2019

The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in Fin de Siècle Jamesian Narratives

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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Abstract

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Henry James once described emergent self–awareness of individual consciousness as an "illimitable power" that enables personal survival within a world that is, by default, unpredictable and volatile. Subsequent analyses of narrative subtleties and character evolution in James's major works of fiction have often been considered through constructs of psychological realism. One particular aspect of the majority of early Jamesian criticism highlights the connections between stringent Victorian social mores and contemporaneously shifting perceptions of life in England toward the end of the 19th century. In the decades that followed, correlations between the Jamesian narrative and psychoanalytical theory became more prominent within mid– and late– 20th century critical reviews of James's major works since Edmund Wilson's seminal essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934); however, no critic has yet shown how James's representations of the human mind as a cognitively dissonant entity within these narratives disrupt the imposition of adverse Victorian cultural sanctions. Thus, by introducing Leon Festinger's 1957 theory on the concept of cognitive dissonance as a paradigm, I will examine how the bifurcated mindsets of four Jamesian characters – specifically Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*), Fleda Vetch (*The Spoils of Poynton*), and Milly Theale and Kate Croy (*The Wings of the Dove*), respectively – meaningfully reflect an acceleration of tensions, complications, and obstacles that underlie the perpetuation of social homogeneity versus the burgeoning notion of autonomous identity at the end point of Victorianism.

Festinger defines the notion of *cognitive dissonance* as the human mind's innate tendency to ensure all its metaphysical components (one's personal thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions) are consistently harmonious at all times. When disruptions to this default commitment to psychic symmetry occur, Festinger posits, the mind will automatically rely upon certain drive states (such as denial, repression, projection, and irrational reasoning) in its attempts to reestablish a sense of cognitive equilibrium. As a literary framework, then, dissonance theory provides deeper insight into the discordant dualisms that are inherent within James's own resistance to the Victorian dynamic. The depictions of internal strife within these four protagonists illuminate what has been described as James's own efforts to convey that "realism is as much a mode of being as it is a form of art" by depicting how "estranging dehumanization can coexist … as it detaches, disorients, and reorients" via genuine portrayals of cognitive dissonance. At the fore of these conflicts is the Angel of the House – New Woman dichotomy that fractured and then redefined constructs of "ideal" femininity by the end of the 19th century. In this context of James's narratively metonymic anticipation of a transitionally fraught fin de siècle, I will trace each character's journey through cognitive dissonance via her center of consciousness. By giving his readers access to the heroine's interiority (her "stream of consciousness," in the terminology of James's renowned psychologist brother William), James accentuates an ultimately irresolvable paradox: the desire for independence and acceptance that consistently drive Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate toward their destinies is constantly subverted by the deceptively oppressive Old World social forces which they struggle against. What emerges is four distinct portraits that underscore fin de siècle ambivalence regarding change, self–identity, individuality, morality, virtue, and the increasingly tenuous sustainment of social conformity.

Dedicated to the memory of Professor John W. Halperin

In Memoriam J.W.H.

obit MMXVIII

Acknowledgements

There are so many generous souls I will always be indebted to. Firstly, this endeavor would not have been possible without the constant support of my mentor, Professor John Halperin. It was during the spring of 2015 that he told me (after a long discussion regarding "the Jamesian ending") that "In any discussion of the novel, Henry James can't be ignored—there's no one else I can say that about." At that point, I jumped into all–things–Jamesian and never looked back. It was the ultimate honor to have been Dr. Halperin's student – to have been at the receiving end of his immense depth of knowledge – and I am forever grateful for his guidance.

Professor Wendy Martin is the best advisor, ever. Her steady counsel and encouragement over these last four years has been invaluable. Throughout every stage of my progress – from coursework, to qualifying exams, and finally the dissertation – she has been the greatest help at every turn. I have learned from her how to improve the quality my work, how to balance time effectively, how to deal with the unexpected, and how to persistently persevere. Most importantly of all, Professor Martin has been an outstanding example for me of what genuine professorship entails – what it means to truly and wholeheartedly invest precious time and effort in each of her students. I can only hope to emulate her one day.

The tremendous help I have received from Professor Sarah Raff and Professor James Morrison has been equally invaluable. They are both treasures, and I could not have completed this project without their assistance. Professor Raff is so incredibly patient and giving, and her feedback has always challenged me to reassess with "new eyes," to borrow a phrase from Proust. Professor Morrison's rich, detailed commentary on every successive draft not only enabled me to revise with ease, but also returned me back on track whenever my focus became obscured. The process would have been a confusing maze without him.

I have had the good fortune of thriving under the tutelage of every professor in the English Department here at CGU, each of whom so attentively directed me along this journey. Professor Lori Anne Ferrell is the epitome of graciousness and understanding, and I am infinitely thankful for her wisdom and advice. Professor Eric Bulson's brilliant and thorough instruction on Modernism gave me a strong grasp on early–20th century literary intricacies. Navigating through those complexities would have been impossible without his help.

Over in the Religion Department, Professor Tammi Schneider has always been a source of encouragement and calming reassurance. As Dean, she went above and beyond for me, in spite of her ceaselessly demanding schedule. She is, in a word, amazing.

My four mentors at CSU San Bernardino first set me upon this path. My endless gratitude goes to Professor Glen Hirshberg, Professor David Carlson, Professor Mary Boland, and Professor Jean Delgado for their dedicated support over the years.

My three brothers inspire me. Despite his grueling work as a physician, putting in exhausting 12–hour graveyard shifts at the ER, my oldest brother never hesitated at my random requests for company and conversation as I read, wrote, and revised. (I've always suspected he's superhuman). My other wonderful older brother provided a safe haven at his home whenever I needed to take a quick break from writing, and my baby brother called me daily to ask how my research was going and to lend a sympathetic ear during the slower days.

My best friends have been by my side for this entire epic ride: Kwanda, who I met here at CGU and who has been the most amazing big sister and supporter; Wardah, my globetrotting "lil sis" who never missed checking in on me during her world travels; and Najwa, who has always been my resilient sounding board. Thank you so much for always being there, no matter what.

To my twelve nieces and nephews – Sarah, Maryam, Ilyaas, Ruqayyah, Talhah, Hafsah, Umar, Sawdah, Abbaas, Noah, Sumayyah, and Hamzah – my most beloved honor in life is being titled your Phuppho [aunt]. Thank you infinitely for being my sparkling little lights of eternal joy, and for reminding me to play as hard as I work.

To the dear Lani Sanders, who I have lovingly dubbed "The Sewing Professor" on account of her incomparable talents, thank you so much for your endless cheer and your never–ending care. You ensured the defense was wholly less scary by driving all the way down to attend.

I've saved the best for last: my parents. To my glorious mother, who passed onto me her faith, steadfastness, determination, and purposeful devotion, and to my father, who gave me my never–give–up work ethic, a sense of meaningful direction, and an example of how to never lose sight of one's goals – I love you both more than mere words can ever convey. This achievement is equally as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for everything.

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Chapter I

Historical Contexts

Freud, William James, and "The Divided Self"

In his 1907 Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, Henry James explains the novelist's prime

advantage over the theatrical dramatist: the ability to portray a character's "*usurping*

consciousness," indivisible from individuality, as opposed to staged representations wherein "the

consciousness of others is exhibited in exactly the same way as that of the 'hero.'"[1] The

"usurping" consciousness is commensurate with the increasingly divided self, plagued by

dissonance in the face of historical transitions and the range of cultural responses that had begun

to inform progressive change. As with the last major societal shift, when Victorian romanticism

established itself as a repudiation of Regency libertinism, the end of the 19th century was largely

defined by a revolt against previously normalized conventions. This watershed turn was

primarily rooted in intrigue and concern, above all else, with the "usurping consciousness," the

concept of individual self–awareness and the elements that animate its interiority. Sigmund

Freud's theories on the unconscious mind and its central role in processes and control of human

cognition, innately instinctual drives, defense mechanisms, mental disturbances, and transference

also began to garner timely intellectual attention across Europe during this period, the beginnings

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[1] James cites Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a specific example of how the playwright is detrimentally prevented from depicting a full, unfiltered immersion into a protagonist's consciousness: "The consciousness of others is exhibited exactly in the same way as that of the 'hero'; the prodigious consciousness of Hamlet, the most capacious and most crowded, the moral presence the most asserted, in the whole range of fiction, only takes its turn with that of the other agents of the story, no matter how occasional these may be. It is left, in other words, to answer for itself equally with theirs."

of what would become a profound influence in both clinical and metapsychology. By the end of the first World War, Freud's impact on the direction of narrative fiction was already under assessment, as a 1923 review from *Time* magazine notes: "His influence has been the greatest single factor in determining the course of modern fiction, and future literary historians may well refer to [James] Joyce and [Thomas] Mann as great Freudians in the way that Thackeray and George Eliot are now called great Victorians. Freud has exercised a greater literary influence than any other living writer. His 35 volumes are packed with literary allusions, with shrewd criticisms on poetry and fiction, with case histories that read like novels."[2] In retrospect, the most significant aspect of the Freudian effect was the range of responses, in both agreement and dissention, that his ideas provoked, as Wendy Larson observes: "The Freudian unconscious was merely one of many early 20th century ideas about the mentality, spirit, psyche, and soul that circulated among intellectuals and evolved into a focus on a mental quality that was very different from what Freud proposed."[3]

William James was foremost among these other scholars. At the same time Freud's works were drawing attention beyond Vienna, James – who had almost single–handedly expanded the discipline of psychology in America in the late latter half of the 19th century – was emphasizing the unitary characteristics of conscious thought, the function of consciousness rather than its structure, and the idea of a "divided self." In this vein, James describes the mind as composed of two separate entities: there is the "Me," which refers to an individual's manner of processing personal experiences, and the "I," which controls the unalterable "thinking self, the pure Ego, the

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[2] Briton Hadden, "Reviews." *Time Magazine*, Vol. 31 (March 31, 1923), 63.
[3] Wendy Larson, *Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century* (Stanford University Press: 2008), 81.

spiritual soul of felt personal identity."[4] The unification of these two elements, according to

James, is necessary for one's "stability and happiness … a fundamental requirement for

successful living." On the other hand, inconsistencies between the "felt personal identity" and a

sustained inability to maintain it in light of life experiences leads to "sick–souled attitudes

toward reality,"[5] the onset of psychological disturbance. Additionally, in another major departure

from original Freudian postulates, James's explanation of the "divided self" also presents an

opposing pluralistic theory on the phenomena of human instincts. Such inclinations, which

number more than the original four as proposed by Freud,[6] do not appear as inherently static and

constant; they are instead dynamic and variable, continuously evolving to serve a specific

purpose. As Don S. Browning explains in his Freud–James comparative study, for James, "The

mind's complex processes exist on account of their adaptive value in ensuring survival, both of

the individual and of the species," well beyond the limitations that confine the Freudian ego and

id:

> James believed humans had a large number of instinctual tendencies whereas Freud believed
> human activity is motivated by no more than two types of instinctual energy, although throughout
> his career his mind changed about just what these two types actually were. … Both James and
> Freud, as Stuart Hughes would say, were in different ways 'loyal critics' of the Enlightenment.
> They wittingly or unwittingly gave us images of man which went beyond the logical and
> mechanistic paradigms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although Freud never escaped
> this ethos. But Freud's normative vision of man and his interpretation of the modern world varied
> significantly from James's. Freud believed in an inherent antagonism between an individual's
> chaotic instinctuality and the frustrations of social institutions. He ended by advocating a retreat
> into self–conscious and prudential husbandry of one's pleasures in a basically inhospitable world.

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[4] The "Me" component of the self includes the "material" self and the "social" self, both of which are subject to external influence. The "spiritual" self, by contrast, is central to innate self-perception and thus more attuned to the "pure Ego."

[5] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), 196.

[6] Freud, in his focus on personality as a function of certain "instinctive" energies, referred to four basic characteristics that define instincts: source (biological processes), pressure (degree of motivational force), aim (self-preservation), and object (desire).

James gave rise to an image of life as active engagement; Freud helped found a vision of life as civil yet hedonic detachment. Freud saw modernity as the control of life through science; James saw it as an acceleration of competing forces which could be guided only by the unifying powers of practical moral activity. ... The strenuous life was, for James, primarily a life of inquiry, a practical moral inquiry designed to develop new moral traditions and new cultural syntheses to guide man through the transitions of modernity. ... James hit on a method of practical moral investigation designed to give us ethical principles which could be living and forever revised to fit the changing circumstances of life."[7]

Although Freud's oeuvre would, to some extent, eclipse much of his peers' work during the first half of the 20th century, the unmistakable legacy of William James in bringing the formerly esoteric discipline to a much wider, more general audience[8] in both America and Europe emerged after psychoanalysis became a greater focus of critique later on. Until then, during the decade and beyond since James first coined the phrases "The Stream of Thought" and "The Consciousness of Self"[9] in the titling of focal chapters within 1890's *Principles of Psychology*, the assertion that "every state of mind forms part of a personal consciousness"[10] – a comprehensive envisionment of the mind in its natural state, a conscious flow of unremitting thoughts notably punctuated by a host of diverse psychological responses ranging from conflict

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[7] Don S. Browning, *Pluralism and Personality: William James and Some Contemporary Cultures of Psychology* (Bucknell University Press: 1980), 39.

