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THOMAS G. CORBETT, B. A.

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AUTHOR: Thomas George Corbett, B.A. (Oxford University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor James D. Brasch

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis grew out of a chance remark made in a graduate course on the fiction of Henry James. The class was working on The Aspern Papers and concentrating particularly on the inconsistencies of the editor's narrative when I chanced the remark that the questions arising over the reliability of the editor's point of view reminded me of the situation of the governess in The Turn of the Screw. On the advice of the course instructor, Dr. James D. Brasch, I began to pursue a study of the similarities in the two tales as a possible thesis project. At that time I was aware of the existence of the critical controversy over The Turn of the Screw, but not of its proportions. Months later, having made a preliminary run at the mountain of critical work, I was firmly convinced that the answer to the controversy lay somewhere in the relationship of the two tales. This view seemed to be confirmed by two major critics in the field.

Edmund Wilson could not claim to be the instigator of the controversy. That credit must go really to Edna Kenton[1] who, in 1924, proposed that the supernatural events of The Turn of the Screw

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[1]Edna Kenton, "Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: The Turn of the Screw," The Arts, VI (November, 1924), 245-255.

are hallucinations of the nervous governess. What Wilson did was to try and show systematically that the governess' hallucinations are the direct result of her repressed sexual drives.[2] This Freudian analysis really began a storm that has yet to subside. The storm caused Wilson to retract, restate and modify his position. One important point which Wilson made has never been fully explored: in the New York edition of The Novels and Tales of Henry James, the tale is placed between The Aspern Papers and "The Liar". I believe this positioning to be significant.

In a paper given to the M. L. A. conference in December 1950, Leon Edel reiterated this point.[3] His paper outlines a possible basis from which James may have collected the twenty-three volumes of the New York edition based on Balzac's twenty three volume collected works. Edel notes that James' Volume 17 is the only volume devoted to "ghost stories" or "stories of the supernatural", but that his most well-known "ghost story", The Turn of the Screw is missing. It is placed in Volume 12 between The Aspern Papers and "The Liar" with the short story "The Two Faces" making up the collection. Edel

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[2]Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James", Hound and Horn, VII (April-June, 1934), 385-406.

[3]Leon Edel, "The Architecture of James's 'New York Edition'", New England Quarterly, XXIV (June, 1951), 169-178.

designates the four tales as "tales of curiosity" reflecting the fact that all four point of view characters find themselves in puzzling situations which they attempt to resolve.

It is always surprising to find that in writers like James, to whom a good deal of critical attention has been paid, whole fertile areas of investigation are left virtually untouched by the critics. This is true of the New York edition. Since Edel's brief, but important, article, very little has appeared in print on the subject. In this thesis, then, I feel justified in making a study of Volume 12, even at the cost of repeating much that is well known about the first three tales, in order to bring out the inherent unity of the volume.

There are three main threads of unity in the volume. The first of these threads is in the characterisation of the central character in each tale. In all four cases an ironic portrait is drawn of them and I will show that, although the operative irony becomes clearer as we read from the first tale to the last, it is no less, or more important, in the portrait of the anonymous editor of The Aspern Papers than it is in the portrait of Mrs. Grantham in "The Two Faces".

The second thread of unity may be summed up in the single word, "romance". Elements of romanticism, whether an integral part of the narrative technique, a system of ironic references by use of plot analogues to well-known romantic works, an atmosphere, or

simply overtones, are present in all four tales. Like the use of operative irony, the element of romance is used progressively in a clearer way through the four tales. The third thread of unity, the thematic correspondences of the four tales, follows naturally from the investigation of the first two and is, therefore, best left to the conclusion of this thesis.

Being sensible of the greater weight which The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw hold in the James canon over the two short stories and acutely aware of the complexity of the controversy over the second tale, I have decided to pursue my arguments in a strictly linear fashion. Thus Chapter I is devoted to The Aspern Papers and Chapter II to The Turn of the Screw. With the exception of the first section of Chapter I, the two chapters are identical in process. First I detail the narrative techniques which are used to convey the ironic characterisation of the two narrators. Secondly, I investigate the romantic qualities inherent in both narratives. These arguments demonstrate quite conclusively the systematic irony at work in both tales. In the first half of Chapter III, I bring together these threads to show that there is a common theme in the two tales. In the second half of that chapter, I demonstrate that the two remaining short stories pick up those threads of ironies and romance and state the common themes in a simplified fashion, thus acting as sort of artistic

footnotes to the two major tales.

I am aware of the charge that using one work of art to explain or clarify another is held by many to be an unjustifiable procedure. This is another reason why I have pursued my argument in a linear fashion from one tale to the next. Each of my readings of the four tales could stand alone. I have put them together not simply to prove my point, but because James brought them together and presented them to his reading public as one volume. We are accustomed to poets collecting their works around thematic principles and are prepared to treat them accordingly. Why should we not extend the process to writers of prose fiction when they ask us to do so?

Another problem arises from treating of the New York edition. James revised and rewrote his tales, often extensively, for that project. It may be argued that, by dealing with that edition, I have written on a different tale from The Turn of the Screw that was written in 1898. I think that the work of Cranfill and Clark[4] has shown that James' revisions do not alter the tale, but emphasise a reading that

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[4] Thomas M. Cranfill and Robert L. Clark Jr., An Anatomy of The Turn of the Screw, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965). ----------. "James's Revisions of The Turn of the Screw", Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XIX (March, 1965), 394-398.

was already there in the original. The same is true of the revisions to The Aspern Papers and "The Liar".

One final note remains to be dealt with in this introduction. In the first part of Chapter I, I have used some of James' comments on narrative and point of view in The Art of the Novel, to demonstrate his views on first-person narration. The collected prefaces are notoriously difficult to use and there is always the danger that James is saying something with his tongue in his cheek and that one is not aware of it. For instance, he declares that the first-person narrator was "never much my affair", but we know that sixty or more of his works were written in that form. I have used the prefaces merely as a convenience, a starting point, or springboard into my analyses of the two nouvelles. All that I have said of his use of the first-person in those analyses could have been demonstrated without recourse to the prefaces, but at a cost of greatly increased length to this thesis.

I

HERO AND HISTORIAN: THE ASPERN PAPERS

1. James on First-Person Narration

The Aspern Papers has assumed a very high place in critical circles among the works of Henry James. It is regarded by most as one of the highlights of James' work during his middle years and as one of the finest examples of his command of the nouvelle genre. It has even come to be treated by some as a perfect tale. Nevertheless, however much it may approach perfection, there are questions to be answered with regard to this work. These questions arise particularly over James' attitude towards his anonymous narrator and generally in reference to the artistic "tone" of the work.

The most striking feature of The Aspern Papers which we first encounter is the use of a first-person narrator. It is not my intention here to review the whole problem of point of view in the fiction of Henry James since that has been done extensively by other commentators of his work. For the purposes of this thesis I want to highlight one of his rare comments on the use of first-person narration and to place it, briefly, in the context of his more extensive analysis of the point of view character in general. The primary source for the study of James'

critical comments on narrative techniques is the collected prefaces to the New York edition of his works, published in 1934 as The Art of the Novel.[1]

In the preface to The Ambassadors, James discusses the complex problem with which he confronted himself in the writing of this novel. The Ambassadors is among the finest examples of his ability to reveal a character's innermost being by a sustained and minute scrutiny of growth and change within the character. For him the establishment of character in fiction is a process of controlled revelation. He reveals to the reader the growth or evolution of the character as the character himself becomes aware of that growth and the problem which presents itself in this method is

> . . . the question of how to keep [his] form amusing [to the reader] while sticking so close to [his] central figure and constantly taking its pattern from him.[2]

During the course of this preface, he discusses the particular problem which he had faced in presenting the character of Lambert Strether and among the possibilities which had presented themselves was the technique of first-person narration which James had rejected.

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[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), ed. R. P. Blackmur.

[2]Ibid., 320.

> Had I meanwhile, made him [Strether] at once hero and historian, endowed him with the romantic privilege of the "first person"--the darkest abyss of romance this, inveterately, when enjoyed on the grand scale--variety, and many other queer matters as well, might have been smuggled in by a back door. Suffice it, to be brief, that the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness, and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little so as on this particular occasion.[3]

The passage raises two issues which are central to this thesis: the first is the equation of first-person narration with "looseness" in fiction, and the second, the identification of it with the form of romance. The question of romance will return later in this chapter when I shall investigate the tone of The Aspern Papers, but, for the moment, I wish to concentrate on the issue of "looseness" which is raised here.

It is notable that, in this passage, James makes his comments on first-person narration in the context of fiction written "on the grand scale", in the context of "the long piece", in other words the full length novel. From this the objection may be raised that the comments may not be applied to The Aspern Papers since it is not a "long piece" in the sense that The Ambassadors and the other major novels are. It is clear, however, that The Aspern Papers is a

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[3] James, Art of the Novel, 320.

nouvelle and, from his comments on the nouvelle form, it is also clear that James saw no place for "looseness" in that form. In The Art of the Novel there are many discussions of form in fiction and in the preface to The Lesson of the Master he envisages "our ideal, the beautiful and blest nouvelle" as opposed to the short-story, defined by the Anglo-Saxon mind on the arbitrary level of length.

> It was under the star of the nouvelle that, in other languages, a hundred interesting and charming results, such studies on the minor scale as the best of Turgenieff's, of Balzac's, of Maupassant's, of Bourget's, and just lately, in our own tongue, of Kipling's had been, all economically, arrived at--thanks to their authors', as "contributors", having been able to count, right and left, on a wise and liberal support. It had taken the blank misery of our Anglo-Saxon sense of such matters to organise, as might be said, the general indifference to this fine type of composition. In that dull view a "short story" was a "short story", and that was the end of it. Shades and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily developed, languished, to extinction, under the hard-and-fast rule of the "from six to eight thousand words"--when, for one's benefit, the rigour was a little relaxed. For myself, I delighted in the shapely nouvelle--as, for that matter, I had from time to time and here and there been almost encouraged to show.[4]

The implication is that the short story is a form incapable of the development and variety which the novel can achieve on the grand

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[4]James, Art of the Novel, 220.

scale, whereas the nouvelle is capable of these things on the "minor scale". In the achievement of these things, however, there is as much need for artistic control in the "shapely" nouvelle form as there is in the full-scale novel, as becomes clear at the end of this preface where, speaking of The Coxon Fund, James calls it a

> . . . marked example of the possible scope, at once, and the possible neatness of the nouvelle, [which] takes its place for me in a series of which the main merit and sign is the effort to do the complicated thing with a strong brevity and lucidity--to arrive, on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control.[5]

Thus the distinction between the short-story, the nouvelle and the novel proper, comes down to one of "scope". Like the short-story, the general appearance of the nouvelle form is "brevity", but unlike the short-story and like the novel, the aim of the nouvelle form is "multiplicity". It is a multiplicity however, which is to be arrived at without departing from the keynotes of the nouvelle form which are "neatness" and "control", the opposite of that "looseness" which obviously has no more currency in James' thoughts on the nouvelle, than it does in his comments on the novel.

Most commentators, however, in reading The Aspern Papers, have been struck by the looseness of the anonymous publisher's

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[5]James, Art of the Novel, 231.

narrative. At times it lacks clarity and, apparently, the reader is often left to his own devices when attempting to discern the "facts" of the situation through the clouded medium of the anonymous publisher. We are all aware of the critical controversy which surrounds The Turn of the Screw. Probably less well known is the fact that the seeds of controversy are sewn into The Aspern Papers as well, since readers can question the very existence of the papers. By contrast to the storm over The Turn of the Screw, the argument between Jacob Korg and Robert S. Phillips in College English[6] over Korg's hypothesis that the papers do not exist, is something of a tempest in a teacup, but it is indicative of the open-ended quality of the narrative. In The Aspern Papers there is an air, or quality of "looseness" which would seem to be at odds with what James considers to be his "affair" in the production of literature. If we are not to adopt the inconsistent view of regarding this as a fundamental failing in a highly-esteemed work, then we must assume the looseness to be intentional and consider what implications this has for our view of James' attitude to this work.

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[6] Jacob Korg, "What Aspern Papers? A Hypothesis", College English, XXIII (February, 1962), 378-381. See reply by Robert S. Phillips in XXIV (November, 1962), 154-155.

The anonymous publisher of The Aspern Papers is both the "hero and historian" of his own tale, the very combination which James rejects in the comment on first-person narration quoted above. It is the chronicle of his own experiences in the villa of the Bordereaus which forms the subject of his tale and it is his reactions to those experiences which form the meat on that narrative skeleton. As such, his tale appears to be the stuff of which fiction is made, as James describes it in the preface to The Princess Casamassima.

> What a man thinks and what he feels are the history and the character of what he does; on all of which things the logic of intensity rests.[7]

"Intensity" is a word which is made to jump through many hoops in James' critical writing. At times he will speak of the intensity of emotion in a fictional character, at others of the intensity with which an atmosphere is evoked by a particular scene, or, in a more complicated critical sense, the intensity of the "picture" which a novelist paints. In the preface to What Maisie Knew[8] we are confronted by the bald statement that, by their very nature, little girls possess more intense sensibilities than little boys, while in the preface to The

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[7] James, Art of the Novel, 66.

[8] Ibid., 143-144.

Princess Casamassima[9] we find him conplaining that Scott, in The Bride of Lammermoor, has sacrificed intensity (i. e. "the centre of [his] subject") as a direct result of his "great romantic good faith". Many and varied are the uses to which James subjects the word "intensity", but, even if we can not arrive at a definition of the phrase "logic of intensity", we must at least decide to what aspect of the creation of fiction it is applied. Here, I think, we must decide that it applies to the point of view character, or characters, for in the works of James the position from which a story is told is the largest part of the question of the fashion in which it is told.

From this we may gather that the "logic of intensity" is missing from the ordinary function of the historian, for in his ordinary role the historian chronicles only what a man sees and does, rather than "what a man thinks and what he feels". This function of mere chronicler is, for James, anathema to the role of creative artist. A simple catalogue of the experiences of a life can not be the true "history and the character" of that life, since the thoughts and the feelings evoked by experience are necessary to an understanding of the "character" of that life.

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[9] James, Art of the Novel, 68.

> There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connection than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it.[10]

"Felt life", then, is the moral index of an individual character. It is his or her ability not only to experience the world, but to bring to that experience an inner sense of value. It is the function of the point of view character in James' fiction to reveal to us that experience of felt life.

On the surface our hero-historian, the anonymous publisher, would seem adequate to his task since he is concerned not only with chronicling what he saw and did, but also what he thought and felt during his adventure. Yet the reaction of the reader is hardly to praise him for his moral sense. On the contrary he is condemned as being at least immoral and probably amoral. The key to this must lie in what James called "the terrible _fluidity_ of self-revelation",[11] in other words the looseness of first-person narration. In _The Aspern Papers_, the centre of consciousness is not only the source of revelation, but is also the subject of revelation and as such becomes suspect because of its subjectivity. We may investigate this point by considering other Jamesian heroes and their history.

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[10] James, _Art of the Novel_, 45.

[11] _Ibid._, 321.

The Aspern Papers deals with the European adventure of an American hero. It is the story of a man going to an old European capital on a specific quest and of his failure to achieve the goal of that quest. As such it bears a resemblance to one of James' earlier "international" novels, The American (1877). The hero of The American is Christopher Newman and the novel is the history of Newman's unsuccessful quest. However, this hero is not his own historian, his tale is not told in the first-person. There is no doubt that his mind and his sensibility are the centre of the novel.

> If Newman was attaching enough, I must have argued, his tangle would be sensible enough; for the interest of everything is all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we "assist". He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it.[12]

However he does not tell his own tale. There is a centre of consciousness at work in the novel which is beside, but not inside, the hero. An anonymous narrator is present to "narrate" Newman's mind to us. The excesses of subjectivity, the "terrible fluidity of self-revelation", are thus kept out of the novel by the control which this centre of consciousness exerts. Newman is "attaching" because

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[12]James, Art of the Novel, 37.

the centre of consciousness controls the reader's reaction to him. We are _given_ a sense of a noble creature, victim of circumstance, who battles with himself to achieve the noble action in the face of what he sees as a monstrous betrayal. At no point really do we witness the internal battle. The difference with the anonymous publisher of _The Aspern Papers_ is that there is no separate centre of consciousness to protect us from his sense of paranoia. Newman reacts to a growing situation which confronts him, to achieve at the last a moral balance; the anonymous narrator acts on a given plan with which he confronts the world and collapses to near-hysteria when it does not work. Thus while Newman's mind is at the centre of the novel, the subject is his reaction and its effect on him, while in _The Aspern Papers_, the mind itself is both centre and subject. To emphasise that his moral failing is excessive subjectivity and that this is the source of looseness in the narrative, we may compare the anonymous publisher to another character, himself a hero-historian.

Roderick Hudson (1875) is another tale of an American's quest in the Old World. Roderick is a sculptor struggling to work in New England who is discovered by Rowland Mallet, a man rich enough to drift through life without any particular purpose. In Roderick he finds a purpose and he takes the young sculptor to Europe where it is hoped that, under the spell of European art and culture, he will

develop into a great artist. Roderick finds inspiration to produce some great works, but he also finds Christina Light (later Princess Casamassima) who is engaged in the aristocratic marriage market. Through his entanglement with her, Roderick loses his "inspiration" to work, he loses his "love" for his financee Mary Garland and he loses his life, possibly at his own hands.

This, briefly, is the history of Roderick Hudson who is the subject of the novel, but he is not his own historian; this particular history is related through the "window" of Rowland Mallet's consciousness. In the preface to the novel, James deals with Rowland's consciousness.

> It had, naturally, Rowland's consciousness, not to be too acute--which would have disconnected it and made it superhuman: the beautiful little problem was to keep it connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure, and thereby bedimmed and befooled and bewildered, anxious, restless, fallible, and yet to endow it with such intelligence that the appearances reflected in it and constituting together there the situation and the "story", should become by that fact intelligible. [13]

Here, in microcosm, is the central point of James' position on point of view. If Rowland is to be the historian of Roderick Hudson he must, at all costs, not be "too acute". In other words, he must not become the "superhuman", "disconnected", omniscient narrator familiar to

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[13] James, Art of the Novel, 16.

readers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction. He must at all times remain as human and, as near as possible, true-to-life as the other characters. He must never lose a sense of fallibility which at times is expressed in bewilderment at the human activities he observes. As the novel unfolds it becomes clear that Roderick the doer is the subject of the novel, but Rowland the reflector is the centre. Thus, in a sense, Rowland is also a hero-historian, but the marked difference between him and the hero-historian of The Aspern Papers is again in the degree of subjectivity. Rowland's narrative is revelatory, but the element of self-revelation which it contains is secondary to Roderick's "story". Rowland's crisis revolves around his growing love for Mary Garland which coincides with Roderick's alienation from her, but at no point does he allow selfish motives to interfere with his actions. By contrast, the anonymous publisher at no point allows any motive other than the selfish to interfere.

The key words in the description of Rowland's consciousness are nearly all applicable to the anonymous publisher. He is at all times "bedimmed", "befooled", "bewildered", "anxious", "restless", "fallible", but he always lacks Rowland's "intelligence" and the intelligence of Christopher Newman's anonymous historian, and is therefore incapable of dealing with his experiences. In the preface to The Princess Casamassima James deals with this "intelligence".

> This in fact I have ever found rather terribly the point--that the figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it. But there are degrees of feeling--the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense, the complete, in a word--the power to be finely aware and richly responsible. It is those moved in this latter fashion who "get most" out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get most.[14]

In conclusion, Rowland Mallet and Christopher Newman are Americans engaged on personal quests in Europe. The first is the hero and historian of Roderick Hudson, the second is the hero whose history is related in The American. Both men are characterised by those Jamesian graces, a fine awareness and a rich sense of responsibility. In contract, the American questor of The Aspern Papers is characterised by a marked lack of acuteness and a distorted sense of responsibility. Worse, he is allowed to be the hero and historian of his own quest and to indulge in that "terrible fluidity of self-revelation". This is the basis of that "looseness" which James had stated to be "never much my affair". What is more, the importance of looseness in The Aspern Papers suggeststhat this time it was very much his affair. If we are to arrive,then, at the tone of

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[14]James, Art of the Novel, 62.

The Aspern Papers we must first investigate this looseness and its source, the narrative and the narrator.

2. Inconsistency in the Anonymous Editor's Narrative

The "looseness" which we find in the narrative of The Aspern Papers is largely a question of narrative inconsistency. As the previous section will have demonstrated, it is often difficult to decide exactly how James uses such words in his critical vocabulary and one is always aware of the dangers of circular definitions. However, I think that we may successfully use the phrase "logic of intensity" as a contrast which will define narrative "looseness". If "intensity" is taken to be a measure of the acuteness or intelligence of the centre of consciousness, then the "logic of intensity" is the quality of credibility which leads us to accept the process of understanding which the centre of consciousness applies to the events of the narrative. The degree to which this "logic" is accepted by the reader is directly proportional to the amount of "felt life" which the centre of consciousness exhibits, that is, the honesty with which he or she attempts to apply a system of moral values, or, to arrive at a moral understanding of the situation in which they find themselves.

The narrative of The Aspern Papers may often be characterised by a lack of this sense of "felt life". The system of values which the editor brings to his situation is full of glaring inconsistencies and

changes, most often for the worse, as the narrative unfolds. Furthermore, those occasions when the editor as character attempts to come to a moral understanding of his situation are disrupted by the editor as narrator's flimsy attempts to justify his past actions. The inconsistencies of the narrative then arise from the double role of the anonymous editor which, it is important to repeat, is not merely that of both character and narrator, but to use James' own terms, is that of "hero and historian" of his own adventure. The "looseness" then arises out of the different time schemes, and therefore perspectives, in which the narrator and the hero operate.

The opening sentence gives us the clue that the narrative is to be a historical reconstruction of the past and not simply a narrative unfolding of the events.

> I had taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence; without her in truth I should have made but little advance, for the fruitful idea in the whole business dropped from her friendly lips.[15]

The use of the pluperfect tense in the first phrase informs us that we are to be given a chronicle of events already completed in the past and that this small preliminary fact, from the yet more distant past,

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[15]Henry James, The Novels and Tales of Henry James, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), XII, 3. Subsequent references to the four tales of this volume and to the preface will be identified by page numbers enclosed in parentheses immediately after the reference.

is a necessary aid to us in understanding the chronicle which is about to unfold. The second phrase, "without her in truth I should have made but little advance", implies that there has indeed been advance in the affair, while the third phrase implies "that the whole business" has been completed with some significant success as a result of the "fruitful idea" which Mrs. Prest has given him. We have before us in this opening sentence then a triple time-scheme which will inform the whole course of the nouvelle.

The first of these levels of time which we may call the primary time-scheme, is that summer in Venice during which the affair of The Aspern Papers takes place in the palace of the Bordereaus. This primary time-scheme is the central concern of the narrative and is the period during which the plot of the nouvelle unfolds. The second time-scheme of the narrative is the editor's past up to the day on the canals of Venice which is described in the opening chapter. The opening phrase of the nouvelle, "I had taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence", takes us back into the secondary time-scheme, although not too far back. As the first chapter unfolds, however, this secondary time-scheme becomes much more important. We learn from the anonymous narrator's reflections on this past time-scheme of his collaborations with his colleague, John Cumnor, in the uncovering and editing of the work of the poet, Jeffrey Aspern. It also becomes

apparent that the narrative which is about to unfold before us, is the story of a campaign, the plan of which had been worked out well in advance in collaboration with Cumnor.

