for the equilibrium was what, between them all, had most power of insistence (*GB*, vol.2, p.39)

The violence of this image of being ‘cut up afresh into pairs and parties’ marks a change in the presented view of pairing.³⁵ The larger group is the natural unit, being unnaturally divided by force into ‘pairs and parties’, which may appear to be the formation which provides equilibrium, but now seem more contrived. However, Maggie’s – or anyone else’s – continued efforts to obey the imperative of the equilibrium do not, however, lead to resolution, simply to a rearrangement of the previous pattern, without challenging that pattern.

Maggie’s next move, which is a little more successful, is to dissolve some of the structures within the pattern, by the disintegration of their habits of pairing:

It seemed as easy for them to make a quartette as it had formerly so long appeared for them to make a pair of couples – this latter being a discovery too absurdly belated. (*GB*, vol.2, p.69)

The lesson is that two and two make four; not, as Butterworth shows, as easy to comprehend as it sounds to the mathematically trained twenty-first century reader. Cultures which count by pairing things, by thinking in twos, can easily master the Western practice of counting higher and using larger sets to structure their counting, once the system is introduced to them – the conceptual jump from one system to the other, however, is considerable. The expansion of Maggie’s intelligence involves her learning to think beyond pairs, in terms of larger groups. Suddenly, the limitations of those around her, who are still thinking in terms of pairs, and who are unconsciously bound to the ideal of symmetry, are

very clear to her; Charlotte's overly schematic attempts to balance attention to her lover with reparation towards her husband seem clumsy:

This pious effort [...] would have been an achievement quite wasted if Mrs Verver should make with him those mistakes of proportion, one set of them too abruptly, too incoherently designed to correct another set, that she had made with his daughter. (*GB*, vol.2, p.139)

Charlotte's established skills as a social operator appear to have deserted her; yet this, too, is a matter of proportion. Earlier, favourable judgements of her performance derive from the observations of Amerigo and Fanny Assingham, which now seem rudimentary in the shade of Maggie's acquired mathematical abilities. Charlotte's efforts to maintain equilibrium, correcting an excess by weighting the scales in the opposite direction, are judged as 'abrupt' and 'incoherent'; while Maggie herself would until recently have pursued this goal, Charlotte's strategy now seems primitive. Nevertheless, no more subtle theory has yet emerged as a replacement.

For some time after the ideal of equilibrium is exposed as spurious, the best alternative is the one already shown in *The Sacred Fount*: merging and masking countable numbers into a mass, which confuses and defies precise calculations being made about any of its parts. For the Verver family group, this constitutes following the Newmarch example and filling their country house with extra guests, including both previous stalwarts such as 'the once despised Kitty and Dotty', formerly contenders for the role of Adam's second wife, and 'members, again, of the historic Matcham week', who are occupied with furthering their own extra-marital intrigues and thus diminish the distinctiveness of the Ververs (*GB*, vol.2, p.210). For the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* this proved oppressive and overwhelming, but in *The Golden Bowl* the presence of the mass is seen in a

³⁵ Butterworth comments that 'the Latin word for calculating, *computare*, comes from *putare* which means, literally, "to cut"' (p.75), linking these actions.

different light; having once been regarded as a tiresome distraction from the business of exclusive pairings, the social bustle now provides a welcome relief from the pressures of calculation:

It was in fact striking, that this resource, just now, seemed to meet in the highest degree everyone's need; quite as if everyone were, by the multiplication of human objects in the scene, by the creation, by the confusion, of fictive issues, hopeful of escaping someone else's notice. (*GB*, vol.2, p.209)

The explanation given by Grace Brissenden of how movements affect the perception of individuals within the group is one with which Maggie, perhaps surprisingly, appears to sympathise. She is beginning to perceive what is obscure to the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* - that the result of precise calculations and complicated sums is often to reveal darkness, not to bring enlightenment. Furthermore, what distinguishes Maggie from the nameless narrator is her interest in preserving to some extent the relations of the group, while increasing her power of movement as an individual within it. In contrast, his sole aim is to accomplish his own individual triumph in dissecting the group, without an interest in mediating any form of balance, even imbalance, between the two.