[8] According to Judith Ryan, William James's work was also invaluable as it analyzed and critiqued "an amalgam of ideas from an entire range of recent European thinkers" for the general audience. *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (University of Chicago Press: 1991), 13.

[9] Because consciousness reflexively processes and shapes experience, it is never "chopped up in bits," as William James explains, even though the experiences it analyzes often are. "It is nothing jointed; it flows, a 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described."

[10] Ibid., 151. John Lachs elaborates on the three components that underlie the "personal" consciousness. (1) The various states of mind that form the Jamesian-defined "stream" are all revealed within a "first-personal mode of giveness." This means that they are private and privileged, the part of the mind that "keeps its own thoughts to itself." Furthermore, each aspect of the stream embodies an experiential state: "The various states comprising the stream are intrinsically subjective, in that they *feel* a certain way for the subject who experiences them." (2) James notes that these various states that imbue the stream of consciousness are constantly shifting; they exhibit an "inner phenomenal movement," controlled by intervals of time that are not necessarily linear, but rather dictated by the understanding that new experiences are "remolding us every moment." (3) Because the stream of consciousness is "sensibly continuous," novelty and flux are organized cohesively within the stream, successively flowing without interruption, "breach, crack, or division." Thus, while states within the "stream" will undoubtedly experience dissonance throughout one's life, the reflexive processing of such states continues without pause.

to repression – was overshadowed by Freudian perusals of the symmetrical divide between the ego, the super–ego, the id, dream states, and the Oedipus complex. In retrospective view of the increasingly frequent trend in Freudian criticism following what Michael Saler terms "the first wave" of the English fin de siècle, during which Freud's peers more actively challenged his "artificial" theoretical dictates,[11] the extensive contributions of William James in studies on the nature of the mind provide a more precise, nuanced theoretical lens. Additionally, through his duly influenced brother Henry, James's perspectives on human consciousness and interiority were transmitted into the literary realm, with the novelist expounding upon the psychologist's theoretical precepts on the connection between the individual and society – one interlocked by discordance, anxiety, and conflict, within a replicated atmosphere emphasizing genuine familial and marriage plots, complicated relationships, and emotional intrigue:

> For both thinkers [William and Henry James], the pragmatic individual is aware that the institutions of society represent, in concrete form, the vast currents of habit, belief, and emotion that undergird the collective consciousness. The infrastructures of society are imbued with the emotional resonance of subjectivity. In the pragmatist sense, communal subjectivity is not a stable entity, nor is it some kind of inner locus of beliefs that guide society. Rather, it is composed of a fractious and changeable myriad of public opinions, trends, and pressure points that assume tangible shape largely in relation to specific events… the protagonists all display an independent strain that complicates their relationships to material society.[12]

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[11] Many mid- and late- 20th century scholars and critics across literary, philosophical, and psychological spectrums have noted that in the presence of subsequent empirical evidence, most of Freud's ideology can no longer be deemed valid. For example, Frederick Crews observes that "Freud's scientific reputation has been in an accelerating tailspin" since the 1970s; Edwin Fuller Torrey states that "Freud's Oedipal theory has been convincingly disproven" consistently; and Hans Eysenck declares that Freud "elevated false assumptions to a major art form."

[12] Gregory Phipps, *Henry James and the Philosophy of Literary Pragmatism* (Springer: 2016), 17.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory as an Alternative Psychoanalytic Literary Paradigm

Readings of Henry James's works within Freudian theoretical parameters thus dominated early modernist criticism, with special attention to Freud's ideas on the uncanny, melancholia, the death drive, and the intricacies of the unconscious mind. J.C. Rowe explains that since Freudian methodology focused largely on the interdependence of "psychic and cultural representation," exemplified by Freud's case studies, the subsequent traversing between different discourses in the form of translations of one discipline (literature) in terms of another (psychology) prompted a new "literary mode of understanding."[13] In determining these psychoanalytical links, according to Rowe, successive analyses of fiction located narrative connections between – among other subjects – anthropology, sociology, cultural conditioning, and the role of socially embedded institutions. Each of these connections merged into a greater "participation of literary processes in the shaping of social reality,"[14] thereby establishing initial perspectives on the manifold interactions between mental and social processes within literary works.

Freudian psychoanalysis, with its focus on the superego's dominant role in controlling – and ultimately attempting to protect – the self from disturbing realities, was largely centered on the notion of self–defense mechanisms; manifestations of displacement, denial, repression, and projection are all modes of rationalization, as recognized by Freud:

> In its attempts to mediate between the id and reality, the superego is often obliged to cloak the commands of the id with its own rationalizations, to conceal the id's conflicts with reality, to profess, with diplomatic disingenuousness, to be taking notice of reality even when the id has remained rigid and unyielding. … Thus the

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[13] Rowe, "After Freud: Henry James and Psychoanalysis." *The Henry James Review* 5.3 (1984), 226.
[14] Ibid., 228.

ego, driven by the id, confined by the superego, repulsed by reality, struggles to

master its economic task of bringing about harmony among the forces and

influences working in and upon it.[15]

Freud's stratified psychic apparatus is broadly reflected in response to the tribulations faced by

Jamesian characters; in different situations, they are continually driven to internalize and repress

their initial instinctive reactions to traumatic experiences, submitting instead to overwhelming

pressure to keep in conformity with set moral and social codes. These constant engagements with

conflict underscore Freud's implication that "the striving for what is useful" is diametrically

opposed to "the dynamics of desire," and thus exemplify the cyclical recurrence of the inherent

struggles between the id, the ego, and the superego. According to Peter Rawlings, however,

Freudian psychoanalysis provides merely a generally "modest" grounding through which to

deconstruct literary works, one that is notably restricted with regard to how James analyzes a

changing social, cultural, and historical setting. The limitations of Freudian theory as a form of

literary analysis originate both from "concern with Freud's conclusions because of his sexism,

which was much in line with the patriarchal views of his nineteenth–century European peers," as

well as criticism that "his theories are oversexed … Seeing literary symbols primarily as sexual

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[15] Freud, "The Structure of the Unconscious." *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 562. Psychoanalytical literary criticism began as an interpretative study of authors and their characters based on Freud's oeuvre: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), in which he extended a discussion on the unconscious mind, introduced the Oedipus complex, and presented an analysis of the theory through Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; and *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), a series of case studies focusing on the aetiological foundations of traumatic feelings as originally repressed within the mind. These were two of Freud's most influential early works in the tradition of late-19th century literary studies. Over the next several decades, Freud's scholarship on the psychoanalysis of loss (*Mourning and Melancholia*), his conceptualization of the human psyche and its components (as outlined in *The Ego and the Id*), and his extensive hypotheses regarding life and its death drives (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), among other psychodynamic theories and analyses, established a continued Freudian literary influence throughout the early- and mid- 20th century.

symbolism might narrow interpretive avenues rather than broaden them."[16] Prominent critics of Freudian psychoanalysis, including Greenberg, Grunbaum, Khilstrom, and Webster, cite Freud's seemingly dismissive treatment of women, coupled with a lack of genuine insight into the female experience (which he once referred to as "the dark continent" of psychology) as a significant indication that Freud's male–dominated hypotheses could not be universally applicable for the purpose of impartial literary analysis. These flaws did not diminish the significance of Freud's impact and influence, however, as future theorists within the field of psychology both built upon and dismantled several core Freudian principles as they formulated their own: "[Freud's] basic assumptions about the workings of the mind, and the language used to describe them, have proved extraordinarily useful in telling us about the way we think and write."[17]

Nearly half a century later, Leon Festinger developed the main fundamentals of Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957) as a divergent epistemological response to Freud's suggestion that human nature is, by intrinsic default, inclined toward irrationality. The defining basis of dissonance theory is uncomplicated, as Festinger proposes: The mind is constantly driven to remain in a state of harmony (consonance) by avoiding the intrusion or onset of inconsistent (nonconsonant) thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and changes. In opposition to Freudian theory, the delineation of the unconscious as described by Festinger pivots on the claim that the human mind is comprised of a principal defensive mechanism that immediately recognizes, and seeks to reduce, any disharmonious circumstances that disturb "the various attitudes, beliefs, and items of knowledge that constitute our mental store."[18] The conscious rationalization or justification that results from any negative

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[16] Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90.
[17] Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *A Writer's Companion* (LSU Press, 1995), 59.
[18] Peter O. Gray, *Psychology* (Macmillan, 2002), 520.

disturbance often manifests in the form of denial, blame, or repression in order to reconcile the individual's beliefs with any external factors that can challenge them. As an action–opinion theory, Festinger's paradigm reinforces the opinion that human thought, largely determined by extrinsic factors, continuously influences lifelong behaviors, attitudes, and ideas; collectively, this is what creates a specific social order. Actions, then, are not merely the product of a set of adapted personal standards; rather, they also establish and validate those standards, at times apparently counterintuitively. Cognitive dissonance, central to the development, modification, and perpetuation of thought, is based on the hypothesis that there are three central characteristics which define individual experience. Firstly, as Festinger argues, the mind is inherently responsive to any degree of inconsistency between beliefs and actions. Secondly, once the mind consciously acknowledges any such discrepancy, the resultant psychological discomfort will motivate the individual to somehow resolve the ensuing mental anguish. Lastly, the dissonance may be resolved either completely or partially by the mind in one of three ways, or a combination thereof: a change in fundamental beliefs; a resolve to avoid actions that initially led to the dissonance; or a change in original perception of the dissonance–causing action itself.

The recurring correlations between late–Jamesian fiction and William James's proposition of the "divided self" clearly also propagates a major common thread with Festinger's hypotheses, particularly in that it implies the inevitability of psychological dissonance and its effects. We can equate James's beliefs on the "Me" versus "I" conundrum with Festinger's claim that the mind is, at all times, naturally inclined toward equilibrium through maintenance of a stable self–conceptualization (the "I" component), while inconsistencies that originate extrinsically (as experienced and processed by the mind's "Me" aspect) threaten to inspire an abnormal set of behaviors for the sake of a return to stasis. The contextual and historical

significance of fin de siècle Jamesian protagonists, illuminated under this scope, pivots upon the degrees to which each personifies what Phipps delineates as "the individual impulse that works against institutional status quos,"[19] a representative figure of dissonance who wages a singular battle against institutional evils, attempting to rise against the confines of a hegemonic world. The final decades of Victorianism and its immediate aftermath, as clarified through these late–stage Jamesian narratives in light of dissonance theory, may be accordingly redefined as a compelling reenvisionment of the transitional apprehensions that alternately both emboldened and threatened to destabilize individual interiority. In turn, this newly divergent, singular focus replaced one where many previous Victorian writers were primarily concerned with a more generalized survey of greater society. Following the first World War, authors throughout the British Empire, in America, across Europe, and beyond further cultivated this zeitgeist that James had initiated. Sally Ledger discusses this turn at length, in view of the ensuing generation's retrospective interest in "reassessments of the 1880s and 1890s, which also examined afresh the relations between fin de siècle culture and literature, and the emergence of modernism in the early 20th century," directly resulting in studies that "have not only led to the emergence of new fields of study in their own right, such as the New Woman, or degeneration and literature, but also extended the coverage of the period: it is common now for studies of the fin de siècle to examine the period up to and including 1910 or even 1914, and for the fin de siècle to be viewed as the crucible of early modernism."[20]

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[19] Phipps, *Literary Pragmatism*, 18.
[20] Sally Ledger, "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism." In *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 22–44.

The Jamesian Narrative and the Psychology of Dissonance: Four Fin de Siècle Protagonists

As literary critic John Carlos Rowe suggests, Henry James's theoretical schematics represent "esthetic attitudes [that] range from psychological realism to the formalism of the symbolists,"[21] all of which underscore a multifaceted literary complexity that is consistently reflected in his fiction. The "Jamesian" brand of narrative is emphatically immersed within a distinctive form of realism, one that accentuates a study, through each protagonist, of the "center of consciousness" at its fundamental core. James's emphasis on individual cognition and awareness via mimetic characterization also highlights how, in general, a psychological approach to narration functions through what critic Bernard Paris refers to as a "unifying structural principal" – one that, in any given fictitious text, allows for a necessary understanding of why "realistic novels are often flawed by incoherence and contradiction … [and to] account for disparities between representation and interpretation."[22] At its most meaningful and effective, narrative fiction is an engaging form of art, as James hypothesizes; such fiction also follows a natural trajectory in communion with the notion of cognitive dissonance. In James's view, the art of narration must be founded upon the seeking of truths, for both the author and his subjects. Thus, the peculiarities, obscurities, unease, and uncertainties that, in real life, occur in conjunction with – and oftentimes, actually overwhelm – any positivity and goodness that also informs the overall human experience must never be minimalized.