This secondary time-scheme is always felt to be present during the narrative as the anonymous publisher attempts to relate the events, as they actually happen to him, back to his original plan. We may complicate this secondary time-scheme by including in it the past of Jeffrey Aspern, Juliana and Tina Bordereau, but since our only source of information in the tale is the anonymous publisher, and we remain as mystified as to the "true facts" of those past lives as he does, then for the present we can ignore this aspect of the secondary time-scheme. The third of these time-schemes is what we may call the editor's present, in other words the time at which he is writing down the narrative. In a work in which the narrator was less obtrusive or was less concerned with himself than with other people, this third time-scheme would have little relevance. In The Aspern Papers, however, the anonymous publisher is the most obtrusive of narrators. He never allows us to forget him as narrator when he is dealing with himself as character. He can never resist allowing present reflections on the past to interfere with his relation of how events in the past affected him at the time. The result is that this third time-scheme becomes of primary importance and is one of the

major sources of "looseness" in the nouvelle.

All this implies that the anonymous editor, in his role as historian, does not simply re-tell the events of the past, indeed he reconstructs the past and, in some senses at least, reconstitutes it. On the surface he appears to be concerned with sorting out his impressions as they occurred to him in the past from the impressions which he has in the present of those past events. As the narrative unfolds it becomes obvious that he is not always capable of doing this. The result for the reader is that we are on shifting sands where the reliability of his point of view is concerned. Just as the editor as character is often unsure of the reason behind events, such as why Juliana wears a green shade over her eyes or why she so insists in treating their relationship purely on a pecuniary level, (it is notable that he never fully accepts Tina's explanation that Juliana is simply trying to amass a legacy for her), so the editor as historian is often unsure of exactly why he did something or of adopting an objective view of his own actions and his own motives. Anna Brylowski highlights this lack of perspective in her study of The Aspern Papers.[16]

> His ability to see himself objectively or from a general perspective is limited to a few flashes of sudden illumination which he insists on rationalising away.

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[16]Anna S. Brylowski, "In Defense of the First Person Narrator in The Aspern Papers", The Centennial Review, XIII (1969), 217.

We may be charitable and say that all this could be the result of a faulty memory or of a generally human failing, that is the inability to view things in a wider perspective, but the text implies that there are more questionable reasons for the narrator's unreliability.

In the opening chapter he reveals to us (through conversation with Mrs. Prest) the lengths to which he is prepared to go and the character which he is prepared to adopt in order to obtain the papers.

> I can arrive at my spoils only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic arts. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm sorry for it, but there's no baseness I would n't commit for Jeffrey Aspern's sake (11-12).

He and Cumnor have already decided (with some justification from their correspondence with the Bordereaus) that straight-talking and straight-dealing are not going to bring the Aspern papers to light. In his efforts to uncover the papers the editor has assumed a false name and (at least we are led to believe) assumed a false character in which hypocrisy and duplicity are the key words. Flattery, the outward behaviour of a hypocritical person, is to be his prime weapon in dealing with the Bordereaus, perhaps I should say double-dealing. As the narrative unfolds the editor as historian will convince himself, and attempt to convince his readers, that he did not actually lie in his attempts to rescue the Aspern papers from the ladies. However, not to tell a lie is not necessarily to tell the truth. As with many moral

questions there are many shades of differences and colour between the black lie and the white truth. In explaining to Mrs. Prest why he and not Cumnor has come to Venice to search out the papers he proposes that if

> . . . they were to ask him point-blank if he were not their snubbed correspondent it would be too awkward for him to lie; whereas I was fortunately not tied in that way. I was a fresh hand--I could protest without lying(13).

Certainly if such a confrontation were to occur he could not be accused of lying, neither could he be accused of telling the whole truth. This statement is strangely ambivalent in the mouth of a man whose declared mission in Venice is to seek out the papers as a source of the historical "truth" about Jeffrey Aspern's past.

Since the editor in his narrative seems incapable of differentiating between himself as character and himself as historian, or of distinguishing truth, half truth, and part truth, and indeed seems capable of treating them all as being the same thing, how can we as readers be sure of distinguishing between the various aspects of his character? How do we know when we are treating with the assumed character of hypocrite that he presents to the Bordereaus, or his presumed true character as presented to Mrs. Prest or to us in his role as narrator? How can we ever tell when we are dealing with his historian self, or his editorial self, or his adventurer self, or indeed his true self?

The key to the inconsistency of the editor's narrative is his own lack of self knowledge. He is hypocritical in his dealings with the Bordereaus, because he chooses to be so as a means of achieving a specific goal, that is possession of the papers. He is hypocritical in his dealings with his reader for an almost diametrically opposed reason, that is his unawareness of the complications raised by his double role as hero and historian. In the passage which I have already quoted from the preface to The Princess Casamassima James says that

> . . . the figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it.[17]

Before the reader can come to terms with the situation in which the editor finds himself during his Venetian summer, he must first decide the extent to which the editor "feels" that situation. The problem for the reader of The Aspern Papers is that, since the editor as historian is incapable of removing himself from the picture and, as a consequence, is incapable of placing himself as a character in an honest perspective, then the reader finds that the *actual* situation of the narrative is closed to him. The details of the story are presented to us through the

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[17] James, Art of the Novel, 62.

strictly limited perspective of the editor as historian and, even if we accept those details as true, it is certain that we can not accept his speculations and propositions such as the motives which he ascribes to Juliana.

Unless we assume that in The Aspern Papers James meant to titillate us with an amusing mystery story in which a narrative block is thrown up between the reader and the details of the story, we must conclude that the narrator himself is the true subject of the story. Sam S. Baskett reaches this conclusion in his study of The Aspern Papers.[18]

> If, as F. Scott Fitzgerald observed, "Action is Character", the book as a whole is a characterization of the narrator, whether he is physically engaged in trying to steal the papers or whether he is plotting his campaign against the two ladies.

Later he concludes that "the heart of the book is a skillful, interesting, ironic characterization". The emphasis here is on the word "ironic", for in the tension which James sets up between the perception of the reader and the perception of the narrator, there is dramatic irony at work.

Just as the audience at a play, by being in possession of

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[18]Sam S. Baskett, "The Sense of the Present in The Aspern Papers", Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, XLIV (1958), 382.

information which a specific character may not have, may see through the limited perspective which that particular character exhibits in a particular speech, so the reader can read through the narrative of the editor. Sometimes the irony of the editor's situation is revealed in his dealings or dialogues with other characters. So in the first chapter we find him dismissing Mrs. Prest's proposition that he must be a megalomaniac to pursue so single-mindedly his object, while informing us in his narrative that he regards a bundle of Aspern's letters as more important than the answer to the riddle of the universe, that he regards Aspern as more than a poet, indeed as a god, and that he and Cumnor regard themselves as ministers at the temple of Jeffrey Aspern which they have erected. Are we to accept his rationalisation of his work on Jeffrey Aspern's past and concur with his conclusion that he does not over-do it, or does James intend us to agree with Mrs. Prest? Megalomania certainly seems to me an appropriate word to apply to this man's single-minded obsession with what he terms "historical truth" and to his desire to elevate his editorial task to the status of the priesthood.

Dialogue and dramatic confrontation with other characters is one of the methods which James uses in The Aspern Papers for his ironic characterisation of the narrator. Another, and perhaps more important method, is to allow the words of the editor himself to reveal by their conflictions and contradictions his duplicity. Hence

the inconsistency of his narrative. Even the briefest perusal of the text reveals these devices at work.

From the very beginning the editor emphasises his quest for historial "truth". He reveals to us that his reason for pursuing Juliana Bordereau to her home in Venice is the persistence of rumours that Jeffrey Aspern had "treated her badly"(7). He reveals also that the name of Aspern had been linked with other women in such rumours and that he and his colleague, Cumnor, had conscientiously investigated those rumours and had never failed to clear Aspern's name. However, his attitude on this matter is strange for a man whose professed aim is to seek out the truth. He freely admits that he is more indulgent to the memory of Aspern in such questions than his friend Cumnor. Indeed he pictures his god as a suffering Orpheus among the Maenads. When it comes to the figure of Juliana Bordereau, one of those Maenads who has hidden herself away in a dark corner of Venice for many years following her relationship with Aspern, he admits that the "poor lady on the whole had had reason for doing so"(8). This seems a remarkable admission for the self-confessed, indulgent priest of Aspern-Orpheus to make. Does it not indicate that the truth of Aspern's past may be slightly less savoury than the editor and his colleague Cumnor have been prepared to concede? Here Juliana is described as a poor lady, but later he describes her in terms of a death's-head or death-mask.

(We shall see later how this same ambivalence occurs in his descriptions of Miss Tina.) His vision of Juliana fluctuates between two extremes: on the one hand, she is a tribute to the past, a living monument of the beauty which inspired the poetry of Aspern; on the other hand she is a death's-head, a terrible relic of a past which is jealous of the present. In these fluctuations the editor reveals to us that, even as character, he has been unable to adopt a consistent attitude to the past. This makes it more difficult to accept his perspective as historian.

In these opening pages he emphasises his regard for the past and his desire to bridge the gulf of time between the present and that glorious past, just as Jeffrey Aspern has bridged the gulf between the New world and the Old. However, when he is confronted with tangible reminders of the past, the editor is strangely unimpressed and somewhat impatient. Aspern had left the New world to seek out the romance of the Old; when the editor is confronted with a living relic of the Old world, that is the Bordereau's palace, he shows little or no respect for it.

> It was not particularly old, only two or three centuries; and it had an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career (9).

Presumably scenes such as this had been part of Jeffrey Aspern's inspiration, but they hardly inspire the editor, although he does at

other times display sensitive reactions to the beauties of the Venetian landscape.[19] The editor's odd attitudes to the glories of the past are exhibited again in the second chapter. When he arrives at the front door of the palace, he is irritated by the maid's actions. Before she will open the door she challenges him from an upper window to reveal his identity, and he responds by holding up the card which is engraved with his assumed name. He describes his reactions as follows:

> . . . . I was irritated as a general thing by this survival of mediaeval manners, though as so fond, if yet so special, an antiquarian I suppose I ought to have liked it; but, with

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[19]Wayne C. Booth in his book The Rhetoric of Fiction, finds these ambivalent attitudes so confusing that he distinguishes separate narrative voices in the text, although on different grounds from those on which I have been talking of the editor's "separate self". He says that there are "three distinct narrative voices in the story: the narrator's self betrayal, evident to any careful reader; his efforts at straight forward evocation of the past, which taken out of context might be indistinguishable from James' own voice; and the passages of mumbling, as it were, that lie between"(361). Booth is not prepared to accept the mixture of aesthete and villain which James presents us with in the editor. He concludes that, while the editor is well suited as narrator for revealing the details of his seditious scheme, his voice is inappropriate for the evocation of the "poetry of the visitable past" (356). He regards this as a failure in the narrative, having accepted James' own position in the preface to the tale that the delight of writing The Aspern Papers was the attempt to recreate the glories of the Venetian past. I hope to show later in this chapter that James regarded The Aspern Papers as more than an attempt to evoke the poetry of the past and, indeed, that such an attempt is foredoomed to failure. I will also show that while I disagree with Booth that the employment of different narrative voices is a failing in the text, his chapter on unreliable narrators in his book has been one of the most illuminating sources of this thesis.

> my resolve to be genial from the threshold at any price, I took my false card out of my pocket and held it up to her, smiling as if it were a magic token(15).

Here we have a rather straightforward admission that his attitude to the past is not always what he would like it to be.

In the third chapter we get the most striking example of James allowing his narrator to condemn himself out of his own mouth. Having been accepted by Juliana as a lodger, the editor is taken by Miss Tina to view his rooms. He is disappointed by the shabby, unkempt appearance of the inside of the house and has just concluded to himself that this is a sign that the Misses Bordereau are untidy people of low standards. However he pulls himself up short in these speculations with the comment: "I afterwards recognised that a lodger who had forced entrance had no _locus standi_ as a critic"(34). Here is an example of the different time spheres of the narrative overlapping. How long "afterwards" did this recognition dawn on the editor? Did it dawn on him at any time during that summer adventure? The text implies that it did not, since as the narrative unfolds he never ceases to be a critic of the Bordereaus. We have here an example of the editor as historian imputing an attitude to the editor as character what that character's actions in the narrative do not bear out. We may compare this statement with another statement made in the same paragraph of the narrative. Having noted that Miss Tina has affected

an attitude of unconcern as to how he should live or what he should do in the house, the editor states that:

> . . . . I guessed that her aunt had instructed her to adopt this tone, and I may as well say now that I came afterwards to distinguish perfectly (as I believed) between the speeches she made on her own responsibility and those the old woman imposed upon her (34).

The parenthetical comment of the editor as historian here indicates that he is aware of his failing at this point in his role of editor as character.

In the opening of the fourth chapter we find him six weeks later having made no progress in his quest. Apart from one brief encounter he has made no contact with his hostesses. He informs us that, in desparation and despite the fact that he dislikes himself for doing it, he allows his man servant Pasquale to infer that he is interested in any information that Pasquale may pick up about the Misses Bordereau. Are we to believe that he dislikes himself at the time for doing this, or is this not another case of the editor as historian using hindsight to gloss over some of his actions? He goes on in the same passage to inform us that he would have liked Pasquale to fall in love with the Bordereaus' maid, or failing that to take her in aversion as a means of gaining useful information for his master. The implication is that here again the editor as historian is distorting the perspective of his narrative. He ends the paragraph with an admission that to

use the domestics of the house in this way would not really be right, and attempts to absolve himself with the slightly preposterous statement that he "never said a word to Miss Bordereau's cook"(41).

Later in this same chapter, we are given what seems to be another clear example of the editor as historian intruding upon his narrative. He has been describing those long weeks of frustration and the long, apparently interminable wait, for the work on the garden to show forth in blooms. Meanwhile, he says that "the real summer days arrived and began to pass, and as I look back upon them they seem to me almost the happiest of my life"(45). Surely this is the editor as historian speaking. He can only be referring to the memory of those long hot summer days in Venice, most certainly not to the incidents which took place and the frustrations of that particular time.

Once the garden begins to produce flowers, he carries out his plan to bombard the ladies with them as a means of gaining their confidence. This does not work and, after a few weeks, he stops the flow of flowers to their rooms just as suddenly as he had started it. Unexpectedly to him, this brings about a change in his situation. When he returns to the house unusually early one evening, he finds Miss Tina waiting for him in the garden, apparently wishing to speak with him. For the first time he attempts to interpose himself between Miss Tina and her aunt, when he asks her to do something

that he would like for a change instead of always doing what her aunt would like. Miss Tina is confused, but the editor stops short of further explanation and gives us the following reason.

> I could n't say more, though I should have liked to, as I saw I only mystified her; for I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her. Nothing less should I have seemed to do had I continued to beg a lady to "believe in me" in an Italian garden on a midsummer night(61-62).

The alert reader will be reminded that at the end of the first chapter the editor had declared to Mrs. Prest his intention of making love to the niece as a means of pursuing his plan (14). It is obvious as the tale unfolds that he does show a more than common interest in Miss Tina, at least it is obvious to her and to her aunt. In the climactic final chapter, following the recognition scene and his departure from Venice, he reveals that he had toyed with the uncomfortable idea of getting out of the Bordereaus' lives for ever.

> Then I reflected that I had better try a short absence first, for I must already have had a sense (unexpressed and dim) that in disappearing completely it would n't be merely my own hopes I should condemn to extinction (120).

Here he is unmistakably referring to Tina's growing affection, an affection which his actions have nurtured. His parenthetical comment contradicts his actions, suggesting again the historian's attempt to rationalise falsely his own past actions.

His expressed attitudes towards Miss Tina vaccilate wildly in

this last chapter, recalling his vaccilating attitudes to Miss Juliana which I noted above. Having deserted her with the body of her aunt in the old palace, on his return he informs us that he took a "bad view" of the fact that she was left alone to make the funeral arrangements, and expresses the pious hope that her old friends had not "neglected" her (121). This sympathetic and considerate attitude is pulled up short by the prospect of perhaps having to look after the lady. He decides that he must leave because he "could n't linger there to act as guardian to a piece of middle-aged female helplessness", and he realises that if she has indeed preserved the papers for him, he may be forced as a matter of courtesy to make a reciprocal gesture, which would "saddle [him] with a guardianship" (126). The "poor woman" and "good creature" now reveals that such a proposition is a pre-requisite of his gaining possession of the papers. She reveals that if he were to marry her, he could have free use of the papers. The editor's reaction to this proposal is that it is a preposterous proposition coming from such a "poor deluded infatuated extravagant lady"(136). In the midst of this scene the editor rationalises his relationship with Miss Tina as follows:

> . . . . She must have been conscious, however, that though my face showed the greatest embarrassment ever painted on a human countenance it was not set as a stone, it was also full of compassion. It was a comfort to me a long time afterwards to consider that she could n't have seen in me the smallest symptom of disrespect (133-134).

Coming from the lips of a man who up until now has treated her as a simple-minded old woman, useful only as a tool in his plans, has attempted to drive a wedge between her and her last remaining relative and possibly precipitated the death of that relative, such a statement is truly absurd. Surely the last sentence of it is another example of the editor as historian inserting an unjustifiable afterthought. During his giddy whirl on the canals of Venice that night he asks himself whether she thought that he

> . . . had made love to her even to get the papers? I had n't, I had n't; I repeated that over to myself for an hour, for two hours, till I was wearied if not convinced (136).

Possibly he can not convince himself; certainly he can not convince us.

The last two chapters of the tale are riddled with examples like these of the editor's self-delusion. During the fateful scene in Juliana's parlour, he takes us step by step with him through this gross act of intrusion. He rationalises his uninvited entrance into the parlour by suggesting that in leaving the door unlocked, Miss Tina has tacitly invited him in. Even when his hand goes out to touch the button which will open the secretary, he attempts to rationalise his action away as a sign of his fascination with the actual mechanism of the lock and as in no way an indication of his intention to steal the contents. The reader can not possibly accept this proposition from

the same man who,in the opening chapter, had told Mrs. Prest that in his attempt to get the papers he was "prepared to roast all summer--as well as through the long hereafter perhaps you'll say!"(14). Again it is the editor as historian who is trying to convince us that it was not his intention that night to steal the papers.

The vaccilations which I have noted in his descriptions of the Misses Bordereau even extend to the precious papers themselves in the last chapter. Confronted with the proposition that the only way he will gain possession of the papers is to marry "a ridiculous pathetic provincial old woman", the papers which had previously been thought of as priceless by the hero, become "a bundle of tattered papers"(137). As he wanders the canals of Venice in his confusion, he seeks for a way to extricate himself from the situation without being too brutal to Miss Tina. In a moment of rare insight he realises that his end may not have justified his means.

> As the day went on I grew to wish I had never heard of Aspern's relics, and I cursed the extravagant curiosity that had put John Cumnor on the scent of them. We had more than enough material without them, and my predicament was the just punishment of that most fatal of human follies, our not having known when to stop. . . .As my confusion cooled I lost myself in wonder at the importance I had attached to Juliana's crumpled scraps; the thought of them became odious to me and I was as vexed with the old witch for the superstitition that prevented her from destroying them as I was with myself for already having spent more money than I could afford in attempting to control their fate (137-138).

Even here we notice that the whole affair is a result of Cumnor's "extravagant curiosity", not of the editor's. Also the fact that the affair has carried on is not a result of his single-minded obsession, but of Juliana's "superstition" which prevented her from destroying them. In truth, the kernel of this gleam of conscience is his regret at the large amount of money he has spent. This is a potential turning point in the plot, since the editor is at least questioning whether the papers could be worth all this effort. However, the mercenary question soon pushes itself to the forefront. The editor returns to the palace and retires to bed where he soon begins to speculate whether his "goods" can still be salvaged (140). Again the editor's attitude is equivocal, since, despite the fact that he has recognised the mercenary element in his desire to possess the papers, he insists on equating this with his previous desire to seek out the truth of the past and to extract from the past its beauty:

> . . . what had now come to pass was that in the unconscious cerebration of sleep I had gone back to a passionate appreciation of Juliana's treasure (140).

We must inevitably ask which sense of the word the editor is using when he closes his narrative with the phrase "the precious papers" (143).

Returning then to the concept of a triple time-scheme, we shall see that the central focus of The Aspern Papers is indeed a

characterisation of the narrator, and as the foregoing analysis has shown, an ironic characterisation. I have noted already that the plot of the nouvelle unfolds in the primary time-scheme which is that past summer in Venice. The plot is revealed to us through a centre of consciousness whom I have shown to have a strictly limited point of view, due to his inability to view his own past actions objectively. Sometimes the point of view character, in other words the editor as character, speaks to us during that primary time-scheme in an honest manner. We must assume, since James has given us no indication to the contrary, that he reproduces his dialogues with other characters honestly. The most notable moments when we can safely regard his narrative as honest and straightforward are those moments when he describes the beauties of the Venetian scene. This is the aesthetic side of the editor's nature which Wayne C. Booth finds hard to stomach. However, since the editor is a literary historian and critic, and presumably an appreciative observer of beauty in the arts, there is no reason why we should not believe that he is capable of responding sensitively to the beauties of the scene around him. Neither is there any reason for us not to believe that a person who can respond to beauty in inanimate objects should be capable of a ruthless, driving ambition which would lead him to treat other human beings as mere tools for use in achieving his ambitions. This is

particularly feasible in the case of our narrator whose ambition is, supposedly, to uncover, explain and illuminate the beauties of the past, an ambition which has become so obsessive that the present is regarded as no more than a means to bridge time.

We can assume that when he is dealing with dialogue or scene, the editor as character is honest. However, when he comes to dealing with the implications or significances of events or scenes, or the motives behind certain actions, a second narrative voice, the editor as historian, interposes itself. The result of this interposition is that both narrative voices become unreliable. Since the point of view is unreliable, we can not build up a reliable picture of the action. The importance of what I have called the primary time-scheme is thus undermined by the tertiary time-scheme in a way that does not occur in ordinary narrative. To illustrate this point we can return to the comparison of The Aspern Papers with two earlier quest novels: Roderick Hudson and The American.

In both of these novels there are narrative voices, centres of consciousness which are close to, but not inside the minds of the central characters. When we read these narratives, we do not get a sense of the narrative voice being intrusive, let alone obtrusive, because the action is revealed to us and not reconstructed for us. The action is revealed in the imperfect tense, that is, we feel that it

was happening while we were reading the novels. In The Aspern Papers, the action is in the past historic tense. From the opening sentence onwards we are aware that the whole action was complete before it began for us. The present voice of the narrator is for ever interrupting, disrupting, and distorting the events of the primary time scheme; thus the primary time-scheme becomes less important to us than the editor's present, that is, the time at which he is recounting the past, just as the action becomes secondary to the character and characterisation of the editor.

To emphasise this point, what I have previously called the secondary time-scheme also pales into virtual insignificance compared to the editor's present. As far as the pasts of Juliana Bordereau and Jeffrey Aspern are concerned we learn little or nothing of importance beyond the scanty information which the editor provides us with in the first chapter. As far as the editor's own past is concerned, the initial picture which he paints of himself, that is, the conscientious seeker out of historical truth and poetic beauty is systematically undermined by the narrative. The third time-scheme then completely overrides the importance of the first two and The Aspern Papers becomes for us less of a nouvelle and more of a dramatic monologue, a form which James uses to present an ironic characterisation of a particular character type. At this point we must decide what type

the editor is meant to portray.

Given that the past in The Aspern Papers is useful only as an illuminator of the present, that the inconsistencies of the narrative are intended as a means to illuminate the present character of the narrator, then it follows that the narrative is not a true record of the past but rather a reconstruction of it. Furthermore, some of the inconsistencies which I have outlined, indicate that the editor as historian is attempting to reconstitute the past and his own role as character in the history. It also follows that the narrative is, in a sense, a creative fiction based on the events of the past. In an illuminating article on the nouvelle, Samuel Hux[20] underlines the point that

> . . . our narrator is telling a story which occurred several years (we presume) in the past; he therefore possesses the perspective of time and consideration. Furthermore, James presents him as an author. . . our narrator is no hard-headed realist for whom a fact is simply a fact. He is a man of letters constitutionally given to symbolic thinking; this is his mode of thought. His constant references, for instance, to himself as a "priest" at the temple of Aspern suggest more than a merely incidental use of metaphor; they represent his habit of allegorizing which convinces him that he is protagonist in a holy quest and not merely gratifying a self-indulgent antiquarianism.