'Meeting everyone's need' remains, to the end of the novel, a consideration for Maggie (in spite of acquiring a healthy selfishness for her own part), while it never is in *The Sacred Fount*. Catherine Cox comments on this aspect of *The Golden Bowl*:

The happiness Maggie balances is really her own; her design for her family serves herself first and best. [...] But, based as it is upon her understanding of their needs, her design does provide the most accommodating arrangement for the group as a whole.³⁶

This is borne out in the difference between the fragmentation which concludes *The Sacred Fount*, and the conciliatory ending of *The Golden Bowl*, in which the

³⁶Catherine Cox, 'Strategies for Survival in James's *The Golden Bowl*', *American Literature*, December 1983, 55:4, 576-90; p.587.

power of the mass does *not* triumph over the greater subtlety of the figure who plays the role of detective. Maggie is distinctive among James's late protagonists as a figure who emerges from the experience of the mathematical sublime without being destroyed, and with the ability to function as an individual and within a pair, balancing (if unequally) the two.

The imposition of symmetry on the group, though something which has furthered their self-deception, is not homogeneously evil in its effect, which makes the discovery of its flaws painful. Even the illusion of stability is difficult to give up, as Maggie recognises:

If their family coach [had] lumbered and stuck the fault was in its lacking its complement of wheels. Having but three, as they might say, it had wanted another, and what had Charlotte done from the first but begin to act, on the spot, and ever so smoothly and beautifully, as a fourth? Nothing has been, immediately, more manifest than the greater grace of the movement of the vehicle – as to which, for the completeness of the image, Maggie was now supremely to feel how every strain had been lightened for herself. (*GB*, vol.2, p.23)

Maggie acknowledges now what she did not anticipate; that the movement involved in getting the 'family coach' going would create such a change in the internal dynamic. Movement – as for Isabel in *Portrait* – and for many other Jamesian heroines – is an important issue for both Maggie and Charlotte. For Charlotte 'fixing' is the focus, for Maggie the fear of movement in terms of what it offers and what it takes away. Both in the course of the novel experience frustration caused by others controlling their movements, either by restricting them, or by coercing them into movement they might not have chosen freely. Amerigo's subtle, perhaps even unconscious, manipulation of Maggie in the period immediately after her discovery of his infidelity, prompts an awakening of his limitations, and the limitations imposed on her, as a result:

She recognised her having had, in respect to him as well, to 'do all', to go the whole way over, to move, indefatigably, while he stood as fixed in his place as some statue of one of his forefathers. (*GB*, vol.2, p.323)

Once Maggie performed this kind of compromising action unconsciously; now she not only perceives it but also begins to resist it. Nevertheless, this is not an instance of her fear of movement itself, as it would have been earlier in the novel; she does not resent movement but the necessity of it to compensate for the inertia of another. In the same period, Amerigo also prompts feelings where (as quoted earlier) 'the sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed rose before her', an experience Maggie now shares with Charlotte, who thus functions as both an opponent and a comrade. Being forced to move, as on this occasion, is perversely part of the 'tremendously ordered and fixed life' Maggie foresees for herself. While she still seeks some kind of balance between the poles of being fixed and being pressured to move, she is certainly now aware of the dangers of her previous ideal of balance, which involved being 'fixed' by either Amerigo or her father.

The strange bond between Maggie and Charlotte is forged by Maggie's recognition of two elements of their relation; firstly, a shared form of experience in terms of being 'fixed' and reacting against it. By the time of their final private confrontation, in the gardens at Fawns, 'the act of sitting still had become impossible to either of them', a statement implying that stillness is expected of them, in the way that Gilbert Osmond expects it of Pansy and Isabel (*GB*, vol.2, p.307). The second element Maggie acknowledges is her debt to Charlotte – in both lightening the load she had at one time to carry, but also in prompting her to a life of movement. One could argue that, in the way that *Portrait* is the narrative of the relation between Isabel and Madame Merle, in which Gilbert Osmond features as an interloper, *The Golden Bowl* is primarily the narrative of the

relation between Maggie and Charlotte. Since it ends with the end of that relation, the case for such a view is persuasive, especially in the light of Maggie's remark 'I see it's always terrible for women', occurring as a rare example of an absolute judgement near the end of the novel.