The incorporation of formal realism within any given narrative ideally reflects the philosophical practicality of its age, and as Ian Watt further explains in *The Rise of the Novel*,

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[21] John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 229.

[22] Bernard J. Paris, *A Psychological Approach to Fiction: Studies in Thackeray, Stendhal, George Eliot, Dostoevsky, and Conrad* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010), 10.

"the whole question of the historical, institutional, and social context"[23] of the novel itself is fundamental from every dimension in understanding literature as a non–autonomous, interconnected entity. It is precisely these aspects of inseparable, indivisible contextual bearings on specific texts that determine several major aspects of the narrative, from thematic elements to formal stylistics. Additionally, such considerations are themselves shaped by authorial perspective, intent, and implicit societal and cultural commentary. During an era when didactic literature was popular, most Victorian novelists were fixated on producing narratives that were not only positively resonant with their readership, but also faithful – regardless of the potential critical response or departure from reality – to the purposes of their intended plots, as well to their characters. In the 18th century, connections between religion, philosophy, and the content of popular texts "emerged in connection with larger social and intellectual changes"[24] more than ever before, continuing a trend that had developed late in the early modern era. A particular interest in exploring the nature of human sensibilities, however, only became more apparent toward the very end of the period. This shift coincided with a rising interest in Enlightenment–era empiricism, as described by John Locke and David Hume, and its focus on sensory experience as the perceptual source of acquired knowledge. A consideration of realism as a literary technique was first alluded to in the middle of the 19th century, when William Thackeray was labeled "Chief of the Realist School" by the literary journal Frazer's Magazine in 1855.[25] In spite of this passing reference, Victorian romance and idealism, enshrouded in "moral decency," would remain a preferred literary style until near the era's end. Thus, although the psychological

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[23] Ian Watt, *The Rise of The Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), 57.
[24] Geoffrey Sill, *The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.
[25] Two years later, in 1853, the quarterly *Westminster Review* somewhat cautiously described Balzac's novels as containing "the germs of realism," designating him as likely "the head of this realist school" who was determined to portray "the exact imitation of nature."

realism within fiction is present in Georgian as well as Victorian literature – Watt observes that

authors such as Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, and George Eliot more notably drew upon the

subtleties of psychological conflict as a narrative tool – by the end of the 19th century, James's

more pronounced illumination of the exploration of individual consciousness, with notable

attention to the severity of cognitive dissonance at its core, had determined the future direction of

realist fiction.

The critical, negatively paradoxical presence of this dissonance and its reverberant effects

on individual consciousness is thus fundamental to the Jamesian narrative. James regarded

fiction that largely disregards the definitive presence of internal discord as a failure to represent

true existence, rendering the art impractical and, ultimately, useless. The deliberate and unfair

idealization of actual life that habitually delineated many of the most popular novels of the

Victorian era disturbed James, who referred to such works as "loose, baggy monsters"[26] in terms

of form, rife with overblown sentimentalities, an exaggerated adherence to the minutiae of rigid

social mores, and often concluding with an unnatural "happily ever after."[27] In his 1884 essay,

"The Art of Fiction," James defines the narrative as "an art which undertakes so immediately to

reproduce life … in its broadest definition a personal impression of life."[28] The favoring of

inorganic banalities usually came at the expense of such an accurate "reproduction" of real life;

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[26] In his Preface for *The Tragic Muse*, James lamented what he perceived to be the long-winded clutter of the nineteenth-century novel, with its "queer elements" and multiple (and oftentimes confounding) plot points. In this context, he was specifically referring to Thackeray's *The Newcomes* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as examples. Several years later, in a letter to his protégé, the English novelist Hugh Walpole, James derided the eminent works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as "fluid puddings" that were actually not "entirely tasteless," but this concession was only given because he believed that each author's respective narratives duly captured the structural brilliance of "their own minds and souls … thanks to the strong, rank quality of their genius and experience."

[27] In an 1875 review of *Roderick Hudson*, one American critic noted James's dissension from conventionalized Victorian romance. "Those who look for 'and they lived together happily ever after' at the end of Mr. James's novels," he warned, "will be disappointed." Review of *Roderick Hudson*, New York Herald, 1875.

[28] *The Art of Fiction*, penned in critical response to English novelist Walter Besant's claims on "the general laws" that should define novelistic form, purpose, and substance, is often cited by scholars and critics as a succinct justification on how and why fiction should, ideally, function as a realist entity.

individual consciousness was left obscured under the excessive limitations and pressures imposed by the uncompromising standards which recurrently epitomized Victorian authorship. Thus, James's aversion for the "overstuffed" Victorian novel was not primarily based on account of its typical hyperbolic romanticism alone, but also rather the detrimental effects such melodramatic contextualizations consistently levied upon the natural development and progression of a supposedly realistic character's persona. A character's growth in perception and sensibility, as James explained in a letter to a fellow author, takes place within "the delicate shadings of fleeting moods and fugitive emotions." These psychologically dissonant "shadings" must be truthfully chronicled by the novelist for his narrative to hold enduring value.

A review of the enduring psychological significance of James's resistance to the Victorian dynamic reveals a genuine expression of internal and external fin de siècle anxieties, particularly within what has been described as his own efforts to convey that "realism is as much a mode of being as it is a form of art" by depicting how "estranging dehumanization can coexist … as it detaches, disorients, and reorients"[29] through individual cognitive dissonance. In his theoretical explanation, Festinger describes the individual mind as generally inclined "toward consistency … opinions and attitudes, for example, tend to exist in clusters that are internally consistent … there is the same kind of consistency between what a person knows or believes and what he does." When any unwelcome conflict manifests within an individual's cognition, "psychological discomfort will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance … when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance."[30] An

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[29] Rowe, 53.

[30] Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University Press, 1962), 3. Festinger explains the term "dissonance" as connotative of anything that causes "disequilibrium," the first indication of any unnatural and thus

understanding of and reference to these premises within a greater social context can provide greater insight into the purposes and goals of any narrative. While correlations between the Jamesian narrative and psychoanalytical theory have been prominent within mid– and late– 20th century critical reviews of James's major works since Edmund Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934), a central concentration on how, specifically, the representations of cognitive dissonance within these narratives disrupt the imposition of adverse social sanctions has not yet been considered.

By examining four central Jamesian characters from his fin de siècle works which roughly coincide with the final stages of the Victorian era – Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*, 1881), Fleda Vetch (*The Spoils of Poynton*, 1897), and Milly Theale and Kate Croy (*The Wings of the Dove*, 1902) – I will collectively highlight how a more prevalent experience of cognitive dissonance reflects the increasing social anxieties that accompanied the cusp of New Womanhood, shifting definitions of femininity, and the onset of modernism. For these characters, the long–term inability of the mind to consistently sustain adaptability inevitably leads to behavior that is suddenly illogical, willfully detached, or, at times resignedly self–destructive. Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate are initially driven by a type of defamiliarization that ruptures the standard Victorian woman's expected resignation to an inflexible, socially–crafted,

gendered identity. Each subsequently experience catalytic transformations that drive new alliances with "the unified, controlled, integrated self." In the end, however, "the workings of repression and its effects"[31] stifle any newfound self–awareness. This oscillation – from

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disconcerting state of mind. He describes the meaning of "cognition" as the collective store of an individual's knowledge, beliefs, or closely held opinions "about oneself, or about one's behavior," in addition to the individual's perception of their external environment and its numerous pressures.

[31] Julie Rivkin, "The Genius of the Unconscious: Psychoanalytic Criticism." In *Palgrave Advances in Henry James Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2007), 61.

oppressed, to independently self–conscious, to repossessed by the patriarchal system – can be understood in terms of what Festinger refers to as an autonomy–undermining process, central to the nature of Victorian feminine subservience, a "controller of the mind" that is continually exemplified by James, as critic Elizabeth Allen implies:

> They [James's female characters] have a way of missing out on emotional experience, either through timidity or prudence or heroic renunciation … The only patterns available to women, in James's work, fall into distinct categories – those of marriage which signifies social existence and all too often annihilation for the woman of any autonomous existence; of withdrawal from marriage and thus from a fruitful relationship with society; and of death.[32]

Sally Ledger also describes this time as "an era of precious experimentation" for James, where cultural subversiveness was steadily gaining traction, culminating most significantly in the origins of, and questions that surround, the concept of the New Woman. This is a central thematic facet of the dissonance that will eventually overwhelm Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate:

> The collision between the old and the new that characterized the fin de siècle marks it as an excitingly volatile transitional period; a time when British culture was caught between two ages, the Victorian and the modern; a time fraught both with anxiety and with an exhilarating sense of possibility. The recurrent theme of the cultural politics of the fin de siècle was instability, and gender was arguably the most destabilizing category. It is no coincidence that the New Woman materialized alongside the decadent and the dandy.[33]

New Womanhood was further branded and explicated by Irish feminist author Sarah Grand in her 1894 treatise, *The New Aspect of the Woman Question*: "Women are awaking from their long

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[32] Elizabeth E. Allen, *Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James* (Springer, 1984), 43.
[33] Sally Ledger, "The New Woman," 22. The conceptually romanticized "Angel of the House" was thus diminished by many of the same major changes that had simultaneously aided national progress: Industrialization, a series of major parliamentary acts initiated to address a range of social problems, and authorial response to these issues.

apathy… and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home–is–the–Woman's–Sphere, and

prescribed the remedy."[34] The notion of the "perfect" English woman of the early and mid–19th

century, patently reflected in most canonical novels of the period and grounded in the Victorian

ordinance of gendered, public–private separate spheres, was by now quickly deteriorating. Much

had changed since the century prior, when Samuel Johnson noted that "the law has wisely given

them [women] little,"[35] but it was not until the catalytic revision of the mandates concerning the

Matrimonial Causes Act early in the 1870s that a woman was legally established as an

independent individual, as opposed to a circumscribed possession of her father or husband.

Accounts of the problematic, uncertain, and oftentimes failed renunciation of the Victorian

"Angel of the House" in favor of the fin de siècle New Woman figures more prominently in

James's later novels, and as Victoria Coulson observes,

> These confrontations are the raw, volatile sites of a fierce struggle between femininity as
> an ambivalent, self–divisive struggle with authority. The victor is the woman who is
> more closely aligned–more compliant–with social authority; but even as she triumphs she
> recognizes in her victim that resistance, that defiance of authority that is a part of her own
> seeming compliance.[36]

The inspirational potential for progression, incarnated as the New Woman, is fraught with

lingering Old World realities of repression and regression. Thus, the ascendant trajectory of

feminine self–determinism automatically implied by envisionments of modernization was also

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[34] Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." *North American Review* (1894), 271-76. "The Woman Question" was first posed by Mary Wollstonecraft late in the Georgian period in her 1792 manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and a century later, it would markedly influence the most outspoken Victorian feminists. The conflicting tensions that marked the era's end only nurtured the emerging profile of the New Woman, and her purpose became as much about women's rights and redefining gender roles as it was a general renunciation of paternalistic culture. In late Victorian fiction, she symbolized an attempted escape from the masculine gaze, but often with a caveat, as James demonstrates with his four protagonists.
[35] Samuel Johnson to the Reverend Dr. Taylor, 19 August 1763. In *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, Volume I, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 104.
[36] Victoria Coulson, *Henry James, Women, and Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59.

concomitantly threatened by the very nature of fin de siècle transitions, as anticipated by social reformers such as Florence Nightingale. In the same manner, James's projection of the progressively self–aware, dissonant New Woman coincides with the idealization of "a rebel who accepts temporary setbacks and even pain as part of the birth pangs of a new life,"[37] one who is even further burdened with her own unforeseen misfortunes; she is emblematic of the potential pitfalls that result from a cautious attempt to transform the notion of individuality by recreating a public model of femininity that supersedes traditional domestic Victorian womanhood. Tragic failure at successfully navigating the treacherous draw of New Womanhood is always a potential ending, as James indicates. For his four protagonists here, there is no commitment to uninhibited empowerment or contentedly resolved closure as a recompense for achieving full consciousness via dissonance. In the dénouements of Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate, their resolutions are instead replaced by rejection, loss, melancholic ambiguity, self–sacrifice, renunciation, and personal defeat.