I must emphasise Hux's point that "James presents him as an author".

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[20]Samuel Hux, "Irony in The Aspern Papers: the Unreliable Symbolist", Ball State University Forum, X (1969), 61.

During the course of his narrative he informs the reader that he "had always some business of writing in hand" (45) and in a conversation with Juliana, he tells her that he is "a poor devil of a man of letters who lives from day to day" (88). He is indeed an author given to symbolic thinking and allegorising. We may go one step further and, picking up Hux's point that he regards himself as a protagonist in a holy quest (that is, the editor as historian treats the editor as character as such) regard him as a type of romantic artist as the following analysis of his narrative will show.

3. The Editor and the Romantic Quest

It is with a certain amount of trepidation that I raise the spectre of romance in this study. Too often James is presented by his critics as a straight-forward realist, the most dedicated novelist of that form. However, such critics tend to limit their commentaries to major novels and conveniently to forget that for much of his life he was fascinated by the ghost story, the adult faery tale of romance. Also, if romance is one of the most difficult critical terms for which to find an adequate definition then any survey of criticism on the nineteenth and twentieth century novel will show that realism is just as vague a term to deal with. Richard Chase[21] in his study of the

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[21] Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1957).

American novel successfully shows that distinctions between romance and realism are untenable.

In the introductory statement of his argument Chase attempts to define the area of romance which he is talking about in particular in his studies. He relies heavily on James' attitude to the romance, particularly as he finds it in the preface to The American.[22] I do not wish here to repeat or to reproduce Chase's argument, but I would like to emphasise some of his conclusions. In the preface James defines for us his perceptions of the real and the romantic.

> The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another . . . The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire.[23]

He proposes that the truly great novelist always treats of both in his books.

> The interest is greatest--the interest of his genius, I mean, and of his general wealth--when he commits himself in both directions.[24]

The novelist then works from, and between, the two extremes of the known and the unknown, the seen and the felt, to achieve a fusion of

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[22]James, Art of the Novel, 20-39.

[23]Ibid., 31.

[24]Ibid., 31.

the real and the romantic which is, for James, the true perception. Chase concludes that:

> . . . James' theory of the novel, his idea of the circuit of life which allows him to incorporate in his novels so many of the attributes of romance, is a most complete and admirable theory, as at their best James' are the most complete and admirable novels yet produced by an American.[25]

Other recent commentators of James have attempted to show the fusion, particularly in his early works.[26]

I do not wish to suggest by this that to approach James from the stand point of the romance is a particularly new idea. As early as 1918 Beach[27] included in his study of Henry James a chapter on "Romance", although he defines his view of James' romanticism in terms of the rarified psychological arena of conflict in which his characters move. I want to suggest only that the equation of James

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[25]Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, 28.

[26]Robert P. Falk, "Henry James's Romantic Vision of the Real", in Essays Critical and Historical Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell by Members of the Departments of English, University of California, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 235-255. See also Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, The Early Development of Henry James, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

[27]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, (Enlarged edition; Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1954), 120-130.

with realism to the exclusion of romanticism is a mistake which is repeated too often by too many of his commentators. In the earlier quotation from his prefaces which I have used in an attempt to define James' position on first person narration one may infer a rejection of the romantic from the phrase "darkest abyss of romance", which would seem to contradict this proposition. However, in the quotation above he specifically defines genius in terms of an awareness of, and use, of the two extremes of the real and the romantic. One may disperse the apparent contradiction by positing a dark abyss of realism which is opposite to the "darkest abyss of romance", where the artist of true genius walks a ridge between the two abysses never losing his awareness of either, nor his sense of the danger of falling into one or the other. The basis of my argument here is that The Aspern Papers is an ironic characterisation of the anonymous editor, and that the means by which James presents this character to us is to present him in the role of creative artist and to show the pit-falls into which he allows himself to drop. The editor as first person narrator thus falls into the "darkest abyss of romance" and the "looseness" or unreliability of his narrative demonstrate for us the bad side of his character.

In the preface to Volume 12 of the New York edition James highlights three elements of The Aspern Papers, each of them

associated with the romantic, which fascinate him as he reviews the nouvelle for its inclusion in the collected edition. The first element is associated with the glories of the Italian past, particularly the atmosphere of the city of Venice. We may designate this the romance of place. Side by side with the romance of place is what we may call the romance of the past which contains the other two elements highlighted in the preface.

The first of these elements involves the feelings aroused in James during his stay in Italy in the 1870's. He tells us of the feeling he had of the proximity of Byron and Shelley (whom he describes in the preface as "the divine poet"[28], echoing the editor's attitude to Aspern). These feelings were aroused by the revelation that Jane Clairmont was still alive in the 1870's and lived quite close to James. The last of the three elements involves the charge that James was dealing unfairly with his readers by creating the figure of Jeffrey Aspern whom, it is charged, is unlikely in terms of the true history of America in the early nineteenth century. These last two elements merge into each other.

To deal with the romance of place first. Place, in this phrase, implies a situation which provides visible relics and reminders of

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[28]James, Art of the Novel, 163.

the past. Walter F. Wright[29] in his study of James demonstrates that James' sense of the romantic is always tied closely to a feeling for the past.

> The term romance, as James used it in the biography [of William Whetmore Story] is invariably associated with a sense of the past.[30]

Wright proposes that in James a sense of the romantic is a desire to confront present day relics, and sense (perhaps even palpably) through them the shadows of the past. He cites as evidence of this James' non-fiction writings on Italy.[31] This compares to the fascination which James talks of in his preface, of Italian cities like Florence and Venice. The romance of place is the source of those occasional purple passages in the tale which paint the glories of the Venetian picture. The editor's sense for the romance is an aspect of the same fascination which Juliana and the papers hold for him. He succeeds in evoking the romance of place because he recognises that the Venetian past is truly impenetrable, it can only present us with dusty shadows of the past and not with the real face or truth of the past.

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[29] Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James, (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1962).

[30] Ibid., 8.

[31] Ibid., 7.

The *donnée* is associated with Florence, but in the tale James transfers it to Venice. In the preface he suggests that the reason for this was to cover his tracks and to move the interest of the tale away from the particular case of Jane Clairmont towards a more general theme. I shall suggest in a moment that Venice may be just as applicable to the Jane Clairmont story as Florence, but here I want to confine myself to more general reasons for the selection of Venice.

The city of Venice generally represents to James a symbol of charm, the glamour and the lure of European culture, but at the same time a symbol of that culture's decline into decay. More particularly, Venice is for James a symbol of that decay. William Bysshe Stein[32] in his study of *The Aspern Papers* says that the city of canals "from the time of the Renaissance, has been a symbol of corrupt love". Venice in literature has been presented as a place of corruption in which true love is endangered. We can call to mind Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Jonson's *Volpone*, Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* and Mann's *Death in Venice*. Leon Edel[33]

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[32]William Bysshe Stein, "*The Aspern Papers*: a Comedy of Masks", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XIV (September, 1959), 172-178.

[33]Henry James, *The Henry James Reader*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 166.

cites all of these in a prefatory note to his edition of The Aspern Papers. The city is peculiarly appropriate to the tale which Stein characterises as an inversion of the legend of Don Juan.

The romance of the past which incorporates the other two elements outlined above is associated particularly in the preface with the Romantic poets Byron and Shelley and with the puzzle of Jeffrey Aspern. These echoes of the golden age of romanticism are another important aspect of The Aspern Papers. First, I want to suggest an American source for Aspern and then to show how these historical literary figures act as romantic references in the nouvelle.

The object of the editor's quest is a bundle of papers concerned with the life of Jeffrey Aspern. Hux says that the papers "conjure up visions of a high degree of artistic worth, the enduring qualities of the Romantic movement."[34] These enduring qualities are equated by the editor with "esoteric knowledge"(44) which he wants to possess. Aspern, then, is equated with the Romantic movement, but transported across the Atlantic to New York State. James in the preface refers to the charge that no figure comparable to the English Romantics existed in America at the time. However, there was Hawthorne,

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[34]Hux, "Irony in The Aspern Papers: the Unreliable Symbolist", 61.

later than Shelley, but earlier than James, and there is a description of Aspern which echoes James' description of Hawthorne.[35]

> His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had prized him for: that at a period when our native land was rude and crude and provincial, when the famous "atmosphere" it is supposed to lack was not even missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first; to be free and general and not at all afraid; to feel, understand and express everything(50).

This removes Aspern further from Shelley and Byron, but the text of The Aspern Papers produces echoes of those two poets which inform the romantic atmosphere of the tale.

Shelley seems to be less important as a referent, since the tale is intended to evoke echoes of the Byronic age. The donnée is concerned with Jane Clairmont who was the mother of Byron's illegitimate daughter, Allegra. Byron kept the child and refused Jane access to her and, on at least one occasion, Percy and Mary Shelley visited Byron and the child--in Venice! --to plead Jane's case. Shelley failed to move Byron and produced from the experience the poem "Julian and Maddalo" in which Julian (Shelley) and Maddalo (Byron) discuss the true nature of love. Not only does the name

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[35]Henry James, Hawthorne, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1887).

Julian suggest James' heroine Juliana, but the encounters between Juliana and the anonymous editor in which he tries to uncover the nature of her relationship to Aspern and she tries to manoeuvre him into an affair with Tina, are oddly reminiscent of Shelley's poem. I suggest, then, tentatively, that there was a more profound reason for changing the scene from Florence to Venice than James' professed desire to cover his tracks.

The name Juliana is also reminiscent of one of Byron's characters. In his poem "Don Juan", the first sexual encounter which the hero experiences is with Donna Julia who, in fact, seduces Don Juan. Stein[36] suggests that The Aspern Papers is an ironic inversion of the Don Juan legend. His main thesis is that the anonymous editor is a "Victorian Don Juan", a narcissist who sees in the affair of Juliana and Aspern a quest for vicarious eroticism. Juliana, sensing the irony of inverted roles, teases him into a quest for Tina. Stein declares that

> . . . . Juliana is a surrogate of the beautiful Donna Julia in the first canto [of Byron's "Don Juan"] who seduces the sixteen-year-old Don Juan. By association, the artist advises the reader that Juliana seduced Aspern, not to the contrary, as the narrator thinks.

He notes the specific reference to "the queer rococo Venice of

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[36]Stein, "The Aspern Papers: A Comedy of Masks", 176.

Goldoni and Casanova"(60) in the editor's encounter with Miss Tina in the garden and declares that the passage

> . . . establishes the hero's Don Juan fixation. Moreover in the light of Goldoni's activity in the commedia dell'arte, it suggests James' interest in the comic mask of the Italian theatre as a literary device. The career of Don Giovanni, of course, was a stock theme in this drama, and Olympia and Pasquale, the names of the servants in The Aspern Papers, were stereotyped in the same roles.

He emphasises the importance of "masks" in the tale--Juliana's shade and the editor's attempts to "mask" his true identity-- and adds that Tina's proposal of marriage is a stock situation from the legend.

Stein's argument is very convincing and there is even another evocation of the commedia dell'arte which he does not include. During his confused journey through Venice in the final chapter, the editor views the city like a great place of entertainment where

> . . . somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre with its actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe (140).

There can be little doubt that all these references were intended by James to alert the reader to the romantic overtones of the narrative. I can not go all the way with Stein's reading of the tale as an inversion

of the Don Giovanni Legend, particularly when he figures Tina as a Christ substitute (presumably on the assumption that her name is a contraction of Christina). I think that the legend is meant to act as a referent to the tale, but that the romantic nature of the narrative is much more general and more fundamental.

Up to this point, I have relied heavily on the significance of names and I am aware that many readers shy away from this sort of criticism because it supposedly overplays significances or reads meanings into a text which were not intended at the inception. My defence is that James invites us to do this in The Aspern Papers. In the fifth chapter Tina describes to the editor the glories of the life which she and her aunt used to live in Venice.

> I asked her what people they had known and she said Oh very nice ones--the Cavaliere Bombicci and the Contessa Altemura, with whom they had had a great friendship! Also English people--the Churtons and the Goldies and Mrs. Stock-Stock, whom they had loved dearly; she was dead and gone, poor dear(59).

The passage has an ironic tone and the suggestion is that the editor is amused by the names. Churtons, Goldies and Stock-Stocks hardly sound inspiring. The suggestion with the Italian names is that the editor is translating and transliterating, thus that he envisages a Caviliere Bombast and a Contessa High-Wall. If the editor can do this to Tina's words, why not the reader to his? The process works in terms of The Aspern Papers since the Bordereaus do live next to

the water and it works generally in James' canon, for instance in The American where the most significant thing about the Bellegardes is their well-kept secret.[37] So I think that we can assume that the

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[37]One may suggest, with the tongue ever so slightly in the cheek, that the name Bordereau is another Romantic echo that conjures up Wordsworth's play The Borderers. In that play, the villain Oswald induces Marmaduke, a leader of a band of Borderers dedicated to the protection of the innocent, to cause the death of the baron Herbert. Marmaduke loves Herbert's daughter Idonea and, having been duped by Oswald into believing that the blind old Baron is going to sell her into shame and infamy, causes Herbert's death. The parallels with the mechanics of the plot of The Aspern Papers are intriguing. The villainous editor (Oswald) persuades the innocent Tina (Marmaduke) that Juliana (Baron Herbert) is going to destroy the precious papers (Idonea). He persuades her that the action is a violation of truth and a betrayal of history. As a result she helps him in the quest for the papers and, by implication, is an accomplice to the resulting death of Juliana. Juliana's green mask and the play of words on her sight in the text would then be an elaborate allusion to Wordsworth's blind old Baron.

However, there is a much more mundane and more likely source for Juliana's mask. In The American the young Marquise de Bellegarde asks Newman to take her to a student ball since her husband will not. She declares that her husband takes her nowhere that he considers below her dignity and that her mother-in-law wishes to condemn her to a life of growing old gracefully. She tells Newman:

> . . . . I have no pleasure, I see nothing, I do nothing. I live in Paris as I might live at Poitiers. My mother-in-law calls me--what is the pretty word?--a gadabout? accuses me of going to unheard-of places, and thinks it ought to be joy enough for me to sit at home and count over my ancestors on my fingers. But why should I bother about my ancestors? I am sure they never bothered about me. I don't propose to live with a green shade on my eyes; I hold that things were made to look at.
> (The American, Chapter 17)

There are obvious parallels with the character Juliana here (and possibly an enlightening commentary); and so, by applying Occam's razor, I suppose that one must dispense with the charming romance of Wordsworth as a source.

echoes are there to alert us to the romantic atmosphere and, more than this, to alert us to the romantic nature of the narrative itself.

The anonymous editor succeeds in evoking the romance of place and the narrative evokes the romance of the past in these figures, but he fails to penetrate to the real truth of the past in his adventures with Juliana simply because he tries to approach it too closely. This is made clear in the preface where James reveals that knowing of Jane Clairmon't proximity to him aroused a romantic sense of the Byronic age. He reveals also that this knowledge aroused in him a temptation to visit the old lady and that his failure to do so was the source later for a sense of regret. However, he also suggests that had he made such close contact, the situation "would probably have had to be quite differently calculable",[38] which suggests that the actual sight of the lady would have disturbed the romantic feelings which had been aroused. The donnée of The Aspern Papers was an anecdote which dealt with an ardent Shelleyite, Silsbee, and his attempt to make closer contact.[39] The delight of the Byronic age is the fact that it is too far away to be truly knowable, yet close

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[38]James, Art of the Novel, 162.

[39]For a more detailed account of the donnée, see:
F. O. Matthieson and Kenneth B. Murdock, The Notebooks of Henry James, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 71-73.

enough to tease the imagination into the attempt to make contact. The approach to it fails if we try to move too close.

> That, to my imagination, is the past fragrant of all, or of almost all, the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connections but tasting so of differences, remains appreciable. With more moves back the element of the appreciable shrinks--just as the charm of looking over a garden-wall into another garden breaks down when successions of walls appear. The other gardens, those still beyond, may be there, but even by use of our longest ladder we are baffled and bewildered--the view is mainly a view of barriers. [40]

(Note how the "barriers" echo the green mask over Juliana's eyes.) Failure to recognise this was Silsbee's undoing and the source of James' interest in the donnée.

The editor fails to understand that the romance of the past is not a means to uncover the historical truth, but a barrier against it. The donnée evoked the Byronic age for James and the narrative invokes the ghost of Byron. The narrator is more than a historian, he is a "man of letters" who recreates the past in a romantic dramatic monologue. He invokes the spirit of romance unashamedly throughout his narrative. He tells us that his

> . . . eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory--I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art (43).

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[40] James, Art of the Novel, 164.

He tells us that, when he and Cumnor speculated on how Aspern had met Juliana, he

> . . . had hatched a little romance according to which she was the daughter of an artist, a painter or a sculptor, who had left the Western world, when the century was fresh, to study in the ancient schools(47).

He goes on in great detail to speculate about her character. Later, when Juliana shows him the miniature portrait of Aspern and reveals that her father was the artist, he is delighted:

> . . . a part of my cheer came from this proof I had been right in my theory of Miss Bordereau's origin. Aspern had of course met the young lady on his going to her father's studio as a sitter(96).

One small biographical detail thus confirms all his speculations. By this process historic truth becomes a part of the general romance and, for the reader, the historic narrative is submerged in the romantic monologue.

The Byronic atmosphere in the tale arises from the way in which the editor as historian views himself as character. Generally, he presents himself in the narrative as a Byronic warrior hero. He is narcissistic, like the Byronic hero, and the opening chapter of his narrative evokes the warrior hero's quest. He tells us that he viewed the Bordereau's palace for the first time "laying siege to it with my eyes while I considered my plan of campaign"(5). The military imagery continues through the narrative, underlining

the Byronic parallel. He tells us that when the maid opens the door to him for the first time "I felt my foot in the citadel"(16). Later he reports his lack of progress to Mrs. Prest.

> She reproached me with lacking boldness and I answered that even to be bold you must have an opportunity: you may push on through a breach, but you can't batter down a dead wall. She returned that the breach I had already made was big enough to admit an army and accused me of wasting precious hours in whimpering in her salon when I ought to have been carrying on the struggle in the field (38).

If he is a Byronic hero, then he is amoral rather than immoral and this suggests his unprincipled adoption of roles, such as the role of conscientious flatterer towards Tina, and his use of her.

The proposition that he is an amoral force is shown in his use of the garden. The situation of the story, the palace and the attendant garden, is a favourite image (metaphor) for James. We may call it the "Gardencourt" image from James' most well-known use of it in The Portrait of a Lady. The juxtaposition of the garden with the court is the juxtaposition of innocence and worldliness. In The Aspern Papers the palace is the sphere of worldly action and the garden a world of potential innocence. The garden presents a potentially idyllic experience in which the editor may make love to Tina and thus forge a real link with Aspern's past by experiencing the love which had inspired the poet. However, this does not even

enter the editor's terms of reference, except on a cynical level. His desire for the garden is linked with his military approach.

> Moreover I clung to the fond fancy that by flowers I should make my way--I should succeed by big nosegays. I would batter the old women with lilies--I would bombard their citadel with roses. Their door would have to yield to the pressure when a mound of fragrance should be heaped against it(45).

If the garden is Tina's world of innocence then the editor is the worm in the apple. He does not wish to experience the romantic atmosphere in the garden, he wishes to use it. There is assuredly just such an atmosphere on which he capitalises, the delicious atmosphere in Romeo and Juliet's Venice:

> . . . just such an air as must have trembled with Romeo's vows when he stood among the thick flowers and raised his arms to his mistress's balcony(52).

We are reminded of what he tells himself when he approaches the palace: "Imust work the garden--I must work the garden"(15). Later, as he realises how unsavoury his use of Tina is, he says: "I felt almost as one who corrupts the innocence of youth"(81). We begin to wonder about him calling himself "a poor devil of a man of letters"(88) and his remark to Mrs. Prest that he is "prepared to roast all summer--as well as through the long hereafter, perhaps you'll say"(14).

If he is an amoral force, then it is doubtful whether he can respond to ordinary questions of morality, and, as we saw in the

analysis of his narrative, his prime failing is a lack of moral balance and the desire to distort his actions and motives rather than come to terms with them. He can not respond to the proposition that Aspern had betrayed Juliana in making their affair the subject of his public poetry and thus acted immorally. He is a destructive force that is the antithesis of Aspern's creativity. Aspern's creativity, perhaps applied indiscriminately, condemned Juliana to a living death; the editor's irony is that by bringing her back to life, he kills her. Like the Byronic hero, he is a sensitive aesthete and he is also supremely egotistical. His egotism, in the shape of his obsession with historic truth, becomes an amoral destructive force.

The editor as historian, then, systematically treats himself as character as a romantic hero and his narrative takes the form of a quest romance. We may illustrate this by using Northrop Frye's essay on "Archetypal Criticism" in Anatomy of Criticism, where he has a section entitled "The Mythes of Summer: Romance".[41] In this section Frye proposes that romance takes its most complete form in the story of a successful quest. If we apply his criteria to The Aspern Papers, we find that the narrative is a quest romance, albeit the story of an unsuccessful quest.

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[41]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 186-206.

Frye isolates three stages of the quest-romance which he characterises as follows:

> . . . the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms the agon or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and the anagnorisis or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict.[42]

Later, he modifies this view by inserting a fourth stage between the pathos and the anagnorisis.

> Second, the pathos or death, often the mutual death of hero and monster. Third, the disappearance of the hero, a theme which often takes the form of sparagmos or tearing to pieces.[43]

If we apply this to The Aspern Papers, the agon fills the first seven chapters, beginning with the editor's journey to the palace and continuing through his manoeuvres with Tina and Juliana which, I have shown above, he figures in terms of military conflict. The eighth chapter is the pathos, the struggle which culminates in the confrontation between Juliana and the Editor and results in her death. The final chapter begins with the sparagmos which is the editor's flight across the canals, and ends with the anagnorisis where the

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[42] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 187.

[43] Ibid., 192

hero is revealed, or his true character recognised on his return to Tina. Frye also makes the point that

> . . . a threefold structure is repeated in many features of romance--in the frequency, for instance, with which the successful hero is a third son, or the third to undertake the quest, or successful on his third attempt.[44]

We note that there are three interviews between Juliana and the editor, three attempts by him to penetrate her secret, the third of which precipitates her collapse and the death-struggle.

Frye sees the quest romance as essentially a form which deals with conflict between the hero and his enemy.

> The enemy may be an ordinary human being, but the nearer the romance is to myth, the more attributes of divinity will cling to the hero and the more the enemy will take on demonic mythical qualities. The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. The conflict however takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, our world, which is in the middle, and which is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature. Hence the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy. The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth.[45]

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[44]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 187.

[45]Ibid., 187-188.

There is no question that the editor presents the history of his conflict in terms of a conflict between the divine and the demonic. When Mrs. Prest slights Aspern's value as a poet, the editor does not bother to respond because, he says that one "does n't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defense"(5). Later in the same passage he says that the world

> . . . had recognised Jeffrey Aspern, but Cumnor and I had recognised him most. The multitude to-day, flocked to his temple, but of that temple he and I regarded ourselves as the appointed ministers (6).

He goes on in the same paragraph to compare Aspern to Orpheus. Juliana certainly is associated in the text with darkness (the shuttered rooms and her shuttered eyes), sterility, moribund life, and old age. At one level she is associated with witchcraft. Mrs. Prest introduces this note when she describes the palace to the editor before he sees it.