Maggie is centralised in the network largely by the operations of its other members - and again this can be compared to the centralising of Milly by Kate and Densher as the supposed figure of power in their relations, while actually manoeuvring her into quite the opposite position. Adam's thoughts indicate the consequences of this:

He already felt that she [Charlotte] had made him right. But he was in presence aware of the fact that Maggie had made *her* so; and always, therefore, without Maggie, where, in fine, would he be? She united them, brought them together as with the click of a silver spring. (*GB*, vol.1, p.240)

Both Adam's and Amerigo's dependency on Maggie – at least on her continuing to be the predictable Maggie they expect – is transformed into a fantasy of Maggie's omnipotence. This allows Amerigo to refigure her as relatively invulnerable (again, in the way that Densher and Kate do to Milly). Maggie is both part and whole – since she as centre represents microcosm of the whole network of relations – she is, in Hertz's terms, their principle of unity; thus, when Maggie fails, the whole system of counting fails. Amerigo isn't susceptible to the sublime, but he attributes some approximation of that quality to Maggie – something he doesn't understand but accepts as governing.

Maggie at first continues to try and govern; she attempts to regularise everyone's relations, converting the two pairs into a quartet. She marvels at the apparent harmony of the group, given her new knowledge of its potential for movement and fragmentation: 'Nobody else, as yet, in the combination, seemed estranged from anybody' (*GB*, vol.1, p.315). Maggie is only just achieving full

awareness of the duality of the status she occupies. She is both one of a pair (or, in fact, of two pairs) and also a 'odd' one; yet she has believed, in the manner of the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, in the exalted nature of that role. However, like him she is deceived: the situation is the reverse of what she expects, with everyone else being 'magnificently aware' and only Maggie herself 'benightedly out of it'.³⁷ She embarks on a complex process of recalculation that has a number of aspects and implications, as this passage illustrates:

The ground was well-nigh covered by the time she had made out her husband and his colleague as directly interested in preventing her freedom of movement. Policy or no policy, it was they themselves who were arranged. She must be kept in position so as not to *disarrange* them. It fitted immensely together, the whole thing, as soon as she could give them a motive; for, strangely as it had by this time begun to appear to herself, she had hitherto not imagined them sustained by an ideal distinguishably different from her own. [...] Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she – to confine the matter only to herself – was arranged apart. (*GB*, vol.2, p.45)

The paradox here is that 'what fitted immensely together, the whole thing', is in fact the recognition by Maggie that 'the whole thing' does *not* 'fit together immensely', and has not done so all along. Her 'immense' discovery, ironically, is a deconstructive one: like Strether, she achieves a momentary larger sense of what will eventually prove to be reductive as a concept. From this point on, then, Maggie begins to see that she will need to dismantle the system itself – it permits the illusion that they are 'sustained by an ideal' common to all. In a sense, this is accurate: Charlotte's and Amerigo's goal, like Maggie's has been to maintain the appearance of symmetry in the group – yet for different reasons. Their means have been the same, but their end only superficially so.

³⁷Moreover, there can only be one valorised single in any network - otherwise, as is the case with Nanda and Mr. Longdon, they represent, by default, a pair - and that is clearly Charlotte at the start, a role she is to exchange with Maggie, but only later.