Dissonance Theory and Jamesian Philosophy: Intersections

Because cognitive dissonance theory seeks to holistically address the ubiquitous psychological processes that induce deviations in human behavior, its methodology is static and its application is universal, as contemporary psychologists note: "In epistemology, the theory espouses empiricist and rationalist ideas. In terms of axiology, the theory takes a value–neutral stance. In terms of ontology, the theory assumes that behavior is basically determined by and responsive to both biology and the environment."[38] Central to Festinger's framework is a

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[37] A. Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Springer, 2000), 177.
[38] Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, *Theories of Human Communication* (Cengage, 2005), 70-80.

nomothetic explanation of how dissonance intuitively originates; citing consistent trial data, he names several main sources: logical inconsistencies, conflicts arising from the divergence of specific and general personal opinions, cultural mores on acceptability and consonance, and the cognizance of past experiences. Festinger acknowledges potential evaluation and measurement difficulties on account of the abstract nature of dissonance, but contends that established patterns of both human behavior and cultural systems, specific to and generally predictable in every society, sustain the integrity and accuracy of such assessments. The magnitude of dissonance, in congruence with what James refers to as "the bewilderments, multiplied confusion overtaking inward values no less than outward,"[39] determines an individual's initial response and subsequent reactions, many of which are unreconciliatory or abnormal. There are four spectrums of what Festinger calls "dissonance phenomena," each characterized by these different individual aversive–motivational states: perception altering, marked by an abrupt change in convictions; induced compliance, grounded in counterattitudinal behavior; postdecisional dissonance, frequently accompanied by a sense of guilt that usually elicits additional dissonance; and social system dissonance, a product of individual nonconformity and the negative pressure that results.

The immensity of mental disunity is a product of the individual's relationship with and valuation of the elements that instigate the feelings of discomfort. These variables that determine the extent of dissonance also control the manner in which an individual seeks to reduce the conflicting emotions altogether. This consequential effect, which Festinger terms *dissonance reduction*, is the most compelling postulate of dissonance theory as a referential system for literary analysis: it exposes the contradictions that underlie self–perception and reality; it emphasizes the essential role of historicism and contextualism in the development of realism; it

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[39] Henry James, "The Question of the Mind." *Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America* (Library of America, 1993), 309.

narrates the uncomfortable metamorphosis of existential consciousness and self–awareness within a cultural–temporal frame; and it reveals the critical lacuna that persists between individual interiority and the external forces of society. The interdependence of personal cognition, communal influence, and reactive conduct is fixed in the human mind's natural inclination toward thought–action consistency, and dissonance reduction is instrumental in sustaining this lifelong effort. The pressure to reduce dissonance is at its most intense when the limits of personal, foundational thoughts and beliefs are confronted by external elements and a restructuring of one's repository of knowledge, leading to a revisioning of ensuing action, is required; as Festinger asserts, since the antagonistic variables that initiate dissonance also determine its reducibility, "The most important thing is how these changes [that lead to dissonance reduction] may be brought about."[40] He identifies five behavioral modes, both conscious and subconscious, that aim to reduce dissonance: (1) an attempt to reassess or redefine the significance of the concerning issue; (2) an attempt to alter the presence of dissonant elements; (3) the addition of new elements, either positive (consonant) or negative (dissonant) in an attempt to lessen cognitive tensions; (4) an attempt to seek new information for the same purpose, processing information selectively; and (5) the distortion or mischaracterization of dissonant elements, either deliberately or unintentionally. Each of these coping mechanisms demonstrates the human mind's instinctive ability to modify or entirely reverse otherwise standard behaviors, for the sole purpose of mitigating psychological discord.

The alteration of dissonant cognitive elements is substantially difficult when the individual's social environment is structured upon authoritative compliance and expectations of

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[40] Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 18.

conformity.[41] This is because social support, usually in the form of others who share similar beliefs or opinions of the one experiencing conflict, is ordinarily a requirement for individual dissonance reduction, "depending on what the person encounters while attempting to reduce the dissonance."[42] The alternative is behavioral changes, which Festinger notes can be problematic: drastic adjustments in personal cognition are often impossible to sustain and may create an entirely new host of dissonant elements. This is where the addition of new consonant elements demonstrates the mind's ability to compartmentalize, and here Festinger specifically cites the example of devoted practitioners of behaviors that are viewed by general society as dangerous or unhealthy. In order to reduce dissonance in such cases, some will add selected information to their understanding of other behaviors or (sometimes irrelevant) aspects of life that are, in their summation, comparatively more harmful or destructive. The total enormity of dissonance is thus diminished as the person reduces the significance of the original concerning behavior or perceived problem. (Festinger cites a study of cigarette smokers refusing to accept their smoking habit as potentially deadly, instead deflecting to the statistically higher mortality rate of car accidents). This manner of dissonance reduction is a form of negative rationalization, and informs why many individuals continue adhering to conduct that seemingly amounts to self–harm and a disregard for personal wellbeing.

While Festinger's survey of dissonance reduction as a drive state exposes the intricacies of endeavored compromise between thought and action, it also leads to a study of what occurs when cognitive dissonance is irreducible. This dilemma, which Festinger calls resistance to dissonance reduction, denotes an individual's responsiveness, or lack thereof, to concrete reality. A state of irrationality, which Freud viewed as a forceful and primitive component of the

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[41] Victorian culture was the embodiment of such a micromanaged setting, where obedience to social dictates was effectively non-debatable, especially early in the era.
[42] Ibid., 24.

unconscious, represents in dissonance theory the mind's intuition to resist disharmony by

adopting disparate behaviors that appear unjustified. When filtered through cultural contexts,

however, the supposed behavioral paradox actually manifests as a mode of social– and self–

preservation. At the same time, eliminating dissonance always involves some degree of change,

which a person may profoundly fear; Festinger explains that "in such circumstances, there will

be a resistance to change … The magnitude of this resistance will be determined by the extent of

pain or loss which must be endured." Seemingly unreasonable behavior that stems from

dissonance, then, becomes "a common defense mechanism people often use to salve their

consciences … they have an internal logic of their own."[43] The protean nature of reality

propagates a suddenly disconcerting unfamiliarity, eliciting these behavioral coping strategies

that are usually configured within constructs of conscious avoidance, hasty diversion, or

complete denial.

The belief that internal dissonance – with all its components, peculiarities, and

implications as a provenance of self–consciousness – is contextually intersubjective, unstable,

and disjointed forms the basis of James's appeal to the inseparability between the real world and

fiction. Late–era Jamesian personalities are increasingly imbued with what critic Kenneth

Graham describes as an "Emersonian emphasis on the value of individual consciousness in

conflict with a Hawthornean and Melvillean insight into the destructive and self–destructive

depths of individuality,"[44] representing emergent consciousness in a world complicated by the

dualistic coalescing of Old and New values, still in opposition with the individual imagination

but at the same time not entirely mired in the confines that had previously defined it. Characters

such as Isabel, Fleda, and Milly are determined, unassuming, and embody a sense of "faith in

[43] Stephen J. Morse, "The Jurisprudence of Craziness." *Irrational Behavior* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 264.
[44] Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life* (Springer, 1995), 7.

self–help, self–transformation through the exercise of the will, or intelligence, or the moral imagination." The products of their respective self–transformations are devastating, while at the same time "personally spiritual, aesthetic, and refining," and reinforce the notion that "values can be validated or even created by such restless, morally or aesthetically ambitious individuals as these characters of James's novels." But the essence of experience without genuine consciousness is superficial and, at least temporarily, instead in favor of "the unscrupulous and the worldly wise … released only through the self–destructively demonic power of the will." This, the darker side of human consciousness, is exemplified by Kate Croy, who nevertheless falls victim to her own schemes; in the end, like the others, Kate becomes the incarnation of "a human spirit baffled by the pressures of the past and of the present."[45]

Ultimately, the ordeal of self–aware consciousness is a process borne from the authenticity of experience, as James writes in The Art of Fiction: "Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider–web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air–borne particle in its tissue." The precursor of experience is internal conflict, which he referred to as the "battle" of life. The dissonant co–presence of good versus bad, moral duty versus desire, and personal ethics versus social obedience all manifest concurrently. Each entity contributes to the development of individual consciousness all the while, and as James implies, evil more often subsumes goodness as a result of human frailties:

> On this point optimists and pessimists agree. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally unhappy. But the world as it stands is no illusion, no phantasm, no evil dream of a night; we wake up to it again for

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[45] Ibid., 8-9.

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ever and ever; we neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it. We can welcome experience as it comes, and give it what it demands, in exchange for something which it is idle to pause to call much or little so long as it contributes to swell the volume of consciousness.

The favored empirical consciousness–experience–dissonance relationship is at odds with the ideological abstractism that William James, echoing his brother, decried as an ill–equipped philosophical endeavor to explain all accounts of consciousness and experience in accordance with a singular model; this, he argues, results in an implausible perspective on reality that "loses contact with the concrete parts of life," while falsely "ascribing the world something 'clean' and 'intellectual' in the way of inner structure."[46] Henry James, in his equivalent literary refutation of the rationalist view of the world (one that, in essence, doubly operates as a preconfiguration of reader response theory), was also greatly aware of the varied character and experiences of his readers. Whereas the purveyor of an "intellectually sound" philosophical version of life chooses to mostly overlook the convoluted but factual aspects of experience, James's human subjects alternatively enable a recognition of, and connection with, the very real audience seeking to interactively discover the concurrence of value and truth in art. In January 1895, reflecting on the hostile reception of what would be his final play, *Guy Domville*, James recapitulated this premise in his personal thoughts, placing the burden of meaningful, realistic conveyance on the author: "The necessity may be for the narrator to be conscient, or semi–conscient, perhaps, to get full force of certain efforts."[47]

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[46] William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 16. The crux of James's argument maintains that every individual plays a role, to a certain extent, in producing his or her own versions of truth: "Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action—action which to a great extent transforms the world—help to make the truth which they declare." Festinger similarly posits that in order to reduce the recurrence of dissonance, a person may reassess and recreate previously accepted, long-held beliefs or opinions with the aim of reducing potential psychological strain and minimizing attitude-discrepant behaviors.

[47] The failure of *Guy Domville*, complete with jeering audience, was an acutely humiliating experience for James; immediately afterward, he declared himself retired from stage writing, mentioning in a subsequent diary entry that he would instead recommit to the elevated art of novels: "I take up my old pen again—the pen of all my unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself—today—I need to say no more."

Festinger concludes that the metatheoretical presuppositions of dissonance theory are indelibly linked with contemporaneous historical circumstances. A retrospective examination of the societal contexts of the Victorian era reveals manifestations of dissonance that grew and multiplied across the population as a new appreciation for nonaligned freethinking began to clash with traditional adherence to social conformity.[48] For Henry James, the American who spent his formative years roaming across the European continent, Victorianism would come to represent somewhat of an oxymoron. It was a society lacking an abundance of extraordinary philosophical polymaths in comparison to those who were associated with the highly esteemed early Romantics, but it was also nonetheless replete with personages of fascinating psychological complexities that besieged the mind, which he deemed to be "heated by feeling … preserving itself in immanence over long periods, and the final burst in escape of expression is shatteringly explosive."[49] This retrospective sentiment succinctly annotates the transitive undercurrents of the late era: conformity and inhibition, followed by demonstrative rebellion and self–realization. The fading Victorian presence is palpable, for instance, in a chronological analysis of James's assessments of Gustave Flaubert, whom he regarded highly as both an intellectual and as "the novelist's novelist." In his extended remarks on the French author for what would become the 1902 preface of a reissued volume of *Madame Bovary*, James describes Flaubert's production of "the most literary of novels," its "triumph" situated within Flaubert's "unmatched" depiction of Emma, who "interests us by the nature of her consciousness and the play of her mind." While James is pointedly critical of Flaubert for a perceived implication that Emma – in spite of the rich exposition of her consciousness – is, in the end, made to be an inferior character, "too small an affair," which in turn simplifies Madame Bovary to "a picture of the middling .... a narrow

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[48] According to historian Herbert Grabes, Victorian "tensions and dualities" were inextricably tied to individual development, and thus, "they affected the life of the mind itself."
[49] Marianne Moore, *The Dial* Volume 69 (Jansen & McClurg, 1920), 84.

middling," he concludes that the novel was Flaubert's singular masterpiece; its emotionalism demonstrated Flaubert's "accessibility to human relations." However, nearly thirty years prior, in an unfavorable review of Flaubert's lifework, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, James's commentary on Madame Bovary was seemingly informed by a functionalist estimation of morality and didacticism: "It is an elaborate picture of vice, but it represents it as so indefeasibly commingled with misery that in a really enlightened system of education it would form exactly the volume to put into the hands of young persons in whom vicious tendencies had been distinctly perceived."[50] As James sought to distance himself from such Victorian conventions in both his theoretical critiques and his novels, especially during his later years, the directional shift toward modernism became even more pronounced.