> It's eccentrically neat, for reasons of its own; and though you may pass on foot scarcely any one ever thinks of doing so. It's as negative--considering where it is--as a Protestant Sunday. . Perhaps the people are afraid of the Misses Bordereau. I dare say they have the reputation of witches (10).

The editor refers to Juliana as "a subtle old witch"(93) and later again as "the old witch"(138). On a deeper level Juliana is associated with the underworld of mythology, the living death. When he first comes face to face with her, the editor is pulled up short

by what he sees:

> . . . she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which served for her almost as a mask. . . it created a presumption of some ghastly death's-head lurking behind it. The divine Juliana as a grinning skull(23-24).

This image of Juliana persists when he later describes the expression of her face as "shrunken grimness"(31). If the editor sees himself in terms of Aspern/Orpheus, then like Orpheus his mission is to descend to the underworld to rescue the precious papers. Juliana, the death's head, becomes on this level Charon, the defender of the underworld, barring him entrance. This is suggested when the editor describes her thus: "she looked at me as from the mouth of her cave"(89).[46] Obviously, it emerges from this that the narrative is an ironic inversion of the usual form of the quest romance since, although the editor wants to associate with the divine Aspern, he emerges in his role, as I have shown above, on the side of the demonic.

To return to Frye and his outline of the form, he emphasises the reward-element in the quest.

> We have spoken of the Messianic hero as a redeemer of society, but in the secular quest-romances more obvious motives and rewards for the quest are more

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[46] Comparing this New York edition version with the original version--"she looked at me in her barricaded way"--we can see that James wanted to emphasise this aspect.

> common. Often the dragon guards a hoard; the quest for buried treasure has been a central theme of romance from the Siegfried cycle to Nostromo, and is unlikely to be exhausted yet. Treasure means wealth, which in mythopoeic romance often means wealth in its ideal forms, power and wisdom.[47]

Certainly the editor seeks the presumed wisdom that the papers will bring and the papers are figured as a treasure. Juliana as a dragon guarding her treasure is apparently a preposterous parallel, but she does share the dragon's lust for gold. Frye adds that "the reward of the quest usually is or includes a bride".[48] The price which the editor is finally expected to pay for his treasure is to marry Tina. Even Tina is figured in the narrative as being slightly unworldly, a simple-minded, ageing child. In the final scene when the editor has convinced himself that he can pay the price, she takes on a fabulous, almost faery-like quality, she becomes a shape-changer, but when she reveals that she has burnt the papers he tells us that the "transfiguration" is over and he tells us that she has reverted to the shape of a "plain dingy elderly person"(143).

From the beginning I have emphasised the editor's role as historian of his own adventure. In the analysis of his unreliability as narrator I have suggested that the plot is subordinated to character

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[47]Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 192-193.

[48]Ibid., 193.

in the tale because the value of the narrative as history is drawn into question. The nature of the narrative becomes more important than the subject. What I have tried to show here is that the narrative, by nature, is a romantic monologue, the work of "a man of letters constitutionally given to symbolic thinking" which demonstrates "his habit of allegorizing" as Hux put it.[49] The point of The Aspern Papers then, is an exploration of the nature of the point of view character; it is an ironic characterisation of the anonymous editor. The irony arises from the conflict between his thoughts as narrator and his actions as character. Irony also rises from his consistent habit of conceiving his adventure in terms of a quest romance which is an illusion that conflicts with the petty and squalid reality of his actions. He wants to figure himself as the brave hero in a romantic conflict between the divine and the demonic, yet his choice of imagery betrays his role as demon. He figures Aspern as a god, yet his own betrayal of Juliana is prefigured by Aspern's betrayal of her. Aspern becomes Orpheus, the divine hero who descended into the underworld to bring back Eurydice in the editor's world of illusion. He too attempts to resurrect the dead Aspern in the shape of his papers, but like Orpheus, he fails, succeeding only in bringing about the birth

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[49]Hux, "Irony in The Aspern Papers: the Unreliable Symbolist", 61.

of Tina into a parody of life

I began this study by showing why James on one occasion had rejected the first-person narrator and have gone on to make a detailed study of a first-person narration. What I have shown is that, in The Aspern Papers, James is concentrating on "looseness" By allowing his narrator to tell the story in the first-person, James has allowed him to fall into the "darkest abyss of romance". The result is a loss of the "logic of intensity". Since the editor is equated with Aspern and Aspern is linked in the preface to the Byronic age, it is possible that James is concerned here with a judgement of that age. As this thesis progresses however, it will become obvious that his concern with the moral vision of the romantic artist is part of a much broader theme than is implied by a specific historical judgement.

II

THE HEROINE'S OWN TALE: THE TURN OF THE SCREW.

1. The Critical Controversy and James' Own Contribution

Twenty years separated the writing of The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw, yet there are striking similarities between the two works. In both tales an unidentified stranger (who remains unidentified throughout) is imposed onto the established routine of a family home. The editor imposes himself on to the Bordereaus, while the governess is imposed on Bly by her employer. In each setting, the chief character carries out a specific mission. In the case of the editor it is a preconceived mission which is, in fact, the reason for his intrusion on the Bordereaus. In the case of the governess her mission, to save the children, arises after her arrival, but is nevertheless of her own choosing. In both tales, the chief characters carry out their chosen missions with extraordinary, unremitting and obsessional zeal. Of the many similarities between them, perhaps the most striking is their feeling of being "acted upon". The editor is never really sure of Tina's motives and becomes convinced that Juliana is playing a cynical game with him. The governess begins by feeling that the ghost of Quint visits her,

becomes convinced that both ghosts are after the children and ends by being absolutely sure that the children are acting upon her. While The Aspern Papers has met with almost unanimous critical acclaim however, The Turn of the Screw has become the centre of a huge critical controversy.

It is with great reluctance that I turn my attention to the controversy surrounding the tale. I tend towards the view that, if a work requires too much explanation, it has failed somehow. If the attempts to explain it are voluminous and disagree on absolutely fundamental questions, then the work would appear to have failed completely. The reader may find however, as I have, that he feels the tale to be a success. He may decide then to look again at the controversy to find which reading is correct or, better still, a reading which defuses the controversy. By treating the tale in its final version[1] and in its final setting, that is Volume 12 of the New York

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[1]There can be little doubt that James regarded the New York edition as the final version since, when Martin Secker wished to include the tale in The Uniform Tales of Henry James, (London: Secker, 1915), James agreed on the "distinct understanding, please, that he conform, literatim and punctuation to [the New York edition] text. It is vital that he adhere to that authentic punctuation--to the last comma or rather, more essentially, no-comma". This is from a letter quoted in: Henry James, The Turn of the Screw, ed. Robert Kimbrough, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1966), 89 and note.

edition, I propose that James himself has given us just such a reading.

Basically, the critics who have contributed to the controversy fall into two main camps with various small allied groups. The two main groups are designated generally, the "apparitionists" and the "non-apparitionists". The former believe explicitly in the governess' narrative and regard the tale as a straightforward ghost-story. To them she is a brave, courageous little figure caught in a life-and-death struggle with the dark forces of supernatural evil over the souls of two innocent children. The non-apparitionists deny firmly the reliability of the narrative. They maintain that the ghosts are hallucinations and that the governess is obsessive, mentally deranged and that, in her misguided zeal, she drives Flora out of her mind and kills Miles. Of the smaller groups, there are two which are particularly interesting. The first of these are the critics who regard the tale as an allegory, a modern fable on the perennial struggle of good and evil. The second is a group of critics who have attempted to provide sources for the tale other than the anecdote which James claimed as the donnée. Finally there are critics who follow Leon Edel's attempt[2] to provide a reading which incorporates

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[2] Leon Edel, The Psychological Novel 1900-1950, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955), 38-46.

these apparently contradictory views.

The protagonists in the controversy spread over a broad area between two extremes. The most extreme version of the apparitionist school is what we may term the "pot-boiler" critic. To these critics the governess is a scrupulously honest narrator relating her confrontation with supernatural evil. They accept James' descriptions of the tale as a "pot-boiler"[3] and "a wanton little tale",[4] to the extent that they regard it as a little festival piece designed for Christmas entertainment. Such a critical stand seems out of step with the amount of attention, both critical and editorial which James lavished on the tale. Cranfill and Clark in their study address the problem as follows: considering the letters, recorded conversations and eight pages of the preface which James devoted to the tale, they state that

> . . . never did an insignificant, irresponsible little fiction, an inferior, merely pictorial subject, and a rather shameless pot-boiler receive more significant, responsible treatment in a preface by its author.[5]

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[3] James used this epithet in a letter to H. G. Wells dated 9 December 1898 which is reproduced in Kimbrough, The Turn of the Screw, 110-111.

[4] James used this epithet in a letter to Dr. Louis Waldstein dated 21 October 1898 which is also reproduced in Kimbrough, The Turn of the Screw, 109-110.

[5] Cranfill and Clark, An Anatomy, 14.

Again, noting the amount of editing and textual revision which went into the New York edition, they say that both versions

> . . . inspire admiration for James the craftsman, the stylist, the artist. The final version inspires admiration for James the editor as well. He clearly wanted his collected fiction to include The Turn of the Screw in as highly polished a state as adroit and painstaking revision could yield. The pains he lavished on the polishing should provide with food for thought critics who persist in accepting his dismissal of the tale as an irresponsible little fiction, an inferior subject.[6]

Yet the "pot-boiler" critics persist and make up a large number of writers on the tale. The other apparitionists fall between this extreme and the views of allegorical critics such as Robert Heilman[7] who reads the tale as a serious fable on the struggle between good and evil. Heilman's reading accepts the governess' narrative as genuine and regards the ghosts as real. His view raises the importance of the tale from the level of pot-boiler to that of philosophical poem.

The opposite extreme to the "pot-boiler" critics, in the non-apparitionist school, are the Freudian critics. The leader of this group is Edmund Wilson[8] who regards the governess' narrative

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[6]Cranfill and Clark, An Anatomy, 17-18.

[7]Robert Heilman, "The Turn of the Screw as Poem", The University of Kansas City Review, XIV (Summer, 1948), 277-289.

[8]Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James".

as a casebook study in sexual neurosis. The Freudians pick on what they regard as sexual symbolism in the narrative (the tower, the lake, stairs and corridors, Flora's two pieces of wood) and attempt to show that the whole thing is a catalogue of hallucinations arising out of her repressed sexual desire for the children's uncle, her employer. The rest of the non-apparitionists fall between this extreme and the critics who regard the governess as a cloistered, overly-romantic person, who, faced with a large responsibility, over-dramatises her predicament and with well-meant, but mis-placed zeal produces a disastrous effect.

One peculiar feature of the controversy between the apparitionists and the non-apparitionists is that both camps come to the field of battle bearing the same weapons. In one hand they brandish the text of the tale and in the other, the preface and other thoughts by James on the tale. The non-apparitionists maintain that a close reading of the text establishes absolutely the unreliability of the governess. The apparitionists, maintain that this is over-reading the text and cite Mrs. Grose as proof of the existence of the ghosts. Furthermore the apparitionists look at what James says about the ghosts and the "authority" of the governess and take this as proof that it is a simple ghost-story. On the other hand, the non-apparitionists regard what James says

as ambiguous and mis-leading to such an extent that it suggests a trap for the unwary, a trick which supplies the clue to a surprising kick in the tale. As to the close reading of the text, my own view, as will emerge in the analysis that follows, is that the non-apparitionists are right in regarding the narrator as suspect. James' own words on the subject are another question. A survey of his expressed thoughts[9] seems to serve only to confuse the subject, since, he appears to contradict himself so much. Almost any critic can find something to support his view. Aware of that danger however, I want to note some of his comments in the preface to Volume 12.

To begin with James informs us that The Turn of the Screw is a

> . . . fairy-tale pure and simple--save indeed as to its springing not from an artless and measureless, but from a conscious and cultivated credulity.[10]

That "cultivated credulity" has an almost sinister suggestion of warning to it. Another phrase that suggests there is more to the "fairy-tale" than meets the eye is "the suppositious narrator".[11] The Oxford English Dictionary defines supposititious as "substituted

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[9]Most of these are collected together in Kimborough, The Turn of the Screw, 106-123.

[10]James, Art of the Novel, 171.

[11]Ibid., 173.

for the real, spurious". This seems to me something of a subtle hint, to which I shall return later. Describing his response to the charge that he has not fully "characterised" the governess, James declares that his "ironic heart shook" and part of his response is that

> . . . . It was 'deja tres-joli, ' in "The Turn of the Screw", please believe, the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities--by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter.[12]

This suggests some doubt over the reliability of her explanations. Further in the same response he says that we have "as much of her own nature as we can swallow in watching it reflect her anxieties and inductions".[13] The process of induction, as I see it, is the proof of the general from the particular. I shall return later to this also.

In rejecting what he calls "good" ghosts, James informs us that in The Turn of the Screw he "cast [his] lot with pure romance".[14] He emphasises that he did not want to specify the evil, simply to create an impression, a sense of evil which the reader can fill in

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[12]James, Art of the Novel, 173. My emphasis.

[13]Ibid., 174. My emphasis.

[14]Ibid., 175.

from "his own experience, his own imagination".[15] Could not this be the real fun of catching those not usually caught which he expressed as his amusing intention in the tale? If the trap is set to catch us by making us believe in ghosts which we regard as evil only by projecting our own sense of evil, then where are the ghosts? The tale was, for him, a success

> . . . beyond my liveliest hope. Droll enough at the same time, I must add, some of the evidence--even when most convincing--of this success. How can I feel my calculation to have failed, my wrought suggestion not to have worked, that is, on my being assailed, as has befallen me, with the charge of a monstrous emphasis, the charge of all indecently expatiating? There is not only from beginning to end of the matter not an inch of expatiation, but my values are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness--on which punctual effects of strong causes no writer can ever fail to plume himself--proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures. Of high interest to the author meanwhile--and by the same stroke a theme for the moralist--the artless resentful reaction of the entertained person who has abounded in the sense of the situation.[16]

Who then "reads" and who "reads into"? I will suggest in the following analysis that the governess as narrator, like the anonymous editor, "reads significance into" the actions of those

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[15] James, Art of the Novel, 176.

[16] Ibid., 176-177.

around her and also "reads into" her own actions as character in order to justify herself after the event.

All this is offered as indication, not as evidence--other "paste-ups" of James' thoughts could support other points of view and there is no reason for us to trust the views of James the critic on the work of James the artist, any more than we do Edmund Wilson or Robert Heilman. This is especially significant if we are to believe those critics who call the reliability of James' preface into question. In the preface, James insists that modern psychical research ghosts are useless for the ghost story and that the old fashioned fairy-tale variety are the ones he preferred to use. However, Francis X. Roellinger[17] suggests that Quint and Miss Jessel "are conceived to a surprising extent in terms of the cases reported to the Society [for Psychical Research]". Roellinger suggests possible links between James and the Society through his brother William, and F. W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney. Roellinger reveals also that Myers published the testimony of a certain Wilson Quint--quite an extraordinary name. Again, James indicates that his donnée was an anecdote given to him by Archbishop E. W. Benson. Both of Benson's sons were authors and friends of James,

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[17]Francis X. Roellinger, "Psychical Research and *The Turn of the Screw*", *American Literature*, XX (January, 1949), 401-412.

but neither mention their father telling the story.[18] Oscar Cargill[19] suggests another unacknowledged source for the tale in Freud and Breuer's Studien uber Hysterie. Cargill's comparison of the tale with Freud's "Case of Lucy R" is very pursuasive. What lends poignancy and credence to the proposition that the governess was a study of hysteria, is the sad fact of Alice James' illness, a fact which Henry James lived with at first hand. If Cargill is right and James did use his sister's tragic illness as a source, then it would not be surprising to find him setting up a smoke screen of ambiguity between the reader and the tale.

Henry James as unreliable historian is a charming concept in the midst of a study of unreliable Jamesian narrators, but it makes for a lot of difficulty in using James as evidence, except for one fact. James did place his tale in a significant position in his collected works. The New York edition does appear to be a systematic collection. The object of this thesis is to show that Volume 12 is, in some senses, a unit and if we turn to The Turn of the Screw and

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[18]Noted in Robert Lee Wolff, "The Genesis of The Turn of the Screw", American Literature, XIII (March, 1941), 1-8.

[19]Oscar Cargill, "The Turn of the Screw and Alice James", PMLA, LXXVIII (June, 1963), 238-249.

apply what I have noted about The Aspern Papers, a pattern does emerge.[20]

2. The Governess as Unreliable Narrator

In my analysis of the narrative in The Aspern Papers I outlined the "looseness" which characterises it. Of the various characteristics underlying the unreliability of the editor as narrator, three stand out as being shared by the governess in The Turn of the Screw. The first of these characteristics is an excess of subjectivity, particularly expressed in a paranoid feeling of being excluded or acted upon. The second characteristic is the failure to distinguish between the time of the action and the time of the narration, causing the latter to interrupt and distort the former. The third character trait is the habit of inducing fact, that is, proving a general pattern by one individual incident. This third habit is more developed in the governess. I shall deal with these three in order.

The governess, like the editor, has two roles, heroine and

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[20]The following analysis of the text of The Turn of the Screw is meant to be indicative, not exhaustive. The scenes with which I deal are accepted generally as the crucial points by most critics. To deal with more would be to duplicate unnecessarily a great deal of other's work. Much of what I say is not original, but common critical ground and as such is not attributed to any individual. Where a reading is obviously original, it has been acknowledged in the footnotes.

historian, a combination which from all I have said so far seems condemned to looseness, to excesses of subjectivity. The governess is nothing else if not subjective. Her whole conception of her mission is subjective. She views herself as a martyr, a sacrificial alternative who throws herself as a shield between the children and the evil of Bly. Leaving that aside for a moment, let us take a couple of mundane examples of her subjectivity.

The first crisis in her tale occurs over the letter from Miles' school. She and Mrs. Grose are thrown into a quandry by the letter, but one brief meeting with Miles convinces her that the school must have been misguided. The two women agree not to do anything about the letter and the following scene occurs.

> "Then I'll stand by you. We'll see it out."
> "We'll see it out!" I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow.
> She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. "Would you mind, Miss, if I used the freedom--"
> "To kiss me? No!" I took the good creature in my arms and after we had embraced like sisters felt still more fortified and indignant (172).

Early in her narrative she declares that she is a person that is easily carried away (162), her ardent cries and moral indignation are fair proof of that, but what about her reaction to others? She may well be justified in her belief that Mrs. Grose wanted to kiss her, but she never waits to find out. Later, when she returns from the,

granted, fateful evening walk during which she sees her first apparition, she describes the look on Mrs. Grose's face as "the good surprised look of my friend, which immediately told me that she had missed me"(179). We have been told already that these walks are a normal afternoon occurrence. Why then should Mrs. Grose have missed her? These are minor occurrences, but they indicate a high degree of subjective reaction to her description of other character's reactions.

Many of the editor's subjective readings and the resulting tension between his perception and the reader's, arise from his narrative intrusions. His confusion of the time schemes leads to conflict between his present impressions of himself and his past actions. The split time-scheme of <u>The Turn of the Screw</u> is made more obvious, yet more complex by the Prologue. The Freudian critics see the Prologue as the key factor in the undermining of the governess' narrative as, they say, the revelation of the governess' love for the guardian provides the key to her neurotic breakdown. For the moment I want to ignore the Prologue and concentrate on those moments when the governess intrudes into her own narrative and casts doubt on her perspective on her own actions and feelings.

One key moment when the governess as narrator intrudes is in a description of the children. "Adorable they must in truth have

been, I now feel, since I did n't in these days hate them"(247).[21] What does she mean? Is it that she hates them now (in other words, at the time of writing) but not at the time of the events? Once she has raised the question of hate we can never be sure of when she started to hate them. If we go back to the time when she and Mrs. Grose take their stand over the letter, we find another significant intrusion.

> This at all events was for the time: a time so full that as I recall the way it went it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct (172).[22]

Here her memory and her art are confused. Is she making reality distinct or a later impression of it? Earlier she asks Mrs. Grose about her predecessor and the following dialogue occurs:

> "The last governess? She was also young and pretty--almost as young and almost as pretty, Miss, even as you."
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> "Ah then I hope her youth and her beauty helped her!" I recollect throwing off. "He seems to like us young and pretty!"
>
> "Oh he did," Mrs. Grose assented: "it was the way he liked everyone!" She had no sooner spoken indeed than she caught herself up. "I mean that's his way--the master's."
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> I was struck. "But of whom did you speak first."
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> She looked blank, but she coloured. "Why of him."
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> "Of the master?"
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> "Of who else?"

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[21] My emphasis.

[22] My emphasis.

> There was so obviously no one else that the next moment I had lost my impression of her having accidentally said more than she meant (169).

The non-apparitionists make much of this scene, noting that it is her first hint of the existence of Quint and one of the causes of her ascribing her hallucination to his ghost.[23] It is a moot point that she (as narrator) does not make clear when she recollects her lost impression and thus leaves the door open to the speculation that she could have recollected it during the adventure and not when she was recording it.

Finally, on this point of her intrusions into the narrative, I want to turn to her description of the third encounter with the presumed ghost of Quint. She describes how she was sitting in her room at night reading a book when a strange sense of foreboding came over her, a feeling that something was abroad in the house.

> Then, with all the marks of a deliberation _that must have seemed magnificent had there been any one to admire it,_ I laid down my book, rose to my feet and, taking a candle, went straight out of the room (221).[24]

She goes to the stairs where she encounters the apparition.

> He was absolutely, on this occasion, a living detestable dangerous presence. But that was not the wonder of

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[23]Harold C. Goddard, "A Pre-Freudian Reading of _The Turn of the Screw_," _Nineteenth-Century Fiction_, XII (June, 1957), 1-36.

[24]My emphasis.

> wonders; I reserve this distinction for quite another circumstance: the circumstance that dread had unmistakeably quitted me and that there was nothing in me unable to meet and measure him (222).

Essentially, however, there was somebody there to admire it--her! Did she feel magnificent at the time, or is this an indication that she as narrator intends to justify herself as character on a subjective level?

We note then the same subjectivity, the same inability to distinguish roles and the same inability to separate present impressions from past ones in the governess' narrative as we found in the editor's. The result is the same tension between the narrator's perception and the reader's, arising from narrative inconsistency. The text is riddled with examples of this inconsistency. Right at the beginning, on her second day at Bly, she asks Mrs. Grose whether or not she agrees that the governess should meet Miles from his coach. It is a proposition to which

> . . . Mrs. Grose assented so heartily that I somehow took her manner as a kind of comforting pledge--never falsified, thank heaven! --that we should on every question be quite at one (162).

There is the narrator again making a statement which the text hardly bears out. Following their scene with Flora on the lake and Mrs. Grose's subsequent behaviour, we can not agree that Mrs. Grose is "at one" with the governess over her treatment of Flora. As the

narrative is a chronicle of the past, her parenthetical comment is patently untrue, a result of subjective rationalisation. In the same scene, the governess declares: "One would n't, it was already conveyed between us, too grossly flatter a child" (161). Yet both of them indulge in gross flattery of the children. To return again to the scene between the two women in which they discuss the letter from the school. Mrs. Grose wants to know what answer the governess will give:

> I had made up my mind. "Nothing at all."
> "And to his uncle?"
> I was incisive. "Nothing at all."
> "And to the boy himself?"
> I was wonderful. "Nothing at all" (172).

Here the Prologue clearly undermines the narrative. We can not say why she will not say anything to the school. We know for certain why she must say nothing to the uncle, because (as the prologue informs us) he has ordered her not to trouble him with the affairs of the children. The narrator tells us she was "incisive"; the prologue tells us she had no choice. What then of the narrator's view of herself as wonderful?

It is clearly emerging that, in the light of her subjectivity and her inconsistency of statement, and in agreement with the non-apparitionist critics, I regard her as a very unreliable narrator. These examples alone bear out that view. If we now turn to the

ghosts, or more particularly to the children and Mrs. Grose, I think that this evidence of her unreliability casts a pall over her account of them and their reactions.