The effect on Maggie herself as a part, rather than the representative of the whole, is also revealed: like Isabel Archer (and ironically, like Charlotte in earlier times) her freedom of movement has been prevented, and is explicitly recognised as such. The movements she has participated in have been merely geometrical forms. She has imagined herself above the mass, manipulating its arrangements to maintain order (as did the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*) and now sees herself as part of this mass, but one forced to remain static while others control the arrangements, and enjoy the freedom of movement she is denied – though at this point movement is more a chore for them than a pleasure:

That they were in face of rearranging, that they *had* to rearrange, was all before her again. (*GB*, vol.2, p.61-62)

The mask of stability is inoperable now. The group's principle of existence is thus not symmetry but rearrangement, which has excluded Maggie from a genuine role in its shaping. This realisation is not wholly new to her - Yeazell says that these late protagonists 'confront what in some part of themselves they have long since known', and as such is consonant with Butterworth's idea of the innate mathematical powers that, once brought into use, can be rapidly developed by individuals.³⁸ Fanny's 'new arithmetic' is Maggie's tool – she begins to make increasingly sophisticated calculations about the relations around her:

With their stillness together so perfect, what had suggested so, around them, the attitude of sparing them? Her inner vision fixed it once more, this attitude, saw it, in the others as vivid and concrete, extended it straight from her companion to Charlotte. (*GB*, vol.2, p.64)

This 'stillness together' is in fact what alerts Maggie: she recognises something similar to the relation between her and her father, denoting a relation which aspires to be exclusive – but cannot declare itself so – therefore concealing its actual disruption by overt, arranged stillness. Thus the abstract becomes real,

³⁸ Yeazell, p.33.

'concrete', and as such, as the narrator in *The Sacred Fount* says, has 'a way of not balancing'.

Maggie's rejection of symmetry, then, leads to a strategic embrace of the sublime – relinquishing the habit of adjusting, rearranging, balancing, and instead allowing the sense of a wholly different state of being, and set of relations, to overwhelm her. This necessitates accepting the unthinkable – a state of imbalance – as a constant presence which she must learn to live with:

There reigned for her, absolutely, during these vertiginous moments, that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horrible possible, which we so often trace by its breaking out suddenly, lest it should go further, in unexplained retreats and reactions. (*GB*, vol.2, p.233)

These 'moments' are the antithesis of the symmetrical system Maggie has previously lived within. She now dwells in an atmosphere of the sublime – whose lure is described perfectly as 'the fascination of the monstrous – and while it doesn't 'break out', it does absolutely surround her, in the way that the atmosphere of *bildungsroman* surrounds Strether in *The Ambassadors*.

James's own intervening observation here, of the way 'we often trace' the sublime in retreats rather than advances, is an important indication of the effect produced by the sublime in this novel. A 'break out' may not necessarily be manifested externally, but may be validated in abstract, internal process, as it is for Maggie, in her decision to confront Charlotte in the form of passivity, refusal to be 'rearranged', rather than action. This is consolidated in the scene where Adam presents Maggie's chosen solution to the problem – his and Charlotte's return to American City – to her as a real possibility. Maggie articulates her reaction in the figurative imagery of the sublime:

It was a blur of light, in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked, by contrast, in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed. (*GB*, vol.2, p.271)

The 'fascination of the monstrous' here translates into intensely visual terms, in which the notion of their relational network being disbanded figures as an appropriately ambivalent one. Contained within the sensory experience of the sublime which Maggie herself undergoes is the consciousness of Charlotte as the figure who will, in turn, be overwhelmed. Yet the consequences of the triumphant 'blur of light' that represents the sublime are, in spite of Maggie's immediate focus, not confined to the 'doom' of Charlotte. She has already imagined the effect on her relation with her father in terms of death and violence:

'Sacrifice me!' [...] She might verily hear him bleating it at her, all conscious and accommodating, like some precious, spotless, exceptionally intelligent lamb. (*GB*, vol.2, p.82-83)

This image is also applied to Nanda, who is superficially being sacrificed to spinsterhood; though in practical terms, she is retiring from an urban circle of movement to a virtually exclusive pairing with Mr Longden in the country (*AA*, p.232). What she sacrifices is the exclusive pairing of her choice – with Vanderbank – not the concept of pairing itself. Adam, similarly, is hardly being sacrificed to singleness in leaving England with his wife; nevertheless, they originally formed their partnership on the basis of being two 'odd ones', and that is the light in which Maggie continues to view it. The Verver marriage becomes a pairing by default, whereas the marriage of Maggie and Amerigo becomes at last, for better or worse, an exclusive partnership of choice.