Victorian Britain: From Stability to Entropy

By the mid–19th century, Britain was the largest, most powerful empire in the world–a credit to its rising economic prosperity, the continued spread of industrialization, and pioneering artistic movements that introduced some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time. While the preceding Regency period represented an ideological inclination toward rationalism, the dawn of the Victorian era was imbued with the resurging influence of Romanticism; this "romantic emotionalism," according to literary historian and critic Richard Altick, reverberated throughout Victorian society at large, a nostalgic attempt to recapture a sense of idealism "across the gap, to be translated into a new idiom, partly personal and partly the reflection of a changing culture."[51] Superfluous expression of feelings, both positive and negative, became commonplace;

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[50] Henry James, *French Poets and Novelists* (Macmillan & Company, 1893), 197.
[51] Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (Dent, 1974), 6.

deliberate stimulation from the arts, particularly fiction and poetry, was progressively sought

across all classes of society. As Altick further observes, this normalized style of "free venting"

instigated a pattern of excessive attention to the mundane and trivial, marked by "an

incommensurate importance to ordinary occurrences, for the sake of additional opportunities to

rejoice or grieve."[52] The influential rhetoric of prominent members of society, namely politicians

(such as Benjamin Disraeli, William Gladstone, and Sir Robert Peel) and preachers (Henry

Liddon, Charles Spurgeon, and Alexander Maclaren, among others), directly contributed to a

growing sense of the power of language. The resulting dictates of conduct governed the

intricacies of Victorian life, from domestic relations, reverence for stringent practices within

established institutions–namely those of marriage, the church, and education–and even an

emerging preoccupation with death and the macabre, contemplations regarding the significance

"of absence, separation, and displacement in an ever–increasingly chaotic and dismembered

world."[53] The stringent ethical and moral codes that came to define Victorian culture were

actually first cultivated during the preceding reign of George III, in what would become a

distinct lobbying toward what is now known as "the reformation of manners"; this movement

was notably accelerated in response to "the corpulent figure and dissolute habits"[54] of George's

eldest son and regent, the widely hated Prince of Wales, soon to succeed as George IV.

Since the four decades prior to Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne have frequently

been assessed as a "Victorian prelude, during which changes in morals, manners, styles, and

tastes began to influence the quality of life of the community,"[55] a glimpse into the cultural

milieu that shaped the social conditions of this extended transitory period is imperative. The

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[52] Ibid., 7.
[53] Jolene Zigarovich, *Writing Death and Absence in the Victorian Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.
[54] Altick, *Victorian People*, 9.
[55] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (Routledge, 2014), 394.

near–universal contempt for George IV and the immorality and ineptitude the new king came to represent–from his severe and costly lack of leadership abilities, to an overtly extravagant lifestyle that continued, unabated, during the Napoleonic Wars, and a deeply corrupted personal code of conduct–eventually became the catalyst for a watershed moment that began as the Regency came to an end. The lingering atmosphere of discontent and resentment directed toward the monarchy in general was pervasive throughout the aristocracy, the bourgeois, and the working class; and although the era was punctuated by significant cultural achievements in the arts, there were also dire consequences resulting from what historian Alan Bott calls "the raffish habits" of the general populace that had become widespread–everything from excessive smoking, drinking, attendance at "glittering salons, gambling hells, prize fights, and modish brothels," coupled with heedlessness of propriety and little consideration for general etiquette within "this vast casino," where secretly "the Church was despised everywhere" while "the Regency was declared to be an era of vice by those who lived under it, as well as by those who came afterwards."[56] Years later, reflecting on the obvious contrast between the Georgians and their successors, preeminent Victorian novelist William Thackeray contemplated on the enduring implications of those times:

> He [George IV] is dead but thirty years, and one asks how a great society could have tolerated him? Would we rather bear him now? In this quarter of a century, what a silent revolution has been working! How it has separated us from old times and manners! How it has changed men themselves! I can see old gentlemen now among us, of perfect good breeding, of quiet lives, with venerable grey heads, fondling their grandchildren; and look at them, and wonder what they were once.[57]

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[56] Alan Bott, *This Was England: Manners and Customs of the Ancient Victorians* (Doubleday: Doran, 1931), 56.
[57] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray* (Smith, 1891), 98. In a series of lectures titled "The Four Georges," which he gave from 1855-56, Thackeray expressed derision and dismay at the Georgians' apathetic disregard for pietism and virtue, and the damaging resultant image that this corrupted representation of "English morality" projected abroad.

As Bott notes, the hedonistic undercurrent of self–indulgence, ornamentation, and waste became unacceptable as derision for the King grew; soon, the economic and social repercussions of decades of joie de vivre debauchery were fully realized. The final years of the Regency were defined by a retreat from "the ostentatious parade of the vices of civilization" in favor of "newfound sobriety and self–conscious rectitude," characteristics that would underwrite the fundamental ethos of Victorian society in its determined quest to become a distinguished "symbol of family refinement. Going further, they made themselves the jury of culture, the controllers of uplift, the assessors of gentility and community life."[58] The gaudy reality of the Georgian period did not suddenly "mysteriously evaporate" in a cultural coup d'état with the change in monarchs–in fact, early in the 1840s, there was still notable overlap in manners and morals–but by the middle of the century, there was an unmistakable wave of disgust and distrust from the majority of Victorians for anything associated with the immediate past: "Regency clothes, Regency entertainments, Regency morals, and Regency architecture."[59] This outward rejection would strengthen with the passage of time, despite an extant underworld of identical (if not surpassing) turpitude that would remain and thrive even as "Victorianism," with all its concealed hypocrisies, rigid practices, and inflexible norms, became the only socially acceptable way of life. To this effect, as literary historian Ben Wilson maintains, "Throughout Victoria's reign, many people derided the prevailing moral taste and detested much of the self–righteous cant that went with it–even if they went through the correct motions in public as a matter of necessity."[60] Anticipation of the Victorian age hinged upon a renewed sense of superiority within the upper classes, one that not only underscored the era's dawn, but would also continue to

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[58] Bott, *This Was England*, 62.
[59] Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, 394.
[60] Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain, 1789-1837* (Penguin, 2007), 13.

undermine the vast majority of the rest of society–first to its detriment, and later to its progression, transformation, and eventual liberation.

The Initial Path Toward Self–Awareness: Rising Readership and Literacy

While several popular novels of the late 18th and early 19th century either inadvertently or purposefully ignored the more sordid aspects of the Regency–most notably, Jane Austen's portrayals of late Georgian life as flawed yet inherently beautiful and romantic definitively influenced a Victorian trend to "cast her as representative of English and Englishness … absorbed into the Victorian cultural profile,"[61] a model of ideal piety, domestic goodness, and virtue, as Cheryl Wilson states–a collectively negative contemplation of the period within subsequent Victorian literature nevertheless emerged in the form of satire, such as Thomas Carlyle's critique of the materialistic, spiritually bereft early 19th century dandy in *Sartor Resartus*; Benjamin Disraeli's criticism of the glaring divide between "two nations, the rich and the poor" in *Sybil*; and Thackeray's shallow–minded, true–to–life characters in *Vanity Fair*, as well as within general fiction that was much more morally instructional in form. Perhaps most obviously, Charles Dickens' novels consistently exhibited "the previous decay of the Regency," while simultaneously drawing attention to the numerous inherited social ills that continued to plague Victorian civilization; the result, as Altick states, demonstrates a new turn away from the silver–fork, oftentimes realism–oblivious literature of the more recent past, in favor of "novels of social protest, few in number but large in influence," all of which juxtaposed the "insolent luxury of the Regency … with the squalor and misery generated by new industrialism."[62] Amidst the novelists who engaged in social activism through their works, initially humorous caricatures

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[61] Agnieszka Golda-Derejczyk, "How to Travel in Time: Retro-Victorian Cinema." *Multicultural Dilemmas: Identity, Difference, Otherness* (Peter Lang, 2008), 112.
[62] Herbert Grabes, *The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* (De Gruyter, 1985), 164.

eventually gave way to plots that functioned as direct condemnations of governmental statutes. Dickens' works exemplify such a trajectory: while his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, illustrates the nature of social degradation on account of personal deficiencies coupled with larger–scale political corruption in the form of comical caricatures, *Oliver Twist*, written several years later, is a forceful attack on the oft–overlooked failures of early Victorian society at large: its hypocritical institutions, its discriminatory laws, and the morally bankrupt individuals it empowered. While Dickens was not the first author to expose the reading public to what true impoverishment entailed within the lower classes in England, he was, as Andrzej Diniejko suggests, "much more successful than his predecessors in exposing the ills of the industrial society including class division, poverty, bad sanitation, privilege and meritocracy and the experience of the metropolis. … In common with many nineteenth–century authors, Dickens used the novel as a repository of social conscience."[63] Thus, as the gulf between the upper and lower classes continued to widen, so did the denunciation of social stratification and the systematic imposition of regulations that encouraged and enabled it. Incidentally, during this time of extended authorial commentary, readership within the general population, across all classes, was rapidly increasing. Altick cites the convergence of several circumstances as contributors to this literacy upswing in the latter half of the century:

> The class structure and the occupational and geographical distribution of the people underwent alterations which affected the availability of reading matter, educational opportunities, the conditions under which reading could be done, and the popular attitude toward print. The development of the mass reading public, in fact, was completely dependent upon the progress of the social revolution.[64]

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[63] Andrzej Diniejko, *The Condition of England: Debate in English Fiction* (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2008), 16.

[64] Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Ohio State University Press, 1998), 81.

The inverse of this would prove to be equally significant: the genesis of social change was

further prompted, in large part, when the middle class–which included shopkeepers, merchants,

clerks, and other skilled workers–first began to experience increased prosperity, and thereby

greater access to reading materials. The ability and ease in purchasing more widely available,

inexpensive magazines and books became an even more common form of leisure for individuals

and families alike. Additionally, the serialization of novels within periodicals on a sequential

basis kept the growing reservoir of readers interested and anticipative of succeeding issues, and

as Altick observes, "Perhaps no other single element in the evolving pattern of Victorian life was

so responsible for the spread of reading."[65] Most importantly, the developing working–class

readership largely consisted of skilled workers who, despite minimal formal education, were able

to maintain and increase their literacy by consuming reading materials–which, early on, mainly

comprised of religious writings, biblical lectures, or so–called "instructional" magazines–that

were specifically directed toward them as a new audience. Inevitably, the greater establishment

of literacy led to a higher demand for formal, structured schooling in otherwise overlooked rural

areas. Following the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832 there were several attempts in

Parliament to address the issue of popular education across the lower classes; these endeavors

were restricted in support of "agricultural interests who were anxious to preserve their supply of

cheap field labor."[66] Authorized aid and provisions for rural education in impoverished regions

finally became mandatory with the implementation of the Forster Act in 1870, and afterwards,

there was heightened interest in reading among unskilled laborers residing in the countryside. In

the decades that followed, the self–educated reader became "peculiarly a product of the age,"

with a concentration on moving beyond the religious literature so heavily emphasized in

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[65] Ibid., 89.
[66] Ibid., 144.

institutionalized schooling to a wider range of secular works; the youth of this time lamented in

their own writings that such "good reading material was hard to come by."[67] However, in the

ensuing years, this, too, would change: as the cost of manufacturing began to lessen, book prices

fell sharply, and a typical working–class reader now had a comfortable range of options from

which to choose–from "the books of Huxley, Haeckel, Darwin, Newman, and Carlyle," to

classical standbys such as Pope, Spenser, and Milton, to autobiographical accounts, in addition to

other non–fictional narratives on international travel, war, and European history. The resulting

climb in literacy rates was steady; before the passage of the Education Act of 1870, the literacy

rate had risen to 69% for men and 55% for women in 1851, and the following decades

demonstrated a steady upswing thereafter. By 1881, the learning gap between the genders was

closing, with literacy at 87% for men, and 82% for women.[68]

Some of the greatest Victorian intellectuals of the day, now also accessible to these

masses–namely Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Henry Newman–supported the notion that

education for all, whether within a formal setting or self–directed and with the furthering of

general literacy at its imperative center, was a requirement for the overall progression of society.

Likewise, while the renowned stylist and critic Walter Pater was averse to any educational

system that would deliberately seek to conform an individual to the collective will of the

surrounding culture, he nonetheless argued that independence in learning the centrifugal virtues

embodied within disciplines such as religion and philosophy would, in turn, lead to "the

development of the individual in that which is most peculiar and individual in him."[69] Carlyle

was vocal in his support of accessibility for the common reader, lamenting that "Books are

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[67] Ibid., 156.

[68] James Eli Adams, *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era, Volume 2* (Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), 379.