One of the most controversial scenes in the tale is that of the first appearance of Miss Jessel. At the time the governess goes to great lengths to impress on us that Flora has turned her back to where the apparition appears.

> I transferred my eyes straight to little Flora, who, at the moment, was about ten yards away. My heart had stood still for an instant with the wonder and terror of the question whether she too would see; and I held my breath while I waited for what a cry from her, what some sudden innocent sign either of interest or of alarm, would tell me. I waited, but nothing came; then in the first place--and there is something more dire in this, I feel, than in anything I have to relate--I was determined by a sense that within a minute all spontaneous sounds from her had dropped; and in the second by the circumstance that also within the minute she had, in her play, turned her back to the water (201-202).

Flora is silently absorbed in making a toy boat, yet "dire" as it is to tell it, the governess reveals that this proves that Flora is aware of the presence of Miss Jessel; furthermore, that she is in communication with the ghost. I have noted that James, in the preface, refers to the governess' "inductions". Here is a prime example of her inductive logic. She infers from Flora's posture that the child, far from being innocently involved in play, is in communion with an evil spirit. This is a subjective reaction, hardly surprising from

some one who has just seen a ghost, but on the slim evidence of this particular inference she declares to Mrs. Grose the undeniable general truth that both children know of the ghosts!

The apparitionists who believe in the governess' reliability, generally attack those who do not with the governess' own question to Mrs. Grose. If the ghosts do not exist, how does Mrs. Grose recognise them from the governess' descriptions? To begin with, it is the governess who names the apparition of Miss Jessel (204) but not Peter Quint. Harold C. Goddard has indicated that she gets a hint of Quint's existence early on and that the first apparition she saw was an image of her employer (with whom she was admittedly infatuated) which she later projected on to this unknown stranger. After her second sight of him she tells Mrs. Grose.

The first significant thing about the recognition scene (187-192) is that Mrs. Grose is also "scared", having received a similar shock from the governess. The governess reveals that she has seen a stranger at the window, the same stranger that she had seen before on the tower. Mrs. Grose asks: "Was he a gentleman?" and the governess replies "No". Mrs. Grose pursues: "Then nobody about the place? Nobody from the village?" The governess replies emphatically: "Nobody--nobody. I did n't tell you, but I made sure." How did she make sure? John Silver and other non-apparitionists

make much of this answer.[25] We do not know how she checked or with whom. The point of her reply is that she knows more than she is telling.

The scene is a grey, murky afternoon. Both women have received a fright and into this atmosphere the governess inserts the crucial note of superstition: "He's a horror." Mrs. Grose's reaction is to fix her eyes "on the duskier distance and then, pulling herself together", to change the subject. But the governess will not allow this, she brings him back in to the conversation. The note of aroused superstition in Mrs. Grose is unmistakable and the governess plays on it. She begins to describe the figure and the crucial moment comes when she reveals that he was dressed "In somebody's clothes. They're smart, but they're not his own." This is the final touch for it clearly inspires in the faithful servant the memory of one of Quint's worst crimes (in her eyes): that he wore his master's clothes. We do not necessarily have to accept Silver's hypothesis that the governess has found out about Quint in her enquiries and is leading Mrs. Grose. What we may be seeing here is a remarkable coincidence which turns a hallucination into a reality. Let us suppose that Goddard is right and the first sighting on the tower is a result of her day-dreaming

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[25]John Silver, "A Note on the Freudian Reading of The Turn of the Screw," American Literature, XXIX (May, 1957), 207-211.

about her beloved employer; she describes the daydream as part of the circumstances. She comes to the conclusion that the figure on the tower is an inexcusably impertinent stranger. In other words, she rationalises the experience. The second sighting frightens the colour out of her face as Mrs. Grose attests. The governess asserts that the two images are the same, but the image of her beloved employer is a welcome sight, not a horror to frighten her. Then she rationalises that it is not him, but somebody else in his clothes. This is just the note that sparks the frightened Mrs. Grose.

The governess is then, consciously or unconsciously, leading Mrs. Grose. There is more evidence of this. I have noted already the slim grounds on which she informs Mrs. Grose emphatically of the children's complicity. Later Mrs. Grose asks her if she thinks that the children discuss Quint and Miss Jessel. She tells us: "I could meet this with an assurance! 'They say things that, if we heard them, would simply appal us'"(274). Later, this proves to be true, certainly of Flora, but she can have no way of knowing that at this time in the narrative. Furthermore there is proof that the governess lies. She keeps the letters which the children write to their uncle (we may excuse her by saying that she is simply carrying out his orders not to worry him about anything at Bly), but she does not tell the children that she does not send them. When she is

confronted by the apparition of Miss Jessel in the classroom the only words recorded are her own outburst.

> While these instants lasted indeed I had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder. It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her--"You terrible miserable woman!"-- I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and empty house. She looked at me as if she heard me, but I had recovered myself and cleared the air. There was nothing in the room the next minute but the sunshine and the sense that I must stay (257).

There is no record of conversation, but in the next scene she recounts her conversation with Miss Jessel to Mrs. Grose (258-261). Thus we have another example of inconsistency in the narrative which affects the reader's perception of it.

In his preface James refers to the governess' "inductions". I have noted above that this is a trait of the editor in The Aspern Papers. Having constructed a chain of inferences, if one of them is established as fact, the editor will assume all of them to be facts. The whole of the governess' narrative follows this process. Given the "identification" of Quint, all further inferences become facts. Alexander E. Jones[26] (an apparitionist) highlights this disturbing trait.

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[26]Alexander E. Jones, "Point of View in The Turn of the Screw", PMLA, LXXIV (March, 1959), 112-122.

> She tends to jump to conclusions, and then to report her deductions as though she were stating facts rather than interpretations.

He cites the certainty with which she informs Mrs. Grose that Flora saw the apparition of Miss Jessel at the lake and her relation of the conversation in the classroom as examples. However, says Jones, she is not a pathological liar and the fact that James so consistently substituted "I felt" for "I saw" and "I believe" in the revisions, proves that he was sympathetic to her. Jones concludes that she is basically reliable. I do not argue with the fact that James was sympathetic to her, but I fail to see how that fact, or the revisions, can make her reliable. The fact is that she transforms consistently speculation to fact, belief into knowledge. There are many more examples of it.

She exhibits this trait in the very beginning. Mrs. Grose asks her what the letter from the school had given as a reason for Miles' expulsion.

> "They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him. That can have but one meaning." Mrs. Grose listened with dumb emotion; she forebore to ask me what this meaning might be; so that, presently, to put the thing with some coherence and with the mere aid of her presence to my own mind, I went on: "That he's an injury to the others" (166).

Eventually it transpires that this is true, but there is no way that the governess can know this at the time. In the first flush of those

summer days at Bly and under the influence of the charming Miles, she rejects this idea herself. Here then we are dealing, not with a pathological liar, but with an unreliable narrator, a "bedimmed and befooled and bewildered" (slightly more than usual) piece of humanity trying to come to grips with an unfamiliar reality.

Other examples of this trait abound in the narrative. For instance, on the second appearance of Quint, she believes that he has come, not for her, but for someone else. Suddenly the belief becomes knowledge.

> The flash of this knowledge--for it was knowledge in the midst of dread--produced in me the most extraordinary effect, starting, as I stood there, a sudden vibration of duty and courage (184).

Armed with this courage, she goes off to transmit her "knowledge" to Mrs. Grose, the certainty that Quint has come for Miles. The governess as narrator even confesses to this habit of transforming speculation into fact.

> It seems to me indeed, in raking it all over, that by the time the morrow's sun was high I had restlessly <u>read into the facts</u> before us almost all the meaning they were to receive from subsequent and more cruel occurrences (198).[27]

From the moment of her scene by the lake with Flora, and on the most subjective analysis of Flora's behaviour, she is convinced that

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[27]My emphasis.

the children's behaviour is the obverse of what it appears to be. We can never know how much of this is fact, and how much the product of her "mere infernal imagination" (241).

I have been noting the remarkable similarities between the governess and the editor. There is one that I have so far not touched on: the fact that they are both obsessive. The driving force behind the editor is his obsession with the past and with historic truth. The governess is also obsessed, supposedly with her mission to rescue the children, but in fact, she is obsessed with her own self and the driving force behind her narrative is self-justification. On the Sunday night after she and Mrs. Grose have "identified" Quint, she is left alone to collect her thoughts. What emerges is a remarkable picture of herself as protector of the children. It is a kind of mock-heroic distortion of the governess. She has no sooner presented this vision of herself as glorious protector, than she comes close to seeing herself as a neurotic.

> I began to watch them in a stifled suspense, a disguised tension, that might well, had it continued too long, have turned to something like madness. What saved me, as I now see, was that it turned to another matter altogether. It did n't last as suspense--it was superseded by horrible proofs. Proofs, I say, yes--from the moment I really took hold (199).

This is a key passage. She admits that the "stifled suspense" and "disguised tension" of her behaviour might well lead to "something

like madness". She, the narrator, informs us ("as I now see") that she, the character, was "saved" from that something like madness. How was she saved?--by "horrible proofs". It is notable that James amended the original text which read "facts" for "proofs". What are these proofs? The one that follows immediately on this passage is the fact that Flora had her back turned to the apparition which proves that she was communicating with it. Can we really believe that this narrator was "saved" from madness? The final sentence with its breathless emphasis on "proofs" is suggestive of hysteria.

The governess actually alludes to her own obsession on two occasions. First, in chapter XIII, where she details her suspicions about the children and tries to explain why she can not accept their behaviour as genuine. "How can I retrace today the strange steps of my obsession" (244). She refers to it again in the scene in which she leaves her room to check up on Miles at night. "What, under my endless obsession, I had been impelled to listen for was some betrayal of his not being at rest" (262). The obsession which drives her to press Miles in the final chapter is the need for self-justification. All she really wants from him is proof that she was right in suspecting his complicity with the ghosts. Her triumph comes when he names Miss Jessel, but he does this in response to her shriek at the window. He thinks she has seen a ghost. Perhaps he mentions

the name because he has spoken to his sister about the previous day's incidents when they had breakfast together (294). It is she who suggests Quint to Miles rather than Miss Jessel. The book ends with even more questions. Does Miles scream "you devil" at the apparition or at the governess? Does Miles die of fright or as a result of an over-zealous, protective hug?

The great question of the ghosts' existence seems to come back to the first sighting of Quint on the tower. Perhaps we may conclude with Leon Edel[28] that the tale is meant to operate on different levels: first it is a ghost story with a large ingredient of horror; second it is a tour-de-force as an experiment in point of view which tricks the reader into accepting speculative theory as fact; and third it is a casebook of a mentally disturbed narrator. What we have seen in The Turn of the Screw is another brilliantly written, ironic characterisation of the narrator. This would accord with Edel's second and third alternatives, but that still leaves the ghost story and the puzzle. The answer to the puzzle lies in analysing the nature of the narrative, as I did before with The Aspern Papers.

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[28] Leon Edel, "Prefatory Note" to Harold C. Goddard, "A Pre-Freudian Reading of The Turn of the Screw", Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XII (June, 1957), 1-3.

3. The Governess as Gothic Heroine

When discussing the nature of the governess' narrative, the concept of romance must come up again, since in the preface James talks of casting his lot with romance in the tale. In the study of The Aspern Papers, I have suggested that the narrator's use of the conventional patterns of quest romance and his drop into the "darkest abyss of romance", the double-role, are tools used to deepen the irony of the characterisation. If the editor drops into the abyss, then the governess does it on a "grand scale" and "variety, and many other queer matters as well. . . have been smuggled in by a back-door".[29] Certainly, some of the critics have asked us to treat it as a romance. For instance, Goddard[30] says:

> When a young person, especially a young woman, falls in love and circumstances forbid the normal growth and confession of the passion, the emotion, dammed, overflows in a psychical experience, a daydream, or internal drama which the mind creates in lieu of the thwarted realization in the objective world. In romantic natures this takes the form of imagined deeds of extraordinary heroism or self-sacrifice done in behalf of the beloved object. The governess' is precisely such a nature and the fact that she knows her love is futile intensifies the tendency. Her whole being tingles with the craving to perform some act of unexplained courage.

He goes on to describe her narrative as "an orgy of myth-making".

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[29] James, Art of the Novel, 320.

[30] Goddard, "A Pre-Freudian Reading", 7.

It is a remarkable fact that Goddard, although approaching from the other side of the road, actually arrives at the same position as the allegorist critics who accept the ghosts. At any rate, it seems valid to regard the narrative as a romance in the form, not of a quest, but of a gothic novel.

The similarities between The Turn of the Screw and The Aspern Papers continue on this level. The Gardencourt metaphor recurs and, like the Bordereau's garden, the grounds at Bly suggest a fallen world of innocence, a garden with a snake. Robert Heilman[31] has pointed out that in the governess' description of Quint, there is an element of the snake.

> His eyes are sharp, strange--awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide, and his lips are thin.

Heilman, as I have noted, read the tale as a dramatic poem which is an allegory of good and evil. The two children are the innocents, the prototypes of the race of man.

> Miles and Flora become the childhood of the race. They are symbolic children as the ghosts are symbolic ghosts. Even the names themselves have a representative quality as those of James's characters often do: Miles--the soldier, the archetypal male; Flora--the flower, the essential female.[32]

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[31]Heilman, "The Turn of the Screw as Poem", 7.

[32]Ibid., 5.

All of which is fine except that what I have said of The Aspern Papers leads me to suggest that the allegory is the governess', not James', and is part of the ironic characterisation.

Like the editor of The Aspern Papers, the governess figures her story in terms of a conflict between the divine and the demonic. The apparitions of Quint and Miss Jessel are the demons, of course, bringing their "infernal message" to the children (246). The divine side is represented by the children originally. Flora is presented as a "vision of. . . angelic beauty"(160), a figure with "the deep sweet serenity indeed of one of Raphael's holy infants"(161). She has a "little divine smile"(226). She and her brother are "cherubs". Miles basks in the "real rose-flush of his innocence". He is "an angel"(182). The governess takes him to her heart because he has in him "something divine"(171). He is a "fairy prince"(223).

In the beginning, the governess casts herself as a heroic martyr fighting in the cause of her divine children because she is "under the spell" and "dazzled by their loveliness"(183). After the heroine has convinced herself that the children know the ghosts exist, then the "angel" Miles becomes a "fiend"(214). The proof of his complicity is that Flora had her back to what the governess saw! She actually calls him a fiend because of his activities at school. A strong word to use when she does not know what he did. From this point on she

regards the children as "little wretches"(244). The most extraordinary instance of her changing attitude to the children occurs at the time when Miles plays the piano while Flora goes out and she tells Mrs. Grose of the incident.

> "The trick's played," I went on; "they've successfully worked their plan. He found the most divine little way to keep me quiet while she went off."
> "'Divine'?" Mrs. Grose bewilderedly echoed.
> "Infernal then!" I almost cheerfully rejoined (271).

Suddenly the pattern of imagery which Heilman claims as the basis of James' allegory becomes frivolous in the hands of the governess, a cheerful play on words. Given the unreliability of the governess and the evidence that, like The Aspern Papers, the tale is an ironic characterisation, the allegory is then the product of the governess' "mere infernal imagination"(241).

Heilman[33] outlines the details of setting and says that what "might elsewhere be Gothic trimming is here disciplined by the pattern." By the "pattern", I assume that he means the allegory, but the allegory breaks down in the governess' frivolity. What emerges clearly is the gothic element. When the governess discusses Quint with Mrs. Grose, she is unsatisfied. She goes to sleep "still haunted with the shadow of something she had not told me"(197). Later she repeats that she feels Mrs. Grose is holding something back.

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[33] Heilman, "The Turn of the Screw as Poem", 5.

She expresses that something as "a small shifty spot on the wrong side of it all [which] still sometimes brushed my brow like the wing of a bat"(211). She conceives their daily life as "the romance of the nursery and the poetry of the classroom"(181). The governess emerges as the sentimental heroine of a gothic novel.

The setting is unremittingly gothic. There is a mysterious lake with a shadowy setting. There are storms to punctuate the rising action of the tale and in the midst of it all stands the house of Bly complete with mediaeval turrets. The governess unashamedly reveals the Gothic element when she tells us that looking at Bly in those days, she

> . . . had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales (163).

In the same paragraph she deflates the image:

> . . . it was a big ugly antique but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-displaced and half utilised, in which I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship (163-164).

However, the first view is the view of the governess as character, the second is that of the governess as narrator attempting to rationalise her experience. I say "attempting" because her image of the drifting ship is no less romantic than the castle, particularly when she adds: "Well, I was strangely at the helm"(164).

The scene is then set in terms of the gothic horror tale and when the ghost appears, he appears to order on one of the towers.

> This tower was one of a pair--square incongruous crenellated structures--that were distinguished, for some reason, though I could see little difference, as the new and the old. They flanked opposite ends of the house and were probably architectural absurdities, redeemed in a measure indeed by not being wholly disengaged nor of a height too pretentious, dating in their gingerbread antiquity, from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past (175).

From this description of Bly, it begins to sound ironically like that very famous flowering of English "Gothic", Strawberry Hill, the creation of Horace Walpole, the first English Gothic novelist. Perhaps this is another note of irony.

The governess reacts in terms of the gothic as well. Having seen the figure on the tower, she wonders whether there was "a 'secret' at Bly--a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement"(179). The first alternative is obviously a reference to Anne Radcliffe's novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, while the second seems to refer to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. The governess opts for the mystery of Udolpho and her narrative takes the form of a gothic mystery. There is a castle, vast in proportions (as Bly is to the governess) with long corridors, dark staircases, empty portions and, of course, ghosts. In the midst of all is the saintly, chaste benighted heroine.

Lowry Nelson Jr. [34] in an article on the gothic novel says that the achievement of the form was that it

> . . . seems to have freed the minds of readers from direct involvement of their superegos and allowed them to pursue daydreams and wish fulfillment in regions where inhibitions and guilt could be suspended. Those regions became thereby available to great writers who eventually demonstrated that sadism, indefinite guiltiness, mingled pleasure and pain (Maturin's "delicious agony"), and love-hate, were also deeply-rooted in the minds of the supposedly normal.

Nelson goes on to say that evil is

> . . . within; in one's own works and creations. Good impulses are thwarted and evil ones encouraged by some inner perversity. The source of that perversity is perhaps a desire to be loved alone or an urge towards narcissism.

This, surely, is the crux of The Turn of the Screw. The question of whether or not the ghost of Peter Quint actually appears on the tower is irrelevant. The ghost may be a ghost, or an hallucination of her employer, or a repressed sex dream projected on to a phallic tower. What matters is that the governess believes it to be a ghost and she becomes convinced that it is evil. Her "good impulses" are to protect the children, but they are perverted. Whether they are perverted by her undoubted desire to be loved or by the suggested narcissism in her obsessional projection of herself as heroic

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[34] Lowry Nelson Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel", The Yale Review, LII (December, 1962), 236-257.

sacrifice, they are definitely perverted because the results of her good impulses are evil--one child dead and another driven out of its mind.

To the reader who complains that James was not a gothic novelist, I must repeat the reminder that I am not talking at the moment of James, but of the governess as artist--the creater of the narrative. Actually the gothic form is not out of keeping with what James says was his intention in the preface. The form appeals to the imagination at its most impressionable level. The most important aspect of it is the creation of atmosphere. In the final analysis it is not the detailed working out of plot which matters, but the creation of given sensations. The Turn of the Screw is gothic in this sense because each successive turn of the narrative screw increases the sense of mystery, isolation, fear and horror. In one sense The Aspern Papers is also gothic because the atmosphere of mystery and isolation which the editor feels in the Bordereau palace, is at least as important as the plot.

Two final puzzles remain with The Turn of the Screw: one is the function of the Prologue; and the other is why James referred to his governess as the "supposititious narrator".[35] Perhaps the answer to the first puzzle contains the answer to the second.

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[35] James, Art of the Novel, 173.

Northrop Frye believes the Prologue to be significant. Defining the sixth phase of romance as the <u>penseroso</u> phase, he notes that a

> . . . characteristic feature of this phase is the tale in quotation marks, where we have an opening setting with a small group of congenial people, and then the real story told by one of the members. In <u>The Turn of the Screw</u> a large party is telling ghost stories in a country house; then some people leave, and a much smaller and more intimate circle gathers around the crucial tale. The opening dismissal of catachumens is thoroughly in spirit and conventions of this phase. The effect of such devices is to present the story through a relaxed and contemplative haze as something that entertains us without, so to speak, confronting us, as direct tragedy confronts us.[36]

The point about the Prologue removing us from the tale is well taken. The fact that we confront it through so may diffusions is probably what allows the apparitionist critics to accept the unmitigated horror without condemning James for irresponsible, gratuitous degradation of children. It is also significant that Frye emphasises the teller of the tale, in this case Douglas.

The non-apparitionists find Douglas very important too. He is the source of the information about the governess' interview with the Harley Street uncle and therefore basic to the sex-repression and other hallucination theories. Some critics have even cast Douglas as Miles. (Obviously these critics regard the governess as unreliable since they do not even recognise her ability to recognise

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[36]Frye, <u>Anatomy of Criticism</u>, 202-203.

death!) Other critics stress the importance of the elaborate time scheme outlined in the Prologue, emphasising again the devices to remove the reader from direct confrontation with the narrative. Notable among this group is Leon Edel[37] who stresses the fact that Douglas' testimony is based on his knowledge of the governess, ten years after the event. One peculiar feature of the elaborate time scheme, although perhaps insignificant, emerges if you count it backwards. We know that Douglas knew the governess forty years before and, since she was thirty at that time and twenty at the time of the tale, this places the events fifty years before the Christmas party. The "I" of the Prologue reveals that he copied the story down just before Douglas died. If we subtract 50 from the date of composition of The Turn of the Screw, 1897, we arrive back close to the date of Wuthering Heights, the high-point of English Gothic. The distancing of events through various narrators is very similar in both books.[38]

Leaving that aside however, as an interesting coincidence, there is something more important to note about Douglas. When he

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[37] Edel, The Psychological Novel, 38-46.

[38] A possible link between the two stories is discussed in Miriam Allot, "Mrs. Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story': A link between 'Wuthering Heights' and 'The Turn of the Screw'", Notes and Queries, VIII, new series (March, 1961), 101-102.

reveals that he has a tale to tell, the following scene unfolds:

> "Nobody but me, till now has ever heard. It's quite too horrible." This was naturally declared by several voices to give the thing the utmost price, and our friend, with quiet art, prepared his triumph by turning his eyes over the rest of us and going on: "It's beyond everything. Nothing at all I know touches it."
>
> "For sheer terror?" I remember asking.
>
> He seemed to say it was n't so simple as that; to be really at a loss how to qualify it. He passed his hands over his eyes, made a little wincing grimace. "For dreadful--dreadfulness!"
>
> "Oh how delicious." cried one of the women.
>
> He took no notice of her; he looked at me, but as if, instead of me, he saw what he spoke of. "For general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain."
>
> "Well then," I said, "just sit right down and begin."
>
> He turned round to the fire, gave a kick to the log, watched it an instant. Then he faced us again: "I can't begin. I shall have to send to town." There was a unanimous groan at this, and much reproach; after which in his preoccupied way, he explained. "The story's written. It's in a locked drawer--it has not been out for years"(148-149).[39]

The responses demonstrate exactly the sort of vicarious delight in terror which James claimed to have aimed for. But note, particularly in the stressed phrases, how Douglas appears to be orchestrating his audience's responses. Notice the "quiet art" with which he does it. Later he describes the ageing manuscript as being written "in old faded ink and in the most beautiful hand. . . . A woman's"(149). It begins to sound like a standard prop in a gothic novel. Further

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[39]My emphasis.

on, Douglas and the "I" narrator work like a well-rehearsed team in creating the aura of mystery and suspense. Let us for a moment assume that the manuscript is a fraud, that Douglas has written a gothic fantasy and foisted it on the house-guests as a true record of life. If "I" is Henry James, then he perpetuates the fraud by claiming that the manuscript is genuine.