James's late novels often show a correlation, in protagonists, between an aptitude for singleness and the ability to project themselves as 'finished', highly polished creations. This is the case with Chad Newsome, and initially with Charlotte; Nanda and Maisie, without the same degree of sexual self-assurance,

have a similar talent for polished, mature public behaviour. Maggie partakes of both these models, as is shown in Fanny's observation of her:

It had ever been her sign that she was, for all occasions, *found* ready, without loose ends or exposed accessories or unremoved superfluities; a suggestion of the swept and garnished, in her whole splendid, yet thereby more or less encumbered and embroidered setting, that reflected her small still passion for order and symmetry, for objects with their backs to the walls, and spoke even of some probable reference, in her American blood, to dusting and polishing New England grandmothers. (*GB*, vol.2, pp.152-53)

This habit of being '*found* ready' locates the generation of Maggie's 'small still passion for order' in a constant performance of the finished product. She is characterised by stillness – Fanny sees no development, no movement, no glimpses of Maggie as a work in progress, in the way that Roderick Hudson and Isabel Archer are portrayed as beings in formation, progressing along the journey of their *bildungsroman*. *The Golden Bowl* begins from the premise that its major characters – and in particular Maggie, who eventually becomes its major protagonist – are still and finished beings. She starts from what she believes to be completeness and perfection, living as part of a group in which everyone's needs are fulfilled. However, the very absence of 'loose ends' indicates either an innate ability to achieve flawlessness, or a perhaps unconscious recognition of the need to guard against them. If the vessel is full to the brim, any movement will make it overflow – an image Maggie herself uses in her conversation with Amerigo on his return from Gloucester (*GB*, vol.2, p.18).

The image of wholeness which Fanny imputes to Maggie results from a great deal of careful construction and artistry: the 'sweeping and garnishing', the removing of superfluities, whose existence is implied, again, by the use of 'unremoved'. However, Maggie is 'more or less encumbered and embroidered', suggesting either that she is not, even now, free of superfluities (for surely

embroideries and encumbrances would be just that) or that these encumbrances are somehow necessary, playing a part in sustaining the illusion of wholeness. Fanny's registering of these contradictory elements in her vision of Maggie reveals that even she, if unconsciously, is sceptical about the display Maggie works to maintain. The fiction of the group's existence in conditions of 'order and symmetry' operates by Fanny and the others publicly adhering to the system in an attempt to generate genuine belief in it; their actions do not stem in the first place from an inner conviction of the power of this symmetry.

Maggie's perseverance with her 'small still passion' for these things becomes at best a mixed blessing, as does her relations with the members of her family group, something potently expressed by her reaction to them as they sit playing a game of cards, while she spectates, at Fawns:

Erect above all for her was the sharp-edged fact of the relation of the whole group, individually and collectively, to herself – herself so speciously eliminated for the hour, but presumably more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played. (*GB*, vol.2, p.232)

This scene spatially characterises the structural pattern of the whole novel: an apparently symmetrical group that has an extra person prowling round, actually upsetting the symmetry. Though that extra person is not counted in the group, the group is nevertheless defined (as the outsider is defined) by their exclusion.³⁹

'Sharp-edged' recalls the earlier 'cut into pairs and parties', implying that these connections are damaging rather than supportive. Maggie's more adept handling of the situation produces the sublime effect of an absence in which it equates to a dominating presence – in the way that the movement of everyone equates to the movement of no-one. By refusing to move in time with the others, to play their game, Maggie interrupts their own movement, since collusion is what keeps it, as

³⁹Even visitors to Fawns seem to be only admitted if in pairs: the Assinghams, Kitty and Dotty. Charlotte is the disruptive, single exception to this rule.

the family coach, running smoothly. In becoming aware of her own power to be sublime, in her connection to everyone – she can elect to be self-effacing - the hollow centre, like Milly Theale - or overwhelming.