[69] Walter H. Pater, "The Marbles of Ægina." *The Fortnightly, Volume 27—Volume 33* (Chapman & Hall, 1880), 540.

written by martyr–men, not for rich men alone but for all men. […] there is no place on the civilised earth so ill supplied with materials for reading, for those who are not rich. … Positively it is a kind of disgrace to us."[70] Carlyle's unprecedented influence as a sage extended from his high profile among his contemporaries, to the middle classes, and beyond the literary world; George Eliot later recalled, while reviewing a selection of his works, that

> There is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived. The character of his influence is best seen in the fact that many of the men who have the least agreement with his opinions are those to whom the reading of Sartor Resartus was an epoch in the history of their minds.[71]

Newman declared that the pursuit of knowledge, under the guidance of morality, was obligatory for its own sake; classical texts and disciplines were elements of an interdependent "liberal education," which "viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence."[72] Matthew Arnold, in his visionary portrait of a desired utopian society, proclaimed the essence of academic endeavors as integral to the achievement of "sweetness and light," the ultimate goal of an ideal, humanistic culture, one that continually advances the unrelenting quest for near–perfection: "...I say, culture is considered not merely as the endeavour to see and learn this, but as the endeavour, also, to make it prevail, the moral, social, and beneficent character of culture becomes manifest. The mere endeavour to see and learn it for our own personal satisfaction is indeed a commencement for

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[70] Thomas Carlyle, *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle, Volume 1* (J. Lane, 1904), 199.
[71] J.W. Cross, *The Writings of George Eliot: Essays and Uncollected Papers* (Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1909), 311.
[72] Ian Ker, *The Achievement of John Henry Newman* (A&C Black, 2001), 8.

making it prevail."[73] Like John Newman before him, Arnold viewed the potential of literature

specifically in terms of its capacity as a moral force, one embedded in instructional theology, for

a society that was now permanently leaning toward the greater possibilities that undoubtedly

existed behind advancing scientific inquiry.

While there was vocal opposition to the idea of change brought about by industrialization

and social reforms–the earlier "March of Intellect" debates, between those who practiced and

advocated for traditional "polite learning," versus those who were promoting the necessity of

scientific applied knowledge, chronicles the beginnings of such tensions–the steady rise in

education and literacy amidst the proletariat was welcomed by many from the higher echelons of

Victorian society as yet another method of control:

> During the high tide of Victorian optimism in the fifties and sixties, glorifiers of British
> progress pointed to the gains for which [they deemed] education was responsible: the
> decline in brutality, coarseness, and drunkenness among the masses; the increase in
> church attendance; … the social ends for which they had been founded had largely been
> achieved. Not only had popular manners improved, but British productivity had never
> been higher, and, best of all, the Chartist fiasco of 1948 had marked the virtual end of the
> revolutionary threat.[74]

Schlossberg further notes that the spread of education and literacy throughout rural areas was

also viewed by many from the upper classes as a means to inculcate among the masses "the

moral and religious principles that animated the members of the society."[75] The Taunton

Commission, established as a vehicle to examine the application and effectiveness of

governmentally–imposed school standards in the 1870s, at one point alluded to these outcomes

[73] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Smith, Elder & Company, 1869), 11.
[74] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 155.
[75] Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Ohio State University Press, 2000), 204.

in a meticulous report: "The true purpose of teaching English literature is not to find material with which to teach English grammar, but to kindle a living interest in the learner's mind, to make him feel the force and beauty of which language is capable, to refine and elevate his taste."[76]

In the upper–class realm, the perception of a "revolutionary threat" from an increasingly educated middle and working classes became more widespread. It epitomized what English author, literary critic, and philosopher William Hazlitt described as

> the horror most conservatives felt at the spread of the reading habit into, and even beneath, the lower reaches of the middle class. The fear of demagogue–inspired rebellion was uppermost in their minds when, having failed to check the growing appetite for reading, they attempted to control what the new public should read–turning popular elementary education into a go–cart of corruption, servility, superstition, and tyranny.[77]

This reflects an unspoken implication of the most considerable advantage for the newly literate working class, ensconced within the nobility's semi–hidden, largely subconscious fears: a newfound awareness that literacy accorded the fringes of the middle class, as they perused and pondered the very same texts that had previously only been available to the affluent. Development of self–awareness and autonomy of thought within oppressed groups implicitly threatened an already faltering status quo, with the looming possibility that eventually, succeeding generations would seek to "overthrow older dogmas of accepted truths."[78] Theories conceptualizing the act of reading itself as an impetus that could radically alter an individual's mindset were actually first suggested over a century prior, coinciding with Samuel Johnson's contention in his bi–weekly periodical, *The Rambler*, that since fiction of the day had begun to

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[76] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 183.
[77] Qtd. in Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 367.
[78] Rachel K. Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and the Prose of Modern Aesthetics* (University of California, Berkeley, 2004), 58.

represent more of a move away from depictions of the fantastic and implausible in favor of

analyses of the concrete and rational, one's sense of reason could perhaps undergo a comparable

cognitive shift:

> The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly
> delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily
> happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be
> found in conversing with mankind. […] For this reason these familiar histories may
> perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey
> the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions. But if
> the power of example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of
> violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be
> taken that, when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited;
> and that which is likely to operate so strongly, should not be mischievous or uncertain in
> its effects.[79]

In these reflections, Johnson accentuates what numerous Victorian academics and their self–

appointed committees, such as the Taunton Commission, would also reiterate in

acknowledgement of the most formidable power that literature, particularly realistic fiction,

ultimately represents: subtle, natural expressions of life that are infinitely more instructive,

relevant, and relatable than the monochrome abstractness of complex theological discourses or

discursive musings on morality and other virtues. Furthermore, since Victorians–similar to those

before them, even with their severely limited readership–found reading to be an enjoyable form

of entertainment, an invested and favorable reception to characters and narratives guaranteed a

psychological absorption, of sorts. Reinvisioned experiences and could shape new perspectives

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[79] Samuel Johnson, "The Necessity of Characters Morally Good." *The Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume 4*
(London: Strahan & Preston, 1806), 23. Johnson published *The Rambler* from 1750 to 1752, penning a total of 208
concise articles; topics subjectively discussed ranged from reflections on religion and morality to contemplations on
the direction of politics and society. In this particular piece, part of a larger feature titled "The New Realistic
Novel," Johnson advocates "realistic" fiction as a form of didacticism that reinforces the values of virtue.

on the circumstances surrounding one's own life, leading to new lessons, insights, thoughts, and actions. The historical context of increasing readership in Victorian Britain thus clearly reveals one of the most critical aspects of the society's changing psyche. With the sustained and unconstrained results of the "common" Victorian's new ability to read came previously impalpable choices: individual initiative, coupled with the ability to more proactively critically think, analyze, infer, and deduct for oneself.

An Accelerating Crisis of Faith: Religion, Science, and Self–Identity

While initial Victorian disassociation from the dissoluteness of the Regency provoked the concerted turn toward a more exacting, demanding system of morality and virtue, it was the paradoxical combination of continued stratification of society, industrial and economic advancements, and rampant disenfranchisement that allowed many to both facilitate and resist this system's dissimulation and duplicity. The brand of Evangelical pietism which came to prevail over even the most seemingly worldly aspects of Victorian society was primarily focused on the ideal way one must live, in constant anticipation of the eternal hereafter. Biblical tenets were interpreted literally, taken as a life manual; earned salvation was the centripetal goal of all decisions and actions; and the impression of sin and sinfulness as inherent to human existence was always at the fore of ecclesiastical instruction. What began as an uprising against late 18th century Anglican "spiritual somnolence and emotional chill … which viewed faith as a matter of the head rather than the heart" soon morphed into fervent obsession with "the eternal microscope which searched for every moral blemish and reported every motion of the soul."[80] Reversal of the previous era's slide toward religious indifference was as extreme as it was swift, as Altick

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[80] Altick, *Victorian People*, 166.

describes: "...many people renounced those formerly fashionable attitudes and fled back to something like fundamental religion."[81] The movement also sought to curtail other emergent factions–particularly the Oxford Movement, which promoted a consolidated Anglican identity infused with Tractarian philosophies based upon the inclusion of classical liturgical traditions, including those from Catholicism; and the ever–growing Methodist movement, which greatly appealed to the working class–and by the middle of the 19th century, the moral tone of English culture had been completely permeated with a "fierce energy … [that] carried over into the buoyant national spirit."[82] The Benthamite principles of "utility," further popularized and expounded upon by John Stuart Mill in his 1863 essay, "Utilitarianism," offered a corroboration with Evangelical ideology, despite its seemingly contradictory verbatim philosophy ("By happiness is intended pleasure ... the fundamental principle of morality and the source of moral obligation"): "Utilitarianism ironically advocated a strict moral code of self–control. Hard work rather than play, thrift rather than extravagance, reason rather than passion, self–denial rather than self–gratification, all combine to produce happiness in the distant future."[83] The newly amplified sense of spiritual commitment and focus reinforced an attitude of confidence and belonging throughout society, one which also positively helped the pursuit of limited secular endeavors: "If it was possible for man to redeem his soul through his own exertions (namely, the exercise of faith), then what other goal could not be attained?"[84] The poor were constantly advised that the difficulties of their "earthly" physical labor would incur divine grace, build character, and prepare their souls for intervention in the afterlife. Diligent observance of certain

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[81] Ibid., 167.
[82] Ibid., 168. Many critics cite the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a visual manifestation of Victorian confidence, as well as the pro-institution and pro-modernization rhetoric of popular nationalist Member of Parliament Thomas Babington Macaulay, who optimistically diffused anxieties that arose from Britain's transformation into an industrial giant.
[83] Ibid., 141.
[84] Ibid., 168.

"judicial values," as Mill named them, including self–sacrifice, abstinence, and simplicity, was presented as a non–negotiable precursor to personal (and thus social) enhancement.

Together, Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism merged to form a normative system whereby the poor were further oppressed,[85] falsely judged as unwilling to follow moral and ethical rationales and thus responsible for their own difficult circumstances; meanwhile, the self–righteousness of the upper classes was tempered by what Carlyle called "diseased self–introspection," an almost fanatical urge to concentrate on the rectitude of one's own individual conscience and "honesty," despite the fact that the same religious dogma often directly challenged the reality of mercenary avariciousness that had become a hallmark of the times. Yet another contradiction imposed within this supposed cornerstone of self–conscience was reflected in the actual focus on social acceptance and conformity, as opposed to genuine individual betterment. The idea of "respectability," in particular, was held to encapsulate all moral virtues that constituted Evangelicalism at its core; however, as Altick explains, "it was not subject to private definition; its attributes represented a consensus."[86] Such attributes included temperance, humility, overall cleanliness, respect for and adherence to the rule of law, truthfulness, "proper" conduct in all affairs personal and professional, and above all, a reverence for chastity. The forced aim of this reformation of manners, as Altick suggests, was twofold: "...to content one's mind and, equally important, to invite the approbation of others. It was like living in a state of grace on earth." The façade held these unyielding virtues to be appreciated with complete sanctity; seriousness in one's demeanor and character was viewed as conducive to and befitting of a moral existence, and even the infrequently tolerated, non–conformist "odd character" or

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[85] Upper class Victorians, in particular, notoriously manipulated theological dictates in repeated (and initially successful) attempts to control everything concerning the poor: their social roles, their access to education, their political involvement, and their economic status. Dickens and Trollope both ridiculed and satirized these double standards.
[86] Ibid., 175.

"eccentric" was expected to abide by them. Inevitably, the extreme inflexibility of these codes of conduct not only rendered lifelong hardships to those beholden to them, but also unavoidably triggered eventual negation in practice: "Carried too far, a virtue could easily become a vice."[87] The threat of social disapproval and its stigmatic effects–collective scorn, abandonment, rejection, vilification, banishment–was a permanent fear in this culture of vicissitudes, and it grossly restricted otherwise natural humanitarian inclinations and impulses in the form of censorship, suppression, and avoidance. Religion was at the nucleus of every single bedrock that produced institutionalized Victorianism: the Church and its supremacy, the draw and scope of education, demarcation of all etiquette surrounding courtship and marriage, and, expressly in reference to women, the requisite standards by which to bear and raise children, coupled with a personal criterion of decorous conduct, all rooted foremost in the preservation of "sexual purity" and subservience to males. The resulting inescapable pressure endured by these "mere mortals,"[88] as critic Carol Bauer terms them, was unrivaled by any predecessors and became an extended study, in the following century, of the lengths and limits of feminine endurance under compliance with patriarchal social ethos.

The Victorian Crisis of Faith

In spite of the draconian social order this Evangelical credo established, the system was still constantly challenged and questioned by critics, academics, and novelists–even at the risk of public repercussions, including the threat of formal censure. Donald Davie, in his analysis of the active consonance between audience and text, contends that the most enduring Victorian critical

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[87] Ibid., 175-76. Perhaps the most pertinent literal incarnation of the virtue-to-vice continuum is the Fallen Woman, a common staple of Victorian fiction that was reflective of a painfully harsh social reality.