This is based on a lot of assumptions, but if it is true, then it makes sense of James calling his governess a "supposititious narrator". Indeed, she would then be "spurious" and "substituted for the real" narrator, Douglas. With this theory we could assume then that James set out to write a gothic novel in a well-established tradition of masking it as a manuscript record of a true life. If we accept this, we must accept the proposition that the death of Miles and the derangement of Flora are purely gratuitous. This is what the apparitionist critics ask us to accept by treating the tale as a mere "pot boiler", a Christmas festival piece.

If this were the case, then James would have been more likely to place The Turn of the Screw in Volume 17 of the New York edition along with the other ghost tales, but he did not. He placed it in Volume 12 beside The Aspern Papers, thus highlighting the similarities of the two tales. To this point I have dwelt on those similarities of character and tone. In the next chapter I shall detail the thematic

correspondences between the two tales and the other stories in the volume: "The Liar" and "The Two Faces".

III

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FOUR TALES

1. Introductory Remarks

At this point, it would be wise to make a summary of what I have said about The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw as they stand in Volume 12 of the New York Edition. (I am reverting to the more traditional view of the governess as narrator, not Douglas.) Both tales are first person narratives, told by narrators who share many common features and circumstances. Each tale exhibits a large amount of narrative inconsistencies, the "looseness" which James associated with first-person narration. The air of romance which he also associated with first-person narration is present in both narratives. In fact, the first narrative is cast in the form of a quest-romance and the second in the form of a gothic fantasy with similar mythological overtones. Analysis of the narrative forms and the narrators indicate that in both tales, James is concerned with producing an ironic characterisation. All this suggests that plot and incident are of secondary importance to character. This is not inconsistent with the views which James has expressed on the relationship of these three aspects of fiction. In the essay "The Art

of Fiction"[1] he says:

> There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident. . . . It appears to me as little to the point as the equally celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance. . . . I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character. When one says picture one says of character, when one says novel one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed at will. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character?

Action, plot, incident are then, like form, part of the ironist's array of tools which he uses to reveal the true character of his two narrators who markedly lack self-knowledge.

Let us assume, for the moment, that the irony was not part of James' intentions; that it is the result of an over-critical attention to the language or of reading into the texts meanings which were not intended by the author. What then are we to make of the two tales? We should have to regard the editor and the governess as heroic figures, struggling against bewildering circumstances to uncover the secrets of the Bordereau's palace and Bly. Certainly, as I have noted above, their bewilderment would not separate them from any of James' other centres of consciousness. As Yvor Winters[2]

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[1]Henry James, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Morris Shapira, (London: Heinemann, 1963), 49-67.

[2]Yvor Winters, In Defense of Reason, (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), 319.

has put it:

> . . . there is almost invariably at least a narrow margin of obscurity; and the entire drama of the typical Jamesian novel is the effort of some character or group of characters to reduce this margin, to understand what is going on.

We may feel that the narrators are justified in attempting to understand the circumstances in which they find themselves.

As critics or critical readers of literature, certainly we may sympathise with the editor's desire to uncover biographical details and to attempt to explicate the works of his favourite poet. As human beings, we may certainly sympathise with the governess' desire to protect her childish charges from the evil atmosphere which she senses at Bly. However, in both cases, there is a problem of means and ends. Can the revelation of Aspern's private papers justify the death of Juliana and the manipulation of Tina's loyalties? Should the ultimate salvation of the children involve the degradation and possible derangement of one and the death of the other? Most critical readers say no to the first proposition, but apparently many accept the second. If we are to accept these narrators as heroic figures, we must accept that James presents a catalogue of death, destruction, delusion and degradation as necessary adjuncts of their heroism which is unlikely in the context of James' life as a creative artist. Speaking of <u>The Wings of the Dove</u> and the

problems which that novel has created for its readers, Joseph Warren Beach[3] has said:

> The suspicion of unsureness of "moral touch" in this case completely vanishes with an alert reading of the story. It was not James but his characters here who were uncertain in their moral touch, who were, indeed, simply feeling their way, as we all do in life, through long, ill-lighted corridors.

Sometimes James gives a warning of a character's "unsureness" as in The Golden Bowl where an important commentator on the events is named Fanny Assingham. At other times, the clues are far less obvious.

In a letter to W. D. Howells in August 1908,[4] James describes the prefaces to his New York edition as

> . . . a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on other than infantile lines--as against the so almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence of these things.

In the individual analyses above I have attempted to show that, if one applies to these tales the kind of critical attention that James calls for, there is an abundance of internal evidence that the narratives are an ironic device used to reveal the characters of the narrators. In these two tales, as in virtually all of the sixty works in which

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[3]Beach, The Method of Henry James, lxxvi.

[4]Quoted in R. P. Blackmur's introduction to Henry James, Art of the Novel, viii.

James employs the first-person, we must first observe the observer before we can observe the tale. In other words, we must first establish the character of the narrator before we can approach the theme of the tale.

Above I have tried to establish that the plot or action of both tales is a function of the characterisation of the narrator, but character, action and theme are always inextricably linked in the works of James. So far, I have outlined some parallels of narrative technique which may suggest a reason for the two tales being set side-by-side in Volume 12 of the New York edition. Now I want to suggest that there are basic similarities in the characters of the two narrators and that, from an outline of these similarities and a comparison of these with the other two tales in Volume 12, two of the major themes of James' canon emerge which throw light on the thinking behind his arrangement of the New York edition. It may be argued that using one tale to explain another implies a weakness in the work under investigation, or undermines the critical reading being proposed, as Marius Bewley in The Complex Fate implies.

> There are a number of essential questions that simply cannot be answered without bringing to The Turn of the Screw that kind of attention which a work of art ought not to require. And yet the questions are not idle ones if one assumes that a work of art has a moral value. [5]

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[5]Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate, (New York: Gordian Press, 1967), 110.

He goes on to bring in evidence from What Maisie Knew to explain his reading of The Turn of the Screw. I do not believe this to be necessary. We do not have to go further for external evidence in reading these four tales than that which James provided by grouping them in one volume. Furthermore, I think that the method is justified, if not in terms of the New Criticism, at least in terms of James' intention. James regarded his work--at least that large proportion of it which became the New York edition--as a complex whole. We are used to regarding individual poems in terms of the collection in which a poet sets them, that is in terms of recurring themes and patterns of imagery--one thinks of Yeats and his continual reworking of material intended to be placed in his collected works--why then should we not approach the work of fiction in the same way, particularly if the writer hints that this is what he requires, as James did? This chapter will attempt to approach the four tales in this way.

2. Common Themes in "The Aspern Papers" and "The Turn of the Screw"

The most significant character trait which the editor and the governess have in common is their zeal. Given a purpose in life, a projected target to achieve, they attack their mission with a single-mindedness which it would be possible to admire if it were not for the unfortunate results which accrue from their actions. Out of

their zeal,however, emerges a suspicion of egotism and pride which leads one to doubt their moral visions. It is notable that both of them suffer mis-givings about their actions in the course of events. The editor reacts to the death of Juliana initially, by thinking that he should perhaps leave altogether, but he returns to his quest. The governess, following her interview with Miles at the church, returns to Bly with the intention of quitting altogether, but she "sees" an apparition of Miss Jessel in the school-room, "assures" Mrs. Grose that the apparition spoke to her of Flora and returns with renewed zeal to her mission. The driving force behind the zeal of both characters is their egotism. The editor envisions himself as a priest at the temple of Aspern, a chosen being set to explain the workings of his divine poet and a great sense of pride in himself comes across to the reader in his descriptions of his critical activities. The governess sees herself as one chosen to fulfil the holy mission of saving the children from demonic possession. In both characters,pride, the sin of Lucifer, is a prominent feature and in both narratives there are allusions to Satanic forces. Possession, in both its religious and more mundane meanings, is a key factor in both tales.

Hardly any reader of The Aspern Papers would accept the editor's moral vision and the depths of skullduggery to which he will descend on his quest. Even the editor starts up at the realisation that he might, under extreme circumstances, become a grave robber (134). To begin

with his aims appear laudable. Aspern has become a famous poet. The editor, apparently as a result of a healthy respect for historical truth, wishes to uncover the papers as an aid in understanding the life of the great man. He regards Juliana's position in refusing to grant Cumnor's request as untenable since the life of the poet has become public. However, this attitude to Aspern's life and work as being public, jars against his vision of the temple of which he and Cumnor regarded themselves as "the appointed ministers"(6). Does his quest for the papers stem from a desire for public knowledge or private aggrandisement? Throughout his dealings with Tina Bordereau this question hangs in the background.

As the climax of the tale approaches so the clues to the answer of this question multiply. Juliana lies ill in her room being attended by Tina, the maid Olympia, and the doctor. The editor has been saying that his only concern is that Juliana's jealous protection of her privacy may lead her to destroy the papers before she dies and thus prevent them becoming part of the public knowledge of history. However, he is stopped short by a curious thought. "It made me uneasy not to be nearer, as if I thought the doctor himself might carry away the papers with him"(107). If his only fear is for the safety of the papers and not for his own role in uncovering them, why should he not welcome the doctor saving them? The answer becomes obvious when he walks in the garden during the doctor's second visit and talks of "my desire to

possess myself of Jeffrey Aspern's papers"(115).[6] He is a collector who desires the personal fame of possessing the historical documents. This point is emphasised when Tina gives him the miniature portrait which he recognises "would be a precious possession"(13). I have already noted that during the tumult caused by Tina's proposal, he loses his desire for the papers which become "a bundle of tattered papers"(137) and "crumpled scraps"(138). However, having considered all that he has put into the attempt to gain them, particularly the vast sums of money which he could ill afford, they re-emerge in the editor's mind as "Juliana's treasure"(140). He decides to try again for what he now calls "my goods" since "the pieces composing [the treasure] were now more precious than ever and a positive ferocity had come into my need to acquire them"(140-141).[7] Obviously the driving force behind the editor's zeal is a selfish desire to possess.

It would be instructive here to look at a passage from the original version of the tale and compare it to the amended version as it appears in the New York edition, in order to demonstrate that James' amendments reinforce rather than alter this interpretation. In the opening chapter of the original, he wrote the following:

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[6] My emphasis.

[7] My emphasis.

> I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practises. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I am sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern's sake I would do worse still.[8]

In the New York edition this becomes:

> I can arrive at <u>my spoils</u> only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic <u>arts.</u> Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm sorry for it, but <u>there's no baseness I would n't commit</u> for Jeffrey Aspern's sake(11-12).[9]

The changes emphasise the unscrupulous nature, the "baseness" of the editor's action. It also hints at something odd in the editor's role as an appreciator and critic of the arts: notice how "diplomatic practises" become "diplomatic arts". Notice too, how "the papers" become "my spoils", highlighting at the very beginning the possession theme which had previously developed slowly out of the narrative.

The role of art as a symbol in James' work is well recognised. Art is generally a record of life and a character's moral worth can be measured in his or her reactions to art. It is instructive that James should have inserted this suggestion of "spoils" into <u>The Aspern Papers</u>, since it calls to mind another of James' tales which deals with a

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[8]Henry James, <u>The Complete Tales of Henry James</u>, ed. Leon Edel,(Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1963), VI, 282. Edel reprints the text of the first publication in book form of <u>The Aspern Papers</u> (London, 1888), which is not appreciably different from the <u>Atlantic Monthly</u> version of March-May 1888, the first printed text.

[9]My emphasis.

struggle over objects of artistic value, <u>The Spoils of Poynton</u>.[10] As a record of the love-affair between Juliana and Aspern, the papers are valuable as objects of art. Juliana has a right to this record of her life. However, once the struggle between her and the editor breaks out, possession becomes more important than appreciation. Tina is an interested, but detached observer of this struggle who like Fleda Vetch, momentarily lets slip her detachment when she uses her possession of the papers to attempt

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[10]In <u>The Spoils of Poynton</u> Mrs. Gereth battles with her son Owen and his wife-to-be for possession of the fine furniture and effects of Poynton. The spoils are a record of life in that they are the physical manifestation of the Gereth's marriage. At her husband's death the legal title to them passes to their son, Owen. She does not object to this until her son proposes to marry Mona Brigstock who, as a product of Waterbath, lacks appreciation and desires to mutilate Poynton by the addition of a winter-garden. A battle ensues for possession. All of this is observed by a sensitive outsider, Fleda Vetch, who appreciates the beauty of Poynton and sympathises with Mrs. Gereth's desire to preserve intact the record of her life with Mr. Gereth, except when Mrs. Gereth violates the integrity of Poynton by removing some pieces.

Fleda is always interested yet detached, refusing to insert herself, as Mrs. Gereth desires, between Owen and Mona, even though she loves Owen. The battle is apparently resolved when Owen marries Mona and Mrs. Gereth leaves Poynton. However, Fleda's detachment slips for one moment when she accepts Owen's offer to remove any one of the treasures as a personal momento. She arrives at Poynton to discover that a mysterious fire has destroyed the spoils. There is a possible suggestion that Fleda is, unconsciously, the human agent who, by letting slip her own standards, precipitates the destruction. Fleda's role as intercessor is paralled by Tina's mediating role between Juliana and the editor. Tina, of course, <u>is</u> the human agent that precipitates the destructive fire of <u>The Aspern Papers</u>.

to catch the editor. The result is that the papers are destroyed.[11]

In The Madness of Art, Walter F. Wright discusses James' story "The Third Person" in which the ghost of a smuggler is put to rest by a living person completing his last unfinished adventure. Wright concludes that we

> . . . are to think of morality in James, therefore, as part of one's concept of life as a creative adventure in a social world--a world in which there is no real distinction between past and present.[12]

We have then a moral duty to the dead as well as to the living. In The Aspern Papers the editor takes this to an extreme since he is prepared to sacrifice the living Juliana in order to fulfil what he sees as his moral duty to uncover the truth about Aspern. This extremist view of his duty is behind the "baseness" which he exhibits

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[11]We can relate this theme to another of James' later works. In The Golden Bowl Charlotte Stant takes Prince Amerigo, on the eve of his wedding to Maggie Verver, into a shop where she proposes to make a wedding-gift to him of a golden bowl. Charlotte wishes the bowl to stand as a symbol of their past love-affair, but the Prince, seeing that it is cracked, refuses it as an ill-omen. The bowl is being used as an index of their awareness of their situation. The Prince marries Maggie Verver, and later, Charlotte marries Maggie's father, Adam. The novel unfolds about a possibly adulterous relationship between the Prince and Charlotte and reaches a climax when Maggie comes into possession of the bowl and learns of their visit to the shop. She smashes the bowl and the relationship is broken. Thus we can see that the use of the papers as a symbol and the possession theme in The Aspern Papers relate to a major theme of James' work in general.

[12]Wright, The Madness of Art, 18-19.

in his dealings with, and manipulation of the Bordereaus. Every other character in the tale is regarded as an object, a source of information, a legitimate means to his end of obtaining the papers. Sam S. Baskett notes the importance of the editor's declaration of the "baseness" to which he will descend.

> Two points should be noted about this conversation. The end, "Jeffrey Aspern's sake", (a self-deluding euphemism for "my sake") justifies any means; and the means are the studied manipulation of any human beings who might be useful. . . . But he fulfils his threat to the letter, using each person he encounters to the limits of that person's usefulness.[13]

Mrs. Prest is used to gain access to the Bordereaus. Tina is used to gain access to Juliana. Juliana is used to gain access to the papers. Even the servants are not immune, although they prove of little value. The warning that he will manipulate anybody in his quest is emphasised when he declares to Mrs. Prest that he will "make love to the niece" at the very beginning. As I have shown above, despite his protestations to the contrary, that is exactly what he does.

What begins to emerge here is another favourite Jamesian theme of moral and social corruption. Ezra Pound[14]violently stated

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[13]Baskett, "The Sense of the Present in The Aspern Papers", 383.

[14]Ezra Pound, "A Brief Note", in Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays,(New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1963), 28 and note.

the importance of this theme in 1918.

> What I have not heard is any word of the major James, of the hater of tyranny; book after early book against oppression, against all the sordid petty personal crushing oppression, the domination of modern life, not worked out in the diagrams of Greek tragedy, not labelled "epos" or "Aeschylus". The outbursts in The Tragic Muse, the whole of "The Turn of the Screw", human liberty, personal liberty, the rights of the individual against all sorts of intangible bondage! . . . This holds, despite anything that may be said of his fuss about social order, social tone. I naturally do not drag in political connotations, from which H. J. was, we believe, wholly exempt. What he fights is "influence", the impinging of family pressure, the impinging of one personality on another; all of them in highest degree damn'd, loathsome and detestable.

Pound is correct in saying that manipulators and users of other people are generally condemned in James. The editor's narrative is a catalogue of abuse, of the editor's lack of respect for other people's personal integrity. Again, Sam S. Baskett has probably the best summary of the editor as we see him in the last paragraph of his narrative.

> Here is the exposure of the hollow man, the embodiment of death in life, unscared, uneducated by his experience. Juliana's death is no cause for regret; Tina has been paid a liberal sum for her trouble; life goes on as before with Mrs. Prest, his other friend; he can play verbally on the loss of the papers and the loss of the scraggy old maid. And quite appropriately the portrait of the god, the rare, elegant image of Jeffrey Aspern, hangs above the writing-table where the idolator performs his meaningless rites, oblivious to the life in Aspern's work which alone makes him worth remembering. [15]

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[15] Baskett, "The Sense of the Present in The Aspern Papers", 387.

One of the finest ironies of The Aspern Papers is that the editor, in a sense, destroys himself. In his use of an alias and his travesty love-affair with Tina, he denies his own identity; he squashes his own dignity and freedom.

I have said that the narrative is a catalogue of the editor's unscrupulous use of others, but during the course of his narrative, the editor exhibits a paranoid sense of others using him. He uses Tina to get at Juliana, but Juliana uses him to acquire a legacy for Tina. He begins to believe that Juliana has seen through him and that she uses the portrait (and, by implication, the papers) as a means to secure him as a husband for Tina. Ironically, the whole thing may stem from Aspern's use of Juliana. If the editor is correct in regarding their affair as being socially unsavoury, then Aspern had betrayed her by making it public. This is what leads one commentator to conclude that the search for the papers "breeds a moral corruption consistent with the corruption symbolised by the papers."[16] Again we see the papers as an index of moral worth. Since the editor refuses to accept the corruption which they may represent, he repeats Aspern's betrayal. The donnée suggests the affair of Byron and Jane Clairmont which was a sad catalogue of abuse by both parties. It is possible then, that James adopts the form of the quest-romance and

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[16]Hux, "Irony in The Aspern Papers: the Unreliable Symbolist", 62.

demonstrates the excesses of "the darkest abyss of romance" as a commentary on the Byronic age.

The criticism is confined to the Byronic age and the Byronic romance and not to romanticism in general, for there is another major romantic figure who informs the tale. If, as I have suggested above, Aspern represents at least partially Hawthorne, then this second theme would be most appropriate for one of Hawthorne's major concerns is the moral depravity inherent in the violation of another's freedom of soul, or the personal tyranny involved in the possession of another's soul. In tales such as "Young Goodman Brown", "Ethan Brand" and "Rapaccini's Daughter", Hawthorne employs the supernatural and particularly demonic possession to bring out this theme.

This takes us to The Turn of the Screw. I have highlighted two major themes in The Aspern Papers: the immoral manipulation of others as a means and the destructive force of a desire to possess, the latter of which involves the work of art as a symbol. These three things are brilliantly fused in The Turn of the Screw. On the surface, the governess' narrative is a record of her attempt to save the children from demonic possession which would be their fate at the hands of the ghosts. On the other hand, by the use of an elaborate framing device and internal inconsistencies in the narrative, James appears to be warning the reader not to accept the narrative on its

face value. I can not accept that the tale is a ghost story, that James is primarily concerned with demonic possession by the ghosts, any more than I can accept that Hawthorne is primarily concerned with the devil who steps out of the furnace in "Ethan Brand". The primary concern of The Turn of the Screw is with the governess' desire to possess the children herself.

This is not an original approach to the tale. It is suggested in the quotation from Ezra Pound above. It is also suggested by John Lydenberg[17] in his reading of the tale when he describes the governess as "a compulsive neurotic who with her martyr complex and her need to dominate finally drives to destruction the children she wishes to possess." If we look at her language in the narrative, this becomes quite clear. In her first days at Bly she knows only Flora, not yet having seen Miles. She envisages her role as governess to the little girl as follows: "To watch, teach, 'form' little Flora would too evidently be the making of a happy and useful life"(160). This suggests more than mere education. Again she says that her first duty was: "by the gentlest arts I could contrive, to win the child into a sense of knowing me"(163). Her "arts" is strangely reminiscent of the editor's use of the word. There is an implication that she sees her role as something deeper than governess. After she reveals to

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[17] John Lyndenberg, "The Governess Turns the Screws", Nineteenth Centruy Fiction, XII (June, 1957), 37-58.

Mrs. Grose the two "appearances" of Quint she envisages herself first as protector, then as sacrificial victim and then says "The children in especial I should fence about and absolutely save". This may be no more than a romantic over-dramatisation of her role, but in the same scene, when Mrs. Grose complains that Quint had been "too free" with Miles, she exclaims: "Too free with <u>my</u> boy"(196). Later, when she has convinced herself that the children are consorting with the ghosts, and is trying to convince Mrs. Grose, she complains:"They're not mine--they're not ours. They're his and they're hers! "(237). The apparition of Miss Jessel in the school-room follows immediately on the heels of the scene outside the church with Miles during which she senses that he gains "more freedom"(254) from her which precipitates her decision to leave. Does she want to leave in order to end her ordeal, as she states, or because she senses her failure to possess Miles? After Mrs. Grose and Flora leave, and while Miles is out of the house on the final day, she speculates about her relationship to him. She concludes that he "had at any rate his freedom now; I was never to touch it again"(295). This suggests that she has given up her attempt to "save" him or possess him, yet she goes through with the confrontation. She goes through with it purely to prove that her fancies are true. In the final dreadful scene, when Miles names Quint, she says:

> They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. "What does he matter now, my own?--what will he *ever* matter? *I* have you", I launched at the beast, " but he has lost you for ever"(309).[18]

It is the governess who wants possession of the children and it is she whom Miles calls "devil", not Quint. The result of the desire to possess or (if we insist on regarding the ghosts as something other than manifestations of her mind) the battle for possession, results in the destruction of Miles.

Thus we see that the theme of destruction associated with the desire to possess which I have isolated in *The Aspern Papers* is prominent in this tale too. The other theme of unscrupulous manipulation is also present. I have highlighted above the scene in which the governess lies to Mrs. Grose about her "conversation" with the ghost of Miss Jessel (258-259). Throughout the tale, she manipulates Mrs. Grose as a means to get at the children. At no time does she present any evidence for her assertion that the children are in league with the ghosts, so we may conclude that she uses the children as a means to self-justification. Whatever it is she sees on the tower and however much we may sympathise with the highly serious view which she takes of her role as governess, the means which she employs to "save" the children and the result of her actions are unthinkable.

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[18] James' italics.

In this tale, we do not actually have a work of art used as a symbol as we do in The Aspern Papers. We do however have the governess' idealised vision of the children which leads her at one point to compare Flora to "one of Raphael's holy infants"(161). It is her idealised view of them which leads to her excessive desire to possess them and it is their actions as children, instead of holy infants, that throw her to the extreme view that they are possessed by demons. The themes are then fused in this tale.[19]

All the same elements are present in The Turn of the Screw that I have noted in The Aspern Papers. Turning to the other two tales we find the same elements. We find also the ironic characterisation becoming more obvious.