Ultimately Maggie refuses the role of being self-effacing and of finding completeness in completing the relations between others, as she become aware of their wish for her to do so:

An appeal [...] that seemed to speak, on the part of each, of some relation to be contrived by her, a relation with herself, which would spare the individual the danger, the actual present strain, of the relation with the others. (*GB*, vol.2, p.243)

In refusing to act for them, to facilitate their relations, Maggie forces them to form relations with one another. She finally abdicates from the situation described by Strether as 'living by the sweat of one's brow', in both knowing everything and ceasing to care, or certainly to *manage*. She moves from active passivity to passive activity; in being seen not to have moved from her designated role as a still centre, she is in actuality empowered to do so, and to resign from managing the relations of the group. As a result, Adam and Charlotte have to relate directly to one another, as they do in their departing scene:

Mr. and Mrs. Verver were making the occasion easy. They were somehow conjoined in it, conjoined for a present effect as Maggie had absolutely never yet seen them. (*GB*, vol.2, p.357)

The Ververs' self-presentation here embodies their status as a pair by default; while 'conjoined in it', they nevertheless move independently of each other, even to the extent of diverging. Adam takes the active role in this respect, Charlotte being once more 'fixed':

He had a way, the dear man, of moving about the room, noiselessly, to see what it might contain; and his manner of now resorting to this habit, acquainted as he already was with the objects in view, expressed with a certain sharpness the intention of leaving his wife to her devices. (*GB*, vol.2, p.358)

James's sardonic application of 'the dear man' both ironises Maggie's worship of her father and draws attention to the less than palatable traits he exhibits here.

Charlotte is isolated and, by contrast, immobilised; Adam's moving 'noiselessly', moreover, has a sinister effect. However, there is no final resolution of whether the Ververs' partnership is characterised more by their new 'conjoinment' or by attached diversity, since the last spatial representation of the four protagonists together shows them momentarily reverting, in arrangement, to their earlier, transgressive pairings:

Their [Maggie and Adam's] eyes moved together from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness [...] Mrs Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene. [...] The note was struck indeed; the note of that strange accepted finality of relation, as from couple to couple, which almost escaped an awkwardness only by now attempting a gloss. (*GB*, vol.2, pp.360-61)

Charlotte's act of 'placing herself' enacts her acceptance of a subordination to the imperatives of the new, unbalanced system, that Amerigo has now also chosen. Maggie participates in a survey of apparent wholeness she *must* know to be false; the clear motives for doing so are to maintain the public illusion for these final moments together, and also to sustain the belief her father still has (or may have) in that system. Adam's sharpness does not indicate conclusively that he shares Maggie's knowledge. As a practitioner of adopting the 'fixed' position that gives him the least work to do, and causes the least disturbance to his projected lifestyle, he can be seen as taking the line of least resistance, even in the face of knowing about his wife and son-in-law's affair. On the other hand, a partial perception of the changes in the system's delicate balance is itself enough to account for his actions, and more consonant with his character and attributes. Without necessarily having detailed knowledge of the affair, he is unlikely not to have perceived that Maggie has, for whatever reason, altered her approach to life

and to the relations within their family group. Therefore, Adam changes his behaviour in accordance with the changes in the group dynamic initiated by Maggie, without knowing, or perhaps wishing *not* to know, what might motivate such a change. His interest in human relations beyond his pairing with Maggie (and the Principino) is cursory and abstract; while he might not wish those relations to change, Maggie has irrevocably imposed such a change. By following her lead he maintains the symbiosis which characterised their pairing, though he loses the physical, routine proximity to her and the Principino which has until now been the balanced form of life.