[88] Carol Bauer, "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors." *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism* (Elsevier, 2013), 166.

literature functioned "as a protest against the stifling effects of the Evangelical code upon the intellectual life and the comeliness of personal and social existence."[89] Religious consciousness, most often in the form of criticizing the moral code, exposing contradictions between commandments and practices, or decrying inherent social sanctimony, was threaded across every popular novel of the time. In addition to Dickens' revelatory depictions of moral insincerities and social failures, the numerous other plots that sought to address questions on faith include Emily Brontë's portraits of characters suspended between polarizing moments of frenzied religiosity and vengeful violence (the brutal Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*); her sister Charlotte's portrayal of a young woman's navigation through her own spiritual conflicts and practical dilemmas (*Jane Eyre*); the irreconcilability of George Eliot's rebellious, highly intelligent, emotional, spiritually ambivalent heroine (Maggie Tulliver, *The Mill on The Floss*); and at the end of the era, Thomas Hardy's unconstrained indictment, in *Jude the Obscure*, of every institution Victorians held dear: the church, marriage, and education.[90] Because the typical middle–class family was inundated with Biblical literature in their daily lives–prayers, devotionals, and scriptures were read every day–no allusion was inscrutable, and every representation of moralistic hesitation, no matter how subtle, was deeply understood. There was resonance between readership and literature to a much greater extent than ever before, and as Altick comments, this heightened reception "enabled Victorian writers to communicate, in readily understandable and persuasive terms, with a susceptible audience many times larger than a select Augustan one."[91]

  The fictional portrayals of dissent and doubt were not solely products of authorial

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[89] Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (Routledge, 2013), 58.
[90] The ferocity of virulent criticism that Hardy faced upon the publication of *Jude* in 1895 was so intense that he swore to never again write another novel. The character of Jude Fawley became Hardy's sacrificial anti-hero, illuminating the degeneration of the era's culture at every turn.
[91] Altick, *Victorian People*, 192.

desires to convey social criticism, and the investigative turn to science and its potential was not merely a curious academic study of the unknown: they both also effectively underlined the real–time, escalating crisis of faith that had been slowly materializing for several decades. The resurfacing of ritualized religious practice led to more of an inclination toward reaffirming the historical value of the Church, rather than an urgently necessary focus on its immediate future, one which would very quickly be tested by "the coming winds of intellectual challenge."[92] By the mid–1800s, the majority of the populace was, in the summation of Alan Rauch, "socialized and assimilated by a culture, investigating popular and canonical fiction, early encyclopedias, and other popular efforts at mass education and knowledge dissemination."[93] The new wave of intellectual stimulation, coupled with the ongoing evolution of industry and dialogue regarding "useful knowledge," soon led to a German–influenced reinterpretation of Biblical scholarship in the form of "high" criticism, which was based on situating the Old Testament and its authenticity within historical contexts, as opposed to the linguistic and textual analyses that had dominated previously.

With novels and critical writings alike questioning the role of oft–changed, antiquated religious doctrine in establishing current social praxis, a new undercurrent of vulnerability was becoming more apparent. The sense of uncertainty that had initially flickered with the printing, thirty years prior, of Charles Lyell's geological findings–theories on the extended chronology of geographical changes and processes, which notably did not coincide with biblical accounts of creation–was now exploded with the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, followed by *The Descent of Man* in 1871. Science–based accounts of evolution and natural selection as central to human existence were impossible to reconcile with previously

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[92] Ibid., 219.
[93] Alan Rauch, "The Dissemination of Knowledge in the Early Nineteenth Century." *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and The March of Intellect* (Duke University Press, 2001), 22.

unquestioned literal invocations of Genesis, and the further insinuations–originating from a realization that Biblical doctrine was perhaps not indisputable, after all–were deeply troubling for the Church. The Rev. Gavin Carlyle (a namesake of Thomas Carlyle and the nephew of one of his closest friends), in his alarmist 1878 volume, *The Battle of Unbelief*, laconically synopsized the paradoxical sentiments thus: "The minds of men are everywhere agitated at present by religious questions." A subsequent book review published in *The Rainbow*, a monthly journal with commentary on current Christian literature, celebrated the author's "praiseworthy effort to do battle for what he deems truth, against scientific materialism and religious skepticism. [...] He uses some well–directed arguments in favour of Christianity."[94] The lines were clearly drawn, and three distinct general social responses to this Crisis of Faith soon emerged: at one end of the spectrum was welcoming acceptance, particularly among those who perceived the Bible as a philosophical rather than literal entity; at the other, immediate hostility, chiefly among conservative clergy such as the Rev. Carlyle, who viewed such inquiries as an attack on orthodoxy; and in between these two extremes, there were those who attempted to cautiously merge some scientific tenets in harmony with Biblical narratives. The varied spectrum of this confusion also led to some of the most meaningful, poignant, and resonant meditations in the literature of the time, pieces that would come to represent the seminal canon of this defining point in the Victorian era. Alfred Tennyson's antithetical evocation of "/Nature, red in tooth and claw/" in his prayerful "In Memoriam A.H.H.," as well as Matthew Arnold's suddenly retreating

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[94] Qtd. in *The Rainbow, A Magazine of Christian Literature, Volume 18* (Oxford University, 1881), 138. Faith-based magazines were one of the hugely popular products of a revitalized, more efficient printing press. *Good Words*, *Christian Observer*, *Christian Watchman*, *Protestant Magazine*, *Christian Witness*, *Christian's Penny Magazine*, and *The Champion of What is True and Right and for the Good of All* are just a few examples of such periodicals published between 1840 and 1855. Some were issued in multiple volumes throughout the year, while others were printed less frequently. These magazines typically combined selected reviews of current, theologically-inclined literary works along with more focused columns on the nature of a "good" Christian life. Additionally, with the success of the printing press, supplemental church papers and circulars soon came into wide distribution, further contributing to a rising social investment in religious texts.

"/Sea of Faith/" in "Dover Beach" both analogize the development of unsettling individual

internal conflicts in seeking to validate the steadfastness of personal faith against the

concreteness of science, and as such, they perfectly capture a pervasive sense of individual

isolation coupled with the intellectual struggles and doubts of the moment.[95]

The Crisis of Faith is also tellingly referred to as the "Crisis of Conscience." As every

social institution was built upon concordance with the fundamental precepts of Christianity, the

"sway of science" conundrum engendered an unprecedented degree of personal psychological

upheaval among those of faith, inescapably disturbed by "discrepancies between science and

revelation, and to explain away difficulties which had then perplexed, and now still perplex to a

great degree, the mind of the honest inquirer after truth," as one Victorian professor described

the situation in 1881.[96] The Church's relative neglect in adequately addressing the most radical

implications of Darwinian theory eventually drew the masses to seek alternative possibilities in

what would become the beginnings of an increasingly secular age. Biblical exegesis could no

longer function as a universal framework for comprehending all other aspects of life. The true

duality of Victorians' morality began to surface in the midst of this confusion: even though their

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[95] Lord Tennyson's deeply personal elegy, a requiem for his closest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, took seventeen years to complete. In his later reflections on *In Memoriam*, Tennyson explained that he had written clusters of lyrical verses together at different times during those intervening years. Each group of verses thus echoes a specific moment of feeling during what would become a protracted period of grief for Tennyson, punctuated by self-introspection and doubt reverberating between hope and despair. The poetic result is a contemplative lament that, in the midst of his own mourning, allowed Tennyson to address a range of delicate topics—namely the origins of life, the growing role of scientific inquiry, and the purpose and value of religious faith. This personal, microcosmic representation of greater society's general Crisis of Faith concludes with Tennyson's reaffirmation of God's presence and the necessity, then more than ever, of a return to religion within this new landscape of increased scientific questioning. Matthew Arnold's melancholic *Dover Beach*, alternately, is much less optimistic. The retreating "Sea of Faith" that Arnold describes, once full and bright but now receding and ebbing from the shore to reveal the "naked shingles of the world" underneath, illustrates his profound sadness on account of the nation's continued turn away from its foundationally religious core. As with Tennyson, Arnold's ruminations are dually personal as well as a general address, in direct reference to society as a whole. Both poets illustrate the varying levels of uncertainty and skepticism spreading across the country, insecurities that would only rise in the coming decades.
[96] W. Forsyth qtd. in *Faith and Thought, Volume 14* (Victoria Institute, 1881), 52. *The Philosophical Society of Great Britain*, also known as *The Victoria Institute*, regularly published a "journal of transactions" that contained detailed minutes of their meetings, summaries of conferences, and copies of prepared lectures; discourse on the preservation of religion and morality was pivotal to these gatherings.

collective identity had previously been reinvented by an alignment with a type of piety that

focused on repression, rejection, and negation, they had also been unconsciously–and now,

subconsciously, on the initial path toward individual self–awareness–intrigued and compelled by

laic ideas of self–regulation and self–sufficiency that scientific reasoning had instigated, and as

Badham posits, "the rise of an autonomous ethic"[97] from within this irrevocable social shift was

a critical result. According to George Levine, this multifaceted reaction also provoked an

increased intellectual plurality which, in turn, led to a reconfiguration of historical portrayals of

realism in literature:

> ....the Romantic poets, and the philosophical radicals; Carlyle and Newman
> attempting to define their faiths; Charles Lyell telling it that the world revels 'no
> vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end,' the Higher Criticism of the Bible
> from Germany; Hume, Kant, Goethe, Comte, and Spencer, with their varying
> systems or antisystems; non–Euclidean geometry and a new anthropology made
> possible by a morally dubious imperialism; John Stuart Mill urging liberty and
> women's equality; Darwin, Huxley, and the agnostics; Tennyson struggling to
> reimagine faith; Browning, Arnold, Swinburne, Pater…[...] As secular kinds of
> knowledge such as empirical science, history, and anthropology grew increasingly
> powerful and competed with older spiritual modes, realist fiction self–consciously
> took part in the secularization movement directed against the falsehoods of earlier
> imaginations of reality.[98]

Since numerous authors of this period utilized fiction as a vehicle for honest criticism, there was

also a more pronounced recognition among writers that the process of narration had its

limitations; maintaining the integrity of depicting reality through fiction, then, meant a

continuously modified understanding of, and experimentation with, illustrating the very same

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[97] Paul Badham, *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology* (University of Wales Press, 1998), 20.
[98] George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), 20.

social conventions that were now dynamically eroding, reshaping, and reinventing previously accepted Truths within this transient yet formative fin de siècle.

Dissonance as a Transitional Catalyst: The Fin De Siècle

The posteriori responses of dissonance reduction, as postulated by Festinger, involve the negative nurturance of connate suppression and self–denial, among other impulses; an application of dissonance theory within the formative atmosphere of the fin de siècle reveals late Victorian fiction to be a microcosmic rendition of the difficult opposition between appreciation for tradition and a renewed desire for modernization. The previous tendency toward limiting feelings of dissonance was scarcely disguised as a precursor throughout the mid–19th century, primarily in the form of classism: the extended argument justifying poverty and the misfortune of the poor as a result of "divine arrangement," in contradiction with notions of Evangelical charity and empathy; the constant endeavors of the middle class to rival the elite, with the claim that such determination would positively encourage individual prosperity, in spite of the continued solemn declarations that self–denial, discipline, and humility were their coveted lifestyle ideals; the feeble, false doctrinal explanations with regard to the various persistent double standards that avowed the superiority of men over women, anchored in the widely accepted Victorian impression of females as "nonsexual" beings; and the general, pervasive measures taken to conceal rampant hypocrisies in society defined by an equally effusive, counterintuitively obsessive atmosphere of prudery. The Queen herself was a contrary figure: as a woman with an ideal marriage and many children, she embodied the quintessential model of wifehood and maternity, perpetuating the image of domestic piety replete with its "Angel in The House"

narrative; but as sovereign, she additionally occupied "multiple and conflicting positions on the scales of femininity and political power … the masculine attributes of military power and the authority of the state,"[99] unequivocally governing over an era that was overwhelmingly dominated, controlled, and dictated by powerful men–men who were, in turn, obliged to reason that their Queen had simply been blessed with "a wonderful and mysterious duty which had been imposed upon her by Divine Providence,"[100] regardless of the fact that she was also simultaneously glorified as the epitome of Victorian Womanhood.

As Victoria's reign drew to a close, Britain approached at its zenith economically, but its status as a long–term imperial center of the world was left increasingly in doubt. Nicholas Daly suggests that uncomfortable forms of emergent self–consciousness concurrently became more apparent throughout society as a result: The realization that other European countries, in addition to the U.S., could soon surpass Britain as the world's chief source of industry, innovation, and progress was coupled with a greater acknowledgement that the nation's vast imperial presence could also warrant it more susceptible to unrest and invasion.[101] Self–doubt had begun to overwhelm self–assurance, with previous national confidence consequently dissipating as society moved in the direction of an inwardly anxious turn. No longer beholden to all–encompassing religious sentiments as were their mid–century predecessors, the vestiges of resistance and opposition morphed into resilient campaigning and the initiation of specific movements. There were organized strikes in the late 1880s to protest unfair working conditions; the Labour Party emerged in the following decade, giving a direct political platform to the working class for the very first time; and, perhaps most significantly, there was an accelerating cultural shift that

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[99] Elizabeth Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (Bloomsbury, 2014), 34.
[100] Viscount Esher, qtd. in *The Living Age, Volume 261* (Boston, 1909), 131. Most of the domineering men who surrounded Victoria nonetheless held genuine affection for her on account of their deferential regard for the "Divine Providence" that they resolutely believed had elevated her to the Queendom. Benjamin Disraeli even famously referred to the Queen as "the Faery," suggesting she inspired an atmosphere of almost magical reverence.
[101] Nicholas Daly, "Places: Britain." From *The Fin de Siècle World* (Routledge, 2014), 117-130.

encouraged experimentation and originality in both private and public realms.