3. The Artist Lyon as "The Liar"

On the surface, there is nothing controversial about the third story in Volume 12 of the New York edition entitled "The Liar". In the donnée described in the Preface, James recalls a dinner party

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[19] We may also relate this tale to The Golden Bowl. The Ververs are rich American collectors who "collect" Prince Amerigo, the European aristocrat. They are self-absorbed in their father-daughter relationship to the point of being almost self-obsessed. Maggie acquires Charlotte Stant for her father and then proceeds to monopolise him so that the Prince and Charlotte are thrown together. When Maggie wakes up to the relationship between them, she interposes herself (shatters the golden bowl) and repossesses the Prince. (The Prince has, from the start, been quite happy to be a possession). The result is that Charlotte is banished to America from where, from the start, she had wanted to escape.

at which he had met "the most unbridled colloquial romancer" whose wife was obviously ashamed of his exaggerated tales.[20] The situation describes the circumstances under which Lyon meets Colonel Capadose in the tale. There are no dark hints, ambiguities or equivocations in the Preface as there are with the two previous tales to lead us to suspect irony in the narrative. On the face of it, the tale stands as a straightforward plot.

An artist, Oliver Lyon, meets an inveterate but apparently harmless romancer, Colonel Capadose. However, to his horror Lyon discovers that the Colonel is married to a woman whom he once loved, Everina Brant. Lyon is tortured by a picture of her humiliation, being married to a liar whom he now sees as dangerous. He proposes to rescue her, or at least become her confidante, by exposing the dangerous side of her husband's habit. In order to effect this he paints a portrait of the Colonel. When the couple see the portrait they are astounded by the way the painter has captured the character. The Colonel destroys the picture and Lyon witnesses the act, having chanced upon the scene unknown to the Capadoses. Lyon goes to see them and reveals that the picture has been destroyed. The Colonel lies about his part in it. Lyon gives Everina ample opportunity to expose her husband, but she does not. Lyon leaves in

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[20]James, Art of the Novel, 178.

dismay that the Colonel has "trained" her so well.

This view of the tale appears to have survived until the late 1940's and early 1950's when critics began to look more quizzically at the text. They began to ask who the liar of the title really is and to note some tension between Lyon's view of his own actions and the overall impression produced by the narrative. The result has been that critics such as Marius Bewley and Walter F. Wright[21] have concluded unequivocally that Lyon is the real subject of the tale which subtly exposes him as the liar, while Wayne C. Booth[22] has noted an unavoidable ambiguity in the narrative without dismissing the straightforward reading. If we investigate the tale in the light of its setting in Volume 12, it will emerge that the irony is an integral part of the narrative.

The first and most obviously striking difference between the first two tales of Volume 12 and "The Liar" is that the narration changes to the third person. We find that James uses here the faintly impersonal centre of consciousness which is close to, but not inside the mind of the point of view character, in this case Lyon. Generally speaking, such centres of consciousness in James' fiction

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[21] Bewley, The Complex Fate, 84-87, and Wright, The Madness of Art, 96-98.

[22] Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 347-354.

reflect faithfully the thoughts of the point of view character. In "The Liar", the anonymous narrator portrays Lyon's surprise at meeting the Capadoses, his growing anger at the Colonel's habit and frustration at what appears to be Everina's act of condoning the liar. However, as he makes his plans to renew his acquaintance with her by responding to her invitation to visit, a slight change occurs in the narrative voice.

> She had told him the hours she was at home--she seemed to like him. If she liked him why had n't she married him, or at any rate why was n't she sorry she had n't? If she was sorry she concealed it too well. The point he made of some visible contrition in her on this head may strike the reader as extravagant, but something must be allowed so disappointed a man (354).

This intrusion of the narrator implies a suspicion of inaccuracy in Lyon's version of things. Noting other examples, Booth[23] highlights this ambiguity:

> . . . one notes that all of the unequivocal intrusions by the reliable narrator--I count four and these very brief--are used to underline the difference between Lyon's picture of himself and the true picture; he acts not from artistic motives, nor from a mistaken commitment to an ideal, but rather from the motives of a disappointed lover. All the rest is rationalization, presented convincingly enough as Lyon "speaks" it or thinks it, but intended to be seen as rationalization by the discerning reader.

The clue that James is once again setting up an ironic tension for his "discerning reader" to experience may well rest in his choice of names.

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[23]Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 351-352.

The name Lyon is phonetically similar to the words liar and lying. The name of the apparent liar is Clement which suggests mercy and moderation. Lyon is the one who "applied without mercy his own gift of provocation. . . . He lashed his victim on when he flagged"(362). Clement Capadose, on the other hand, is described by his loving wife as "everything that's good and kind"(348).

Marius Bewley is quite firm in his reading of the tale that Lyon is the liar and that the tale is an ironic revelation of this. So too is Walter F. Wright. Wayne C. Booth is less adamant. He outlines Lyon's "rationalizations" and compares them to his own reactions, finding an ironic tension. He refers to James' revisions of the 1888 text before its inclusion in the New York edition and proposes that they soften the picture of Capadose and increase the impression of Lyon caught up in his own machinations. However, he remains uncertain whether the ambiguity is a proof of intentional irony. At the risk of duplicating what these critics have said, I wish to analyse the ambiguities, not least because I differ with them on one fundamental point.

The first thing to notice about Lyon as point of view, is the fundamental change which takes place in his vision of the Colonel and of the nature of the Colonel's "vice". His first reaction to the, as yet unknown, man who sits across the table from him is that "he represented both enterprise and tradition, good manners and bad

taste"(317-318). It is not high praise, nor is it condemnation. Seated at a dinner-party in a country house, Lyon has already made clear his attitudes to "society manners". He is amused by them, but not contemptuous. He exhibits in conversation with the lady next to him, the belief that good taste involves some necessary deception. In answer to his question about Mrs. Capadose, the lady replies:

> "I think she's hard".
> "That's only because she's honest and straightforward".
> "Do you mean I like people in proportion as they deceive?"
> "I think we all do, so long as we don't find them out"(323).

After dinner Lyon becomes aware that the Colonel "deceives" rather more than most, but not before he describes the Colonel's "pleasant voice" which "was a bright and fresh but masculine organ, just such a voice as, to Lyon's sense, such a 'fine man' ought to have had"(324). The "fine man" proceeds to take Lyon in with tall tales about being buried alive. We learn at the start that Lyon is susceptible to the ghost stories of Le Fanu (314) and find him easily duped.

> He hesitated however, in time, to betray a doubt--he was so impressed with the tone in which Colonel Capadose pronounced it the turn of a hair that they had n't buried him alive(326).

The Colonel is delighted. His handsome face brightens up and becomes, to Lyon's eye, "doubly handsome"(326). Finally the Colonel fools him into believing the house to be haunted and, even though he learns from his host that this is not true, he goes to inspect the haunted corridor. The picture of the Colonel which emerges from this first section is of

a handsome, impressively humorous, charming and harmless tall story teller.

The second part however, opens with a change in Lyon's attitude. In conversation with old Sir David Ashmore he learns that Capadose lies frequently. With Everina the woman he had loved in his mind, Lyon declares the habit to be "base"(344) even though Sir David insists that it is harmless. The revisions to this conversation in the text, illustrate what Booth comments on. In the 1888 version[24] Sir David says that Capadose is "a thumping liar"; in the final version this becomes: "he pulls the longbow--the longest that ever was". Lyon's declaration that the habit is base has changed from "precious scoundrels" in the original. The essential point about this conversation is that Sir David insists that the Colonel's lies are harmless because they are "quite disinterested" whereas Lyon's growing anger is a result of his interest in Everina.

From this point, Lyon is adamant in condemning the Colonel. Everina is "married to a man whose word had no worth"(348) and who is "a by-word for the most contemptible, the least heroic of vices"(349). As his condemnation of the Colonel emerges, Lyon ironically begins to lose his own sense of truth. In his attempt to draw Everina on the subject of her husband, he "professed to have felt a quick friendship for him"(348). In fact the first narrative intrusion occurs at this

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[24]Edel, ed., The Complete Tales of Henry James, VI, 407.

point in his relationship with Everina.

> If our friend had n't been in love with her he would surely have taken the Colonel's delinquencies less to heart. As the case stood, they fairly turned to the tragical for him, even while he was sharply aware of how merely "his funny way" they were to others--and of how funny his, Oliver Lyon's, own way of regarding them would have seemed to everyone(349-350).

Inside Lyon there is an obsession growing to make Everina admit to him that her husband is base. The obsession distorts his vision as the narrator suggests because he begins to lose sight of the fact that the Colonel "was not a malignant liar"(350). The obsession which distorts his vision makes him reminiscent of the narrators of The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw. There is a remarkable parallel between Lyon and the governess. His reaction to the Capadose's daughter is that she "was beautiful and had the prettiest eyes of innocence he had ever seen: which did n't prevent his wondering if she told horrid fibs"(354). This is exactly the governess' reaction to Flora.

His obsession leads him to the idea of painting a portrait of the Colonel. At first he describes it in terms of a work of art, "a masterpiece of fine characterisation, of legitimate treachery"(355). As the tale unravels however, it becomes obvious that the painting is a malicious caricature. His motive is his interest in Everina.

> What he wanted her to do for him was very little; it was n't even to allow that she was unhappy. She would satisfy him by letting him know even by some quite

> silent sign that she could imagine her happiness with him--well, more unqualified. Perhaps indeed-- his presumption went so far--that was what she did mean by contentedly sitting there(358).

Here we see another parallel with the narrators of the first two tales. This presumption becomes certainty later.

> If she were n't ready to do something of that sort why had she treated him so as a dear old friend; why had she let him for months suppose certain things--or almost; why had she come to his studio day after day to sit near him on the pretext of her child's portrait, as if she liked to think what might have been? Why had she come so near a tacit confession, if she was n't willing to go an inch further? (387)

Inference becomes fact for Lyon just as it had for the editor and the governess.

His tendency to lie, or at least dissemble, grows as his plot progresses. In order to draw the Colonel he "manifested an unfathomable credulity"(362). When the Colonel asks if his wife may see the picture, Lyon says he would prefer not, then he informs his reader that this

> . . . was the repetition of a proposal Mrs. Capadose had made on the occasion of his last visit to her, and he had then recommended her not coming till he should be himself better pleased. He had really never been, at a corresponding stage, better pleased; and <u>he blushed a little for his subtly</u>(363).[25]

The Colonel lies, but Lyon is subtle!

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[25]My emphasis.

Lyon's triumph occurs when he happens across the scene of the Capadose's looking at his painting(371-376). He eavesdrops, as he believes, justifiably and sees the Colonel destroy the picture. It is a triumph because it precipitates what Lyon has wanted all along. The Colonel tells a harmful lie which involves an innocent party and Everina is, apparently, faced with the choice of exposing him or implicating herself. The essential moment of the story is here because Lyon's machinations have precipitated the crisis. This does not necessarily excuse the Colonel who does not have to tell the lie. However we may postulate that he does so to protect his wife. There is no real indication that the Colonel "sees" his own nature in the portrait.

Everina calls the painting "cruel" and mentions "everything he [Lyon] has seen". The Colonel is baffled and quite proud. He says "he has made me handsome". She declares that the likeness is "hideous". The Colonel's face is "flushed" and "bewildered". He can not understand why, if "it's so good" she should be upset. He does sense, however, just how upset she is and he returns to destroy the painting to protect her feelings.

> He came up to the picture again--again he covered it with his baffled glare. "Damn him--damn him--damn him." he broke out once more. Yet it was n't clear to Lyon whether this malediction had for object the guilty original or the guilty painter(375). [26]

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[26] My emphasis.

Even while he destroys it, he remains "baffled". Lyon sees the whole act strangely as "some act of prefigured or rehearsed suicide"(376). There is a marked difference between the surrogate suicide which Capadose performs for his wife's sake and Lyon's activities for her sake.

Lyon's reaction to the figurative suicide is a wave of dizzy happiness, based on the presumption that Everina, his "old friend *was* ashamed"(376).[27] She was certainly distressed, but he has no grounds to believe that she was ashamed. Following this scene, Lyon's own lies become explicit. When he tells the housekeeper that he destroyed the picture, the text has it that "Lyon imitated the Colonel"(377). He, like the narrators before him, can not see his own complicity in an affair which he has created: "he thought it deplorable such charming people should have put themselves so grossly in the wrong"(378). Finally his confrontation with the Capadoses produces the result which, apparently, he had not desired. The Colonel blames the destruction of the painting on the model Geraldine/ Grenadine.

> Lyon looked down; he felt himself colouring. This was what he had been waiting for--the day the Colonel should wantonly sacrifice some innocent person. And could his wife be a party to that final atrocity(381)?

The artist believes that the answer is yes; he gives up his ex-lover

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[27]James' italics.

and walks away believing that the Colonel "had trained her"(388).

Lyon is convinced that Mrs. Capadose has supported the lie and most critics accept this, although not necessarily condemning her for it. For instance, Marius Bewley[28] declares that she

> . . . is thus presented to the reader through Lyon's eyes as a contaminated nature, and a shudder is invited. But in actual fact it is only Mrs. Capadose who has known how to discriminate between appearance and reality in this story, who knows that it is not her husband but Lyon who is the liar.

In fact, the same process that discolours Lyon's view of the Colonel distorts his view of Everina, although less obviously. During his first talk with her, after dinner at Stayes on the first night, he notes in her "an absence of the 'wanton' or of any insinuating art that resembled an omitted faculty". She appears to him as "some fine creature from an asylum". She has a "noble pagan head" and when she explains that she had not spoken at dinner for fear that he would not remember her, he declares:

> This was plainly a perfectly truthful speech--she was incapable of any other--he was affected by such humility on the part of a woman whose grand line was unique(330-331).

This is before he learns of her husband's "vice". Later, as his obsession grows, he begins to presume that she is silently calling for his help.

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[28] Bewley, The Complex Fate, 87.

> She mentioned to her friend in fact that she preferred staying at home, but she did n't say it was because in other people's houses she was on the rack: the reason she gave was that she liked so to be with the child. It was n't perhaps criminal to deal in such "whoppers", but it was damned vulgar: poor Lyon was delighted when he arrived at that formula(356).

The narrative voice intrudes here to suggest that this is pure speculation by Lyon. In fact there is no evidence in the final scene that she is lying, only Lyon's presumption that she is.

When he and the Capadoses go to lunch, the following scene occurs:

> "Did you see the woman?" Lyon put to her with something like a sterness he could n't mitigate.
>
> She seemed not to feel it, or not to heed it if she did. "There was a person, not far from your door, whom Clement called my attention to. He told me something about her, but we were going the other way."
>
> "And do you think she did it?"
>
> "How can I tell? If she did she was mad, poor wretch."
>
> "I should like very much to get hold of her," said Lyon. This was a false plea for the truth: he had nodesire for any conversation with Miss Geraldine(383-384).

The first thing to notice is that throughout the whole of the final scene Everina's behaviour is perfectly natural, while Lyon's is false. There is a direct admission by the narrative voice that Lyon is lying. Then there is Everina's "lie". We know that she had left the studio when the Colonel returned to smash the picture. It is perfectly possible that he has re-spun the yarn about Geraldine/Grenadine that he recalled telling to Lyon, perhaps to protect her from implication in his crime, perhaps to protect himself. It is also perfectly possible that

Geraldine/Grenadine was hanging about the studio again.

Certainly this is pure speculation, but there is no evidence against it in the text. What evidence there is indicates that Lyon convicts her merely on his own speculation. Lyon recalls that the painting was not left out on the fateful day.

> "Ah my dear fellow", the Colonel groaned, "do n't utterly curse me! --but of course I dragged it out".
> "You did n't put it back?" Lyon tragically cried.
> "Ah Clement, Clement, did n't I tell you to?" Mrs. Capadose reproachfully wailed.
> The Colonel almost howled for compunction; he covered his face with his hands. His wife's words were for Lyon the finishing touch; they made his whole vision crumble--his theory that she had secretly kept herself true. Even to her old lover she would n't be so (384-385)!

Again it must be remembered that the Capadoses left the studio together and that there was a short delay before the Colonel returned to destroy the painting. Lyon has no way of knowing whether or not she had sent the Colonel back to replace the picture, or indeed that she heard later what he had done. Yet for Lyon her words are "the finishing touch". His vision of her crumbles, but we have already seen that his vision was idealised from the start and had become distorted by his obsession. Finally, he refers to himself as "her old lover", but his own evidence suggests that she had not responded to his love for her in Munich and that he was just one of many young painters who were in love with her. If he had wanted to test her, why did he not simply expose the Colonel and see her reaction? Are we not reminded of the final scene between the governess and Miles?

Both Lyon and the governess have made up their minds before the final confrontations. They do not seek the truth, they simply want their speculations confirmed.

Once again in "The Liar" we have a discrepancy between the evidence of the narrative and the point of view character's version of the events. The irony of the situation is underlined by the way Lyon's obsession with the Colonel turns him into a liar. Marius Bewley makes the point that "his static conception of Colonel Capadose as a liar has blotted out any finer sense of the Colonel as a human being."[29] This highlights what I have said of his view of the Colonel. In the text we find that Lyon compares the artist to the tall story-teller.

> The observation of these three days showed him that if Capadose was an abundant, he was not a malignant liar and that his fine faculty exercised itself mainly on subjects of small direct importance. "He's the liar platonic", he said to himself; "he's disinterested, as Sir David said, he does n't operate with a hope of gain or with a desire to injure. It's art for art--he's prompted by some love of beauty. He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a shade. He lays on colour, as it were, and what less do I do myself"(350).

The contrast can be drawn with Lyon whose actions in the tale arise from his interest in Everina.

In an article on this story and "The Real Thing" Lyall H.

29Bewley, The Complex Fate, 86.

Powers[30] emphasises the exploration of the nature of the artist's morality. The artist represents on his canvas his own "inner vision" of life just as the Colonel does in his stories. The Colonel is not malignant. Powers demonstrates that in "The Real Thing" James investigates how far an artist may use people for his art while in "The Liar" he shows what happens when the artist abuses them, sacrifices them to his art. From the very beginning Lyon's attitude is suspect. In the opening scene he speculates on old Sir David "the picked nonagenarian" who, as "a sacred and perhaps therefore an impressive relic" sounds more like an object than a person(315). He reveals that he is interested in the face as a "human mask" which interests him because it "testifies" in spite of itself(316). He is first attracted to the Colonel as a mask, an object. "Would he be a subject, or was his face only the legible doorplate of his identity, burnished with punctual washing and shaving"(317). Yet we know that he is a good portrait painter. The narrative voice tells us that: "The artist [Lyon] sketched with a fine point and did n't caricature"(343).

However, Lyon (like the editor and the governess) is an egotist. After his portrait of Sir David is finished, he leaves Stayes

> . . . having worked in a glow of interest which made him believe in his success, until he found he had pleased

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[30] Lyall H. Powers, "Henry James and the Ethics of the Artist: 'The Real Thing' and 'The Liar'," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, III (Autumn, 1961), 360-368.

> every one, especially Mr. and Mrs. Ashmore, when he began to be sceptical(353).

He suspects public acclaim and is far happier appealing to a more intelligent elite. This comes out in his original plan to paint the Colonel.

> He would draw him out, he would set him up in that totality about which he had talked with Sir David, and none but the initiated would know. They, however, would rank the picture high, and it would be six rows deep--a masterpiece of fine characterisation, of legitimate treachery(355).

Up to this point he is still within the realms of "legitimate treachery" because he plans to paint a faithful portrait and set about the difficult task of highlighting one character trait for the discerning few. However, once the project gets underway and his obsession begins to grow, the public acclaim comes back into his reckoning. He regrets that he can not send it to the Academy under the simple title of "The Liar". Nevertheless there is some comfort for him since

> . . . he had now determined to stamp that sense on it as legibly--and to the meanest intelligence--as it was stamped for his own vision on the living face. As he saw nothing else in the Colonel today, so he gave himself up to the joy of "rendering" nothing else(361).

Lyon is demeaning his own intelligence by wishing to appeal to "the meanest intelligence". What he sees "stamped. . . on the living face" is his own obsessive vision played up by his "drawing out" of the Colonel; he no longer plans a portrait, but a satirical caricature.

The point is underlined by James in the textual revisions. When the Colonel stands about to destroy the painting, repeating the phrase "damn him", the 1888 version of the tale reads: "It was not clear to Lyon whether this malediction had for its object the original or the painter of the portrait."[31] In the New York edition this becomes: "Yet it was n't clear for Lyon whether this malediction had for object the guilty original or the guilty painter"(375). Thus James inserts the concept of the painter's guilt plainly into the text. This transformation of Lyon the artist is most significant. As Wayne C. Booth[32] says:

> It is impossible to reconcile this picture of the artist's task with any notion James ever espoused; it is, in fact, James's portrait of what happens to art when it is made to serve "interested" or practical ends. It is not for the sake of art that Lyon "lashed his victim on when he flagged."

Lyon is prepared to sacrifice human beings to his art.

There is the same ironic tension in "The Liar" between the narrative and the point of view character as in the first two tales of Volume 12. There is the same quality of obsession and the same egotistical sense of mission. There is a lack of evidence outside the point of view character's assertion, the same tendency to regard other characters as liars, pretenders or deceivers and the same habit of turning speculation and inference into fact. The basic

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[31]Edel, ed., The Complete Tales of Henry James, VI, 430.

[32]Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 351.

difference is in distancing, that is of the reader from the point of view character. In The Aspern Papers the ironic tension grows out of inconsistencies in the text which arise from a conflict between the historic and present personalities of the point of view character, the editor. The same conflict occurs in The Turn of the Screw and the ironic effect is heightened by the elaborate frame which further undermines the narrative and distances the reader. The inconsistencies of the point of view recur in "The Liar" and the irony is heightened by the interposition of an anonymous narrator between the point of view character and the reader, particularly when the narrator undermines the point of view character directly. I have proposed that the first two tales are cast in romantic forms, but it is obvious that this is not true of "The Liar". However, the romance provides an important background.

Walter F. Wright[33] says that:"James lets us join Lyon in what becomes quickly a romance of adventure, an intrigue promising excitement." If we miss the narrative intrusions, or fail to spot the inconsistencies of Lyon, that is precisely what happens; if we do not, we find references to romantic works used as ironic comparisons. In the first paragraph we are told that beside Lyon's bed at Stayes

> . . . was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu, for the bedside, the ideal reading in a country house for the hours

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[33]Wright, The Madness of Art, 97.

> after midnight. Oliver Lyon could scarcely forebear beginning it while he buttoned his shirt(314).

His fertile imagination which makes him partial to this famous writer of ghost stories also makes him susceptible to the Colonel's tall tales about ghosts and being buried alive. Later at dinner, he tells the lady sitting next to him that he used to paint portraits of Everina and her brothers and sisters when he was an art student in Munich. "I once made a sketch of her as Werther's Charlotte, cutting bread and butter while they clustered all around her"(324).

In Goethe's novel Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers, [34] Werther is a young artist who falls in love with Charlotte. She is betrothed however, to another man, Albert, whom she marries and lives with happily. Werther remains devoted to her and continues to see her until, aware of how strong her love for Albert is and of how hopeless his own case is, he commits suicide. A supreme point of irony is that he borrows Albert's pistols to kill himself and that it is Charlotte herself who sends them to him. The ironic parallel with "The Liar" is quite obvious and recalls the ironic use of Byron and Shelley works in The Aspern Papers. Lyon as a young art student falls in love with Everina Brant in Munich. Everina is sympathetic to him, but does not marry him. She marries Clement Capadose. Lyon renews their

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[34] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther, trans. Catherine Hutter (New York: New American Library, 1962).

acquaintance and, by prolonging his work on her daughter's portrait, spends as much time as he can with her. Eventually he paints a portrait of her husband which precipitates a confrontation as a result of which Lyon loses Everina Brant forever. It is useful to recall here Wayne C. Booths' comment[35] on The Aspern Papers:

> Our attention from first to last cannot help being centred on the comedy of the biter bit, the man of light character who manipulates others so cleverly that he "destroys" himself.