In chapter four of this thesis, I argued that critics often mistakenly regard *The Golden Bowl*, in particular, as the perfect form to which all of James's fictions aspires; the gold standard he finally achieved. My reading of the novel here does not, I believe, contradict that view, but is consonant with an estimation of *The Golden Bowl* as a peak in James's writing career – a fiction whose structure marks a new stage and turning point in his style. If so, it is a profound one, being the last full-length novel he ever completed. What is it, then, about *The Golden Bowl* that creates this impasse? As it happens, something similar to the qualities of *Portrait*, in terms of reaching a boundary beyond which he feels it wrong to venture. Maggie Verver is the one Jamesian protagonist who finally surrenders the will to control the balance of her situation to the overwhelming force of the sublime, as opposed to the more common Jamesian renunciation of a character's situation to the symmetrical and regulating forces of their individual peers and social groups. In doing so she is, as one critic puts it, neither witch nor saint. She embodies something unrepresented by James until now: a protagonist who is *seen* to let go of the ideal of balance. While in the narrated short-term this brings success for Maggie, in the longer term, it is impossible to say to what this

imbalance would lead. To embrace the sublime is to step into the unknowable – on the brink of which Maggie is left at the end of the novel, with James only able, in good faith, to focus on the narrow field of hers and Amerigo's embrace. Therefore, no fictional protagonist can go beyond Maggie – the non-narratable, utterly fluid, is what would be found there. If anything and any movement can occur, what can be selected - as James would say - from that to make a narrative?

James's correspondence with his elder brother William frequently incorporated dialogue about the perceived success, or otherwise, of his fictions. In the autumn of 1905 he received from William, who had just read *The Golden Bowl*, a request to write something with 'no fencing in the dialogue, no psychological commentaries, and absolute straightness in the style'.⁴⁰ In his reply, James stated:

I will write you your book, on that two-and-two-make-four system on which all the awful truck that surrounds us is produced, and then descend to my dishonoured grave – taking up the art of the slate pencil instead of the art of the brush.⁴¹

The counting metaphor has significance beyond a simple inference that most fiction of the day is formulaic. The schoolroom connotations of 'two-plus-two' and the 'slate pencil' suggest that James is rejecting what he sees as an immature mode of comprehension, in favour of one which goes beyond straightforward addition. His late fiction, then is exploring elements beyond the laws of mathematics, but which are inevitably investigated and expressed in those terms. Mathematics itself was by no means a fixed and stable entity (or, for James, enemy) but was undergoing a parallel expansion during the last years of the nineteenth century, as it would continue to do during the twentieth. Strother B.

⁴⁰ Letter from William James to Henry James, October 1905, quoted in *CH*, p.392.

⁴¹ Letter from Henry James to William James, November 1905, quoted in *CH*, p.393.

Purdy, whose critical study of James focuses on science, comments briefly on the expansion of mathematics:

Mathematical knowledge may be said to have doubled between 1850 and 1900, doubled again from 1900 to 1950, and again from 1950 to 1970, but it still has become increasingly apparent, as Einstein pointed out, that precision in mathematics has little relation to reality. Until the late nineteenth century, mathematicians were generally confident that their subject dealt with physical reality, and that the problems it generated were capable of solution, given time and application, in a manner parallel to that of other disciplines. [...] Few would care to make such an assertion today [...] it became clear that the unsolvability of certain problems, the unanswerability of certain questions, basic to the nature of mathematics, had been formally recognised. In these areas, mathematics seems now more like a game of human invention than an uncovering of the numerical aspects of reality. The best that can be hoped for about the game is that it teaches us about reality...⁴²

All of James's late novels refer not only to mathematics but also to game-playing as characterising the behavioural patterns of protagonists like Chad Newsome and Charlotte Stant. This vision of mathematics, as a way of comprehending the world which is, however, less than scientific and more like a speculative game, is one of the best descriptions of the events of James's late novels. The mathematical metaphors that are a constant presence promise rationality, logic and completeness which they can only partially deliver. Nevertheless, they are both important and, in the end, useful to these Jamesian protagonists – and readers – who learn from them, if nothing else, both the 'unsolvability of certain problems', and something about reality.

⁴²Strother B. Purdy, *The Hole in the Fabric: Science, Contemporary Literature, and Henry James* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1977), p.5.

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