By manipulating the Capadoses and caricaturing the Colonel, Lyon destroys his integrity as an artist. When the Colonel destroys the portrait, he not only commits figurative suicide, but also he figuratively destroys Lyon the artist. Ironically, by delivering up the Colonel as a sitter, Everina places the weapon for his self-destruction in Lyon's hand. [36]

These two romantic references are used by James to heighten the irony of Lyon's situation and there is a third. R. J. Kane[37] and

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[35]Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 356.

[36]In the same paragraph as the refence to Goethe, Lyon refers to Thackeray who wrote a satirical poem entitled "The Sorrows of Werther" which ends;

> Charlotte, having seen his body
> Borne before her on a shutter,
> Like a well-conducted person
> Went on cutting bread and butter.

[37]R. J. Kane, "Hawthorne's 'The Phrophetic Pictures' and James's 'The Liar'", Modern Language Notes, LXV (April, 1950),257-258.

Edward Rosenberry[38] both demonstrate the similarities between "The Liar" and Hawthorne's story "The Prophetic Pictures". In the Hawthorne story an artist attempts to demonstrate to a woman that the man she marries is a potential murderer. He paints a portrait which is so successful that, when the couple see it, the husband is inspired to attempt the murder of his wife. The artist who is concealed, witnesses the scene. Rosenberry notes the similarity between this scene in Hawthorne's story and the scene in Lyon's studio and concludes that "the artist sees in the desperate tableau before him exactly what he wants to see; he has created this tragic picture by the force of his genius". He goes on to conclude that the fundamental conflicts of head and heart, pride and humility, detachment and sympathy which are basic to Hawthorne are present in this James story.

I have noted above the links between Aspern and Hawthorne and the presence of the Hawthornean sin of violation of another's sacred freedom of soul in The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw. Marius Bewley[39] links this theme with "The Liar" and Walter F. Wright[40] calls the tale: "The subtlest of all James' studies of the will

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[38] Edward Rosenberry, "James's Use of Hawthorne in 'The Liar'," Modern Language Notes, LXXVI (March, 1961), 234-238.

[39] Bewley, The Complex Fate, 84-87.

[40] Wright, The Madness of Art, 96.

to possess another's soul". Here we see the two main themes which I have outlined in the first two tales. Lyon's attempt to portray his vision of the Colonel arises out of the same obsessive desire to get at the "truth" which drove on the editor and the governess. However his mission, like their's, is distorted by his own egotistical belief in himself as sole repository of the truth and, like their's, it ends in destruction and degradation. His attempt to "capture" the Colonel's image is really an attempt to capture the man's soul and to possess at least part of Everina's soul. In order to achieve his end, he uses Everina, the Colonel and their daughter as means and manipulates them immorally. Finally we see the same use of a work of art as an index of moral worth and the destruction of the work of art as operative symbol in the possession theme. Certainly these three tales exhibit a unity of theme and form. So too does the fourth tale in Volume 12, "The Two Faces".

4. "The Two Faces" of Mrs. Grantham

I have alluded above to the effect of distancing which the reader encounters in Volume 12 of the New York edition. The process continues with "The Two Faces". It is worth applying some of James' own terms to the four narratives to explain this progression, if the reader will allow me to use his terms selectively and according to my own definition of limits which I shall now outline.

Let us assume for the moment that there are two extremes of

narrative technique in prose fiction: the first-person narrator and the omniscient narrator. The omniscient narrator has the relationship of creator to creatures with his characters, but he is impersonal because he is detached from them by his superior knowledge. James, as is well known, rejected the omniscient narrator as a legitimate technique. The first-person narrator, far from being impersonal, performs almost every available function; he is narrative voice, subject, point of view, centre of interest, reflector and centre of consciousness all in one. The terms "narrative voice" and "point of view" need no explanation here. By "subject", I mean the main character or characters of the narrative and although "centre of interest" may appear to be the same thing, there is a distinction. To take an example from Henry James: in Roderick Hudson the "subject" is obviously the sculptor, Roderick Hudson, but the "centre of interest" is his friend Roland Mallet whose mind is obviously what we are concerned with in the novel. From this it appears that "centre of interest" is closer to the term "reflector". Mallett is one of James' best reflectors. The whole action of Roderick Hudson is reflected through his mind which becomes the "centre of interest". The last term "centre of consciousness" is the most difficult to pin down. It may be described as a mind through which the story is told, a consciousness which is close to, but not inside the subject, or reflector's mind.

This begins to sound tautological, but I may clarify it with a

Jamesian analogy. Imagine a painting of a group of people with a lady in the centre, hanging in a gallery with a group of onlookers and a gallery guide standing in front of it. The painting is a work of prose fiction, the onlookers are the readers and the guide is the narrative voice. Lut us assume that the title of the painting is "a portrait of a lady and her friends". The lady is then the "subject" of the fiction. The identity of the guide who explains the painting informs these difficult terms. If the guide is an employee of the gallery, or an art historian with a catalogue in his hands or the artist himself, he is an "omniscient narrator", that is, he has supposedly total knowledge of the situation, but no personal involvement in it. This is a narrative voice which James rejects. If the guide is someone who knows, or knew the figures in the painting and was present at the time of composition, although not in it, then he is a "centre of consciousness". If the guide is one of the group who relates the events at the time of the group-sitting, he is a "reflector" and if this guide is primarily concerned with telling of his own reactions to the situation then he is a "centre of interest." Suppose now that the true title of the painting is "a self-portrait of a lady and her friends" and that the lady is the guide. This is the all-embracing first-person narrator of whom James was so suspicious.

In The Aspern Papers the subjects appear to be Juliana and Tina Bordereau and the editor, but the ladies disappear under the first-person

narrator. The editor as character is the subject and the centre of interest and the reflector. The three functions which normally overlap are here fused together into one exclusive point of view. The editor as historian is centre of consciousness and narrative voice. The irony which undermines the editor as subject of the story arises out of the inconsistencies of the two editors, a schyzophrenic state caused by James allowing the editor to attempt to become his own omniscient narrator. The same is true of The Turn of the Screw, but this tale is complicated by the Prologue.

Applying the gallery analogy to the Prologue, we have the governess in the centre of the picture. Douglas could now perform one of numerous possible functions. If, as Carvel Collins suggests[41], Douglas is Miles, having survived the ordeal, then he would be a member of the group and therefore the centre of intelligence or reflector. Without this, he serves the function of a centre of consciousness at one remove while "I" is the gallery guide, the narrative voice. If, as I have suggested, Douglas is the creator of the gothic manuscript, then he is the highly suspicious omniscient narrator. Whichever of these is true, the primary purpose of the Prologue is to slightly remove the reader from the clutches of the governess as omniscient narrator and thus reinforce the operative

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[41]Carvel Collins, "James' The Turn of the Screw", The Explicator, XIII (June, 1955), Item 49.

irony by further undermining her as subject.

The narratives of the editor and the governess are excessively subjective and the function of the operative irony of the first and the irony combined with the Prologue in the second is to warn the reader against these excesses. In "The Liar" the situation is simplified; indeed at first sight we seem to find a very straightforward technique at work. There is a subject and centre of interest, the Colonel who is a liar. There is a reflector, Oliver Lyon, and a narrative voice which is a centre of consciousness close to Lyon. However, this narrative voice occasionally moves back from Lyon and comments on him in a way that undermines his testimony as a reflector. The ironic tension which is set up transforms Lyon into the centre of interest and once again we are presented with a point of view which is excessively subjective and therefore unreliable. The ironic characterisation of this third tale is made simpler than in the first two tales by the introduction of the third-person narrator, but, since the ironic intrusions of this narrative are so few in number, the irony may easily be missed. Perhaps that is why James dropped such an obvious clue in the name of his artist.

In "The Two Faces" the technique is much simpler and the ironic characterisation of the subject, Mrs. Grantham, is most obvious. As far as the technique goes, we have a subject, Mrs. Grantham, who is also the centre of interest. We have a reflector, Shirley Sutton, who is a close acquaintance and perhaps, at least potentially, lover of Mrs.

Grantham. The story is told by a third-person narrative voice who is a centre of consciousness close to Shirley Sutton. The ironic characterisation of Mrs. Grantham grows obviously out of the plot.

The story is told in three parts each of which occurs in a different setting. The first scene takes place in Mrs. Grantham's house. She and Sutton are surprised by the announcement of the arrival of Lord Gwyther to see her. The reader is made aware immediately that this surprise visit is portentous by the "achieved irony"(391) of her asking Sutton why she should not accept the call. Sutton's reliability is attested to by Mrs. Grantham who calls him "you. . . who notice everything"(392). The narrative voice makes it clear that Sutton is the reflector: "it is, for that matter, with Sutton's total impression that we are particularly and almost exclusively concerned"(393). Sutton's prime concern is Mrs. Grantham. As the tale unfolds it becomes obvious that he is trying to see her true nature in her handsome face. There is an awkward moment when Sutton is introduced to Gwyther which also suggests some deeper motives. During the time that the three are together Sutton watches Mrs. Grantham and finds her "perfection--simply, easily, kindly, yet with something the least bit queer in her wonderful eyes"(394). Again there is a sense of portent as there is in Sutton's feeling for the "rare promise of the scene"(394). The portentous aura hangs,

apparently, around Gwyther's marriage.[42] Gwyther reveals that the object of his visit is to ask Mrs Grantham to supervise his wife's introduction to London society which prompts another mysterious exchange. "It was at this point and on these words that the eyes of Lord Gwyther's two auditors inevitably and wonderfully met"(396). The scene ends when "the full light of [Mrs. Grantham's] expressive face"(396) brings Sutton to his feet to leave.

Two mysteries then emerge from the first part of the story: the nature of the relationships of Mrs. Grantham, Gwyther and Sutton; and the peculiar emphasis which Sutton places on her face. The first mystery is cleared up immediately in the second part which takes place in a drawing-room after dinner on the same evening. Gwyther has apparently been Mrs. Grantham's lover, but has gone to Germany without warning and married someone else. Meanwhile Sutton has become her close companion and, at least as far as London society gossip goes, her lover. The mystery of Sutton's close scrutiny of her face continues. He notes that it is "charged with something produced in it by Lord Gwyther's visit", something which "had quickly come into her beauty; he could n't as yet have said what, nor whether on the whole to its advantage or its loss"(398). He makes a reference to the

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[42]There is an echo of Everina Capadose in Lady Gwyther's background. Both ladies, although English, had been brought up in Germany where their families had been forced to move by financial pressure.

"cheap psychology"(399) of London society which casts him as her lover, an alternative on the rebound from Lord Gwyther, and then he returns to the puzzle of her face.

> He, worse luck, was at the mercy of her face, and more than ever at the mercy of it now, which meant moreover not that it made a slave of him, but that it made him, disconcertingly, a sceptic. It was the absolute perfection of the handsome, but things had a way of coming in to it(399).

They now go on to discuss Gwyther's action of placing his wife in his ex-lover's hands.

Mrs. Grantham sounds the note of surprise for the reader when she calls Gwyther's proposition "extraordinary"(399). Why should he place his young wife in the hands of a woman whom he has injured? Sutton rubs this point home when he says to Mrs. Grantham that Gwyther has "decided on the extraordinary step of throwing his little wife, bound hands and feet, into your arms" and emphasises it again when he asks her "So he _is_ to commit her to you?"(401) Mrs. Grantham reveals that he is to commit her to her charge. Obviously what James is setting up here is the potential human tragedy explicit in the Hawthornean theme. Sutton declares that Gwyther's action has put her on her honour not to "get at"(402) the innocent wife.

The third and final part of the story which takes place at a weekend country-house party, shows the working out of the tragedy. It is evident that Mrs. Grantham has taken possession of the girl. A guest at the house party tells Sutton that everyone is waiting for

Mrs. Grantham to arrive with Lady Gwyther "as if she were 'presenting' her"(405). They are all clearly waiting to see whether she will take her revenge on Lord Gwyther by ruining his wife's debut. It is clear that Miss Banker expects it because she tells Sutton "she'll have formed her for us"(407) and "decked her for the sacrifice with ribbons and flowers"(408)

Sutton meets Mrs. Grantham on the terrace where tea is to be served and immediately notes her face again:

> "The face--the face", as he kept dumbly repeating: that was at last, as at first, all he could clearly see. She had a perfection resplendent, but what in the world had it done, this perfection, to her beauty? It was her beauty doubtless that looked out at him, but it was into something else that, as their eyes met, he strangely found himself looking(409).

He looks around for Lady Gwyther, unsuccessfully and then back to Mrs. Grantham.

> She knew for whom he had looked without success; but why should this knowledge visibly have hardened and sharpened her, and precisely at a moment when she was unprecedently magnificent(410).

When he sees the young Lady Gwyther his questions are answered. Mrs. Grantham has completely overdressed the young woman and made her ridiculous in the eyes of "society". According to the "cheap psychology" of that society, appearances and particularly first impressions of appearances make the man or woman. Lady Gwyther's first appearance is so ridiculous that Miss Banker exclaims: "The

poor creature's lost"(411). The themes of manipulation, possession and violation of another's integrity are explicit in this tale.

When Sutton looks through the "feathers, frills, excrescences of silk" at Lady Gwyther, he sees "a small face that struck him as either scared or sick"(410-411). It is a face of beauty. "The face, yes; which goes to the heart"(412). But "with his eyes again returning to Mrs. Grantham, he saw another"(411). This is the "hardened and sharpened" face of ugliness, that something which had kept creeping in to her face and eyes to puzzle him was the cold, cynical glare of hatred and revenge. These are the two faces of the title, but they are also the two faces of Mrs. Grantham. To put it in Hawthorne's and James' terms: one is the face of beauty, the face "which goes to the heart", which is humble and sympathetic, while the other is the face of ugliness, the face which goes to the head, which is intellectual, proud, cynical and detached.

Two more points should be noted about "The Two Faces". The first is the parallel between Mrs. Grantham's and Lyon's triumphs. She is very much like the painter when she "creates" Lady Gwyther. As Lady Gwyther appears "the expression in Mrs. Grantham's eyes was that of the artist confronted with her work and interested, even to impatience, in the judgement of others"(410). Also Miss Banker declares that the forming of Lady Gwyther was done "with an atrocity of art"(412). The second point is that, even in this straightforward

short-story, there is a romantic echo. At the start, when Lord Gwyther asks Mrs. Grantham to take charge of his wife, he refers to London society as "the great labyrinth"(396). There is a possible reference here to the labyrinth in which Athenian youths were sacrificed to the Minotaur, just as Lady Gwyther is sacrificed to the snobbery of London society. We remember that Miss Banker had envisaged her "decked. . . for the sacrifice with ribbons and flowers". The echo is also possibly of the Roman catacombs in which the early Christians hid from Roman persecution. Miss Banker says to Sutton:

> It's a great house and a great occasion, and we're assembled here, it strikes me, very much as the Roman mob at the circus used to be to see the next Christian maiden brought out to the tigers(407).

All the elements which I have noted in the other three tales are present then in "The Two Faces" which acts as a sort of explicit thematic footnote in Volume 12.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the three principle threads of unity which I outlined in my introduction are woven through the four tales and it should be obvious that James was being very deliberate in bringing them together. I have dealt at length with the way in which James uses various techniques of irony to paint the portraits of his four main characters. I have also detailed at length the use of romance in the four tales. It should be enough to summarise these points and to highlight a progression in the use of these techniques, to demonstrate that the order in which James placed the tales was deliberate and instructive.

As we move from the first to the fourth tale, we notice that the ironic method of characterisation becomes progressively less complex. In The Aspern Papers the ironic portrait emerges from a complex interplay between the two roles of the editor as hero and historian. Much of it arises from glaring inconsistencies and contradictions in the editor's narrative, but the reader must be alert to pick up some of the more subtle hints and nuances. The same is true of The Turn of the Screw, but the reader is helped by the distancing device of the Prologue. In both tales the ironic portrait is drawn of the narrator's centre of consciousness. In "The Liar" it is the reflector of the events who is the subject of the irony and in "The Two Faces" it is the subject. In

this fourth tale the subject is viewed through the two mediums of the reflector and the centre of consciousness and the resulting distance between the subject and the narrative makes the irony more obvious.

The same process of diffusion is found in the use of romance. In the first tale the romantic material is very dense. The editor's narrative is cast in the form of a quest romance and the whole picture is suffused with a romantic atmosphere. The texture is complicated by a complex use of references to romantic works of literature which serve to highlight for the alert reader, the irony of the editor's view of himself. The narrative of the governess in The Turn of the Screw is equally dense with romantic overtones, but again the Prologue serves to warn the alert reader. In "The Liar", the romantic element is reduced to some telling ironic references to romantic works, while in "The Two Faces" there are just two faint echoes.

In both of these elements of technique then, we find the same progressive distancing which serves to make them more obvious as we progress through the volume. I have distinguished between these two threads and treated them separately in order to facilitate understanding of them, but they are really two aspects of the same thing. The thread of romance is tightly woven around the use of ironic characterisation and serves to emphasise it, because the main concern of each tale is the portrait of the main character.

Most of what needs to be said about the four main characters has

been said in the main text. The editor, the governess and Oliver Lyon are all single-minded, obsessive egotists, pursuing their chosen ends. Each begins with good intentions, but all their visions become distorted by their obsessions and their egotism. It is hard to brand Mrs. Grantham as an egotist and harder to identify an obsession in such a short tale, but perhaps she acts as a footnote to the other characters, just as her story acts as a footnote to the other three tales, making a direct, explicit statement of their common themes. She has two faces. At the beginning of the story she has a face of beauty which becomes clouded until, at the end, she has a face of ugliness. Perhaps this second face is the other face of the editor which we are never allowed to see, but can imagine from his actions. Perhaps it is also the other face of the governess which drives Flora and Mrs. Grose away and which Miles sees, momentarily, before he dies. Perhaps it is the other face of the guilty Lyon.

The four main characters share another thing in common which is that they leave behind them a trail of human debris. Throughout the four tales a path of physical and emotional destruction is forged. The list of dead and wounded is like a dramatis personae of the other characters. Juliana and Miles are dead (in a sense, killed), and the Colonel has committed a figurative suicide. The Colonel and Lady Gwyther have been humiliated in front of their spouses and a consequent strain put on their marriages. Everina

has been forced to look at an ugly side of the face of the man she loves and, by the same process, Shirley Sutton has lost his lover. Tina Bordereau has been left completely alone in her middle age and Flora has (possibly) been driven mad. We may almost characterise the action of Volume 12 as a moral catachlysm.

In the light of the rest of the James canon it would be surprising if he let one of the four main agents slip out of the net without some kind of moral judgement being made and, of course, he does not. Whatever the good intensions which they may start with, they are the subjects of criticism for their immoral use and manipulation of others for their own selfish ends. They seek to possess, to place in bondage other people, or they impinge upon other's freedom by undermining their individuality or integrity. This is the major theme of all four tales and it is a theme which runs throughout James' career as a writer. The violation of another's freedom of spirit or soul was one of Hawthorne's major themes and it is, therefore, not surprising to find the figure of Hawthorne haunting The Aspern Papers and "The Liar".

Thus we see the operation of a third principle of unity in this volume of tales. I have isolated the one major (Hawthornean) theme, both in my text and here, but there is a second major theme in the four tales which acts as a complement to this. We may isolate this theme by first noting another common element in the tales. Art is used

as an index of moral worth in Aspern's papers, the governess' idealisation of the children, Lyon's painting and Mrs. Grantham's dressing of Lady Gwyther. Another common element on which I have only lightly touched is masks. In The Aspern Papers there is Juliana's green mask and there is also the false identity which the editor uses to mask his purpose. In The Turn of the Screw there are the masks of innocence which the governess believes the children use to cover their demonic evil, but there is also the mask of superiority of both intelligence and station which the governess hides behind in her dealings with Mrs. Grose. The housekeeper, who knows her "place" in life, is fooled into going along with the governess' "explanations" until she sees the effect on Flora. I have noted Lyon's fascination with "the human mask" in "The Liar". In his desire to get behind the Colonel's mask to the true character, he succeeds in merely placing a hideous mask of his own creation over the Colonel's face. By the end of the story Lyon hides himself behind a mask of lies. Finally there are the preposterous clothes which Mrs. Grantham uses to mask the beauty of Lady Gwyther in "The Two Faces" and thus destroy her in a society which stresses appearances and impressions.

This systematic use of masks indicates a second major theme in Volume 12 which we may call the conflict between representation and illusion. James believed that it was impossible to present life in works of art; at best one could aim for a representation of some aspect of it

and be prepared to compromise further between that and the illusion of life. In the narratives of the editor and the governess and in Lyon's painting the illusion takes over completely. Perhaps I should say delusion rather than illusion because these three characters are driven on by the delusion that they have some mysterious, god-given right to learn the "truth" about Aspern and Bly and the Capadoses. What emerges for the reader is the illusory quality of their art and some ironic "truths" about them as characters. Mrs. Grantham is deluded into believing that she presents Lady Gwyther, but to the discerning Sutton she produces only an illusion which tries, unsuccessfully, to mask the lady's beauty. What emerges for Sutton and the reader is some truth about Mrs. Grantham's nature.

All four characters indulge in exercising some advantage over their fellow characters. The editor uses his false identity to manipulate Miss Tina. The governess uses her station and her education to manipulate Mrs. Grose. Lyon uses his past friendship with Mrs. Capadose to manipulate her, and his artistic skill to manipulate the Colonel. Mrs. Grantham uses her knowledge of "social graces" and of London society to humiliate Lady Gwyther. For comment on this we should return to one of the first and most able commentators on James. Joseph Warren Beach,[1] in his 1954 introduction to his

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[1]Beach, The Method of Henry James, lxxxvii.

pioneering 1918 study of James' fiction, says that the mass of men

> . . . are playing a game, it may be, but a game in which the winner is the man who knows all the ticks of the card sharper, and when he wins, it is at the expense of those who lose.
>
> In the game that James has in mind, one cannot win at the expense of another, and cheating is fatal; it is a game in which the players are so to speak partners, bound to seek their common advantage, and the gains are all those of partners winning together. For it is the successful conduct of the fine relationship between them that is the object of the game.

Perhaps James should have entitled Volume 12, "the card sharpers".

This brings me back to the point of departure, the famous ghost controversy. Given the context in which The Turn of the Screw is placed in Volume 12, and it is James' own choice of context, I do not see that the argument over the existence of the ghosts is relevant. The governess' narrative is a ghost-story, The Turn of the Screw is not; it is part of a much broader spectrum of James' major themes. These four tales relate to later major novels like The Spoils of Poynton and The Golen Bowl. James did not employ the gothic form in The Turn of the Screw in order to produce a pot-boiler, nor are the references to Mrs. Radcliffe and Charlotte Bronte the result of mere whimsy. Does his use of the language of courtly romance in The Spoils of Poynton or the references to Poe's The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and use of quest-romance imagery in The Golden Bowl make these novels pot-boilers? I think not.

In conclusion then, it is obvious that there was an underlying

thematic principle in the selection and ordering of these four tales in Volume 12. I wish to repeat the point made in the introduction that the interpretation given to each individual tale could have been made without reference to the other three. By treating them together, as James appeared to want us to do, we find that the texture is enriched, not altered. This thesis has concentrated specifically on four of James' shorter works, but perhaps it points to a much broader and, as yet, quite neglected area of Jamesian studies. I hope that it will suggest a more fertile approach to The Novels and Tales, not as a convenient single source for most of his individual major works, but as a key to a more complete understanding of his artistic vision.

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