Thus, the multiple evolving currents that marked the fin de siècle of this period–by now defined by the culmination of a greater aspiration toward individuality, the intellectual tensions provoked by dispute and impassioned debate on numerous topics, along with the sense that the "old order" was evanescing in favor of a potentially radical transition–is reflected in literature and art that "challenged the mores and formal conventions of high Victorian ideals,"[102] giving way to an entirely new set of moral, political, and social concerns.

Henry James: Psychological Realism, in Context

Interwoven throughout his copious private notebooks (which would later comprise a majority of the evincive *Prefaces*) and critical essays, Henry James meticulously outlined not only a distinct system of realist narration, but also his own evolving awareness of the process itself and how his cognition as a writer molded each "picture of character," upon which all other intricacies of novelistic patternation is based.[103] The heart of this dynamic, situated alongside a historical Victorian endpoint when "the era of discussion would appear to have been, to a certain extent, open," represents an "inward turn" within the novel, with character study at its uninhibited, natural center, as James further argues in The Art of Fiction: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is a picture or a novel that is not of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it?" The author, as creative artist, must not be criticized on account of non–adherence to standardized dictates of form; instead, the writer's purpose should be to simply "make it [the story] interesting,"

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[102] Ruth Livesey, "Fin de Siècle." From *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 121-26.
[103] James, *The Art of Fiction*.

achievable by merely narrating "a personal, direct impression of life," which is, in turn, based on real experiences. All other aspects of a "successful" novel–plot, situations, settings, circumstances, dialogue, constructions of styles or structures–are inextricably bound to this "direct impression," the hallmark of authenticity. The ideal final product that is thereby represented by this holistic sum of the novel's parts, each of which "melt into each other at every breath … a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other living organism,"[104] is defined by an accurate representation of individual self–awareness within a character's center of consciousness. Such a portrayal is the culmination of genuine psychological realism, as opposed to a superficial primary concentration on affectations of moral didacticism or other potential quasi–aesthetic contrivances, and it is fundamental to both the creation and reception of fiction. Art that is accurately reflective of life and, according to James, "with a vivid sense of reality," will always manifest as a meaningful snapshot of the past, "with the tone of the historian"; become a candid and valuable exploration of "the actions of men"; and, most importantly, it will transcendently endure as a purposeful search for relevance in our world.

The "successful" novel's revelation of individual self–awareness emanates from the audience's admittance into the protagonist's center of consciousness. Circling back to the notion that "knowing" is only accomplished through experience, James explains that this atmosphere of interiority, now with its "air of reality," emerges firstly with the diminished presence of authorial dictation, in favor of objective detachment; "the role of the novelist in the house of fiction is," as Watt describes James's approach, "if not that of the peeper through keyholes, at least that of 'the watcher at the window.'"[105] The novel thus becomes an "agent in the world," as Collin Meissner states, with its audience as an actively engaged participant, acquiring "an image as an

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[104] Rawlings, *Palgrave Advances in Henry James Studies*, 15.
[105] Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 200.

opportunity better to understand not only themselves in the reflected image, but exactly how it is they understand at all."[106] In his notebooks, James often implies that as author, he regularly rescinded control over his narratives; in fact, at times, he contends that the characters themselves, internally directing the unfolding of their own plots, often effectively remove his authority altogether. In the Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, James describes an instance of this sudden loss of charge in explaining the evolving relationship between Owen and Fleda:

> I have, a little, to guard myself against the drawback of having in the course of the story determined on something that I had not intended–or had not expected–at the start. I had intended to make Fleda 'fall in love' with Owen, or. To express it *moins banalement*, to represent her as loving him. But I had not intended to represent a feeling of this kind on Owen's part. Now, however, I have done so; in my last little go at the thing (which I have been able to do so only interruptedly), it inevitably took that turn and I must accept the idea and work it out.[107]

Several critics, such as Merle Williams, claim that James's heterodiegetic narration of *Spoils* is marked by inconsistencies that do not coincide with his emphasis on the consciousness of realism–specifically the abrupt appearance of third–person form at critical moments, "at which we shall in time arrive, little as the reader may believe it," and the "contradictory impulses" that Fleda exhibits at times. This latter claim, however–occurrences that promote an aura of "rapidly spreading confusion"[108] that surrounds Fleda, in the words of Williams–actually indicate what William James assessed as an individual's natural state of discombobulation, which almost always provokes "undesirable emotional tendencies," and what Festinger refers to as simply "the

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[106] Collin Meissner, *Henry James and the Language of Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.
[107] It is important to note that James's perception of invasive authorial control is completely separate from his notion of the writer's "spiritual" presence in a text, which he outlined in "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905) as "the projected light of the individual strong temperament in fiction." Since the author is ideally writing from a position of experience, observation, or both, this spiritual presence would necessarily reveal "the nature of the man himself … in his work," thus providing another crucial dimension for our own understanding and analysis of the narrative itself.
[108] Merle A. Williams, *Henry James and the Philosophical Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155.

confusion between motives and motivational states,"[109] the basis of incipient psychological discord.

David McWhirter states that there were several different prevailing models of psychological thought that permeated both popular and professional culture, in England as well as across the Atlantic, during James's lifetime. Many were temporarily popular – pseudoscientific ideas such as hypnotic induction, phrenology, philosophical associationism, and physiognomy. In her study of British cultural politics of the mid–19th century, Marie–Luise Kohlke notes that these systems had developed during the Victorian era with the aim of "opening up mind and behaviour to public scrutiny, self–evaluation, and redemption."[110] Furthermore, in his discussion on the cross between 19th century literary conventions and the parameters of psychology, Frederico Pereira observes, "The dire consequences of degeneracy theory popular in fin de siècle England could only have been reinforced by the perceived vulnerability of the divided brain … Advances in neurology fed into a general alarm about the state of British society."[111] In spite of this late Victorian "laboratory revolution,"[112] as McWhirter characterizes the movement, when many contemporary thinkers sought to redefine the discipline of psychology itself in terms of somatically based, applied scientific trials and experiments as opposed to putative theoretical inquiry, most still refused to altogether disclaim the formerly predominant notion of psychological study as a speculative, metaphysical philosophical examination regarding the intangible nature of the soul.

In parallel with Festinger's dissonance theory, the Jamesian character's evolving consciousness presents as a dual projection of both behaviorist–rationalist and Gestaltian–

[109] Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 254.
[110] Maria-Luise Kohlke, *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (Rodopi, 2011), 15.
[111] Frederico Pereira, *Eleventh International Conference on Literature and Psychology* (Instituto Superior de Psicología Aplicada, 1995), 22.
[112] David C. McWhirter, *Henry James in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 270.

empiricist epistemologies: the path toward self–awareness is reciprocally obstructed and driven by aggravating social and cultural factors, but it is also enabled by the individual mind's innate proclivity to engage in neurally–driven, complex forms of self–organization, incorporation, and reconciliation. Specific characters are James's case studies; Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate each embody the multivalence of psychological disturbances, which James, utilizing free indirect discourse, presents as "discoveries and productions, and, in some instances, disavowals."[113] Isabel, who began her coming–of–age as an intellectually ambitious, Emersonian–independent agent, is subsequently caught within an anguished cycle of dissonance reduction; Fleda, mindfully controlled by Victorian strains of morality, is willing but unable to fully overcome its confines; the "finely unconscious" Milly approaches her ultimate destiny, death, in an enlightened state as a culmination of her dissonance; and Kate, Milly's "acutely conscious" antithesis, is fortuitously liberated by her failed attempts at dissonance manipulation of those around her. Each character's eventual cognition of her own destiny is bound to a synchronous understanding of individual subjectivity, agency, and specific social presence at a historical point in time. From these characters' realist experiences, James repeats his ongoing dialectic on fiction, truth, and cognition. The novel is not merely a codified product to be evaluated and understood on account of its formalist conventions or marketable content; is it a heuristic entity that is ideally both socially pertinent and individually resonant, a substantial examination of the conjunctions between knowledge, experience, and reality. Whereas the outmoded Victorian modes of judgmental, preachy didacticism, discredited by James as an artistic violation in the Preface to *The Tragic Muse* as "processes, periods, intervals, stages, degrees, connexions," that

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[113] Ibid., 271.

are "named" and "unconvincingly stated … to the deep discredit of the writer,"[114] this

alternatively representational constitution of the novel exemplified by him–a narratology of

"showing" rather than "telling"–facilitates the reader, as Meissner suggests, in essentially uniting

"the internal dynamics of the text with the internal dynamics of the reader's conceptual

framework ... every James text becomes the reader's own in that the reader finds his or her own

consciousness undergoing as much an examination and reversal as do the fictional characters."[115]

Thus, as James was unequivocally against sweeping or formulaic generalizations of the human

experience and its influence on an individual's capacity to reason–those "neat," ideational

postulations mainly based on the "systems, paradigms, and intellectual orderliness, whether from

philosophy, science, or religion," that he denounced, as Linda Simon contends–he viewed so–

called intellectual "ideas" as merely degrading of one's true understanding of undisguised

reality. As the antithesis of perception, thought, and feeling, such "concepts," as he called them,

further "threaten to obscure awareness, forcing people to believe they knew what they saw or felt

before an experience had taken place."[116]

In his analysis on the origins of narrative realism, Ian Watt explores the radix of

individuality in the novel, and finds that the idea of "selfhood" is indelibly linked with the

emergence of the modern novel:

> In all ages, no doubt, and in all societies, some people have been 'individualists' in the
> sense that they were egocentric, unique or conspicuously independent of current opinions
> and habits; but the concept of individualism involves much more than this. It posits a
> whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence

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[114] "Showing," in James's summation, is to present a character, explain the context of her presence, and then allow self-revelation through her behavior, actions, and reactions; as the author disappears, we are given direct and dramatic access to her consciousness. The mode of "telling," on the other hand, is once removed and deficient in comparison: there is merely access to the author's own subjectivity (and oftentimes, an inevitable inclination toward didacticism) as he describes and analyzes the character's thoughts and actions.

[115] Meissner, *Henry James and the Language of Experience*, 31.

[116] Linda Simon, "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered: William James's Feeling of 'If.'" *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, 41.

both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of

thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition'–a force that is always social, not

individual.[117]

The complications of this same "individuality" in James's character portraits also accentuate a

newly discovered psychomachia of the post–Victorian self in general, one that is irrespective of

gender, class, or social standing, and which altogether represents a developing comprehension of

how the human mind positions itself as a volatile link to the external world. In this manner,

James demonstrates that the nature of human psychological tendencies is a conflicting

combination of observable, classifiable actions, idealistic assumptions, and an innate drive to

preserve one's mind as a center of creativity, imagination, and perseverance. This categorization

further establishes how certain ideals were either operantly conditioned by the restrictions of

Victorianism, or gradually developed in resistance to that dynamic. In this way, the paradigm of

dissonance theory and James's structuralist analyses of human consciousness and motivation

merge at all significant points. Thus, tracing the role of cognitive dissonance across these

characters, within this critical transitive moment, not only draws necessary attention to the

dramatic friction between opposing modes of expectation, behavior and experience, but such a

chronicling also illustrates a binary understanding of human psychology "as a product of

classifiable and observable physical processes," along with idealist, self–preservational

dilemmas that "attempt to preserve the elusive and unquantifiable qualities of the mind as

creative force."[118] This creates a literary experience that renders each Jamesian narrative a

"vehicle of truth," generated via the interiority of personal consciousness, firstly documenting

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[117] Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 60.
[118] Ibid., 271.

and contemplating the past, and secondly, anticipating the real trauma of dissonance and

transformation in the immediate and distant future.

Chapter II

"Well, what will she do!" Isabel Archer, Jamesian revisions, and dissonance denial as a defense mechanism: *The Portrait of a Lady*

During the initial serial publication of *The Portrait of a Lady* from 1880 to 1881 in both *Macmillan's Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*,[119] Henry James wrote to his close friend, the author and critic William Dean Howells, in response to Howells' commentary on the heroine of the novel, Isabel Archer: "I will say I intended to make a young woman about whom there should be a great deal to tell & as to whom such telling should be interesting; & also that I think she is analysed once for all in the early part of the book & doesn't turn herself inside out quite so much afterwards."[120] In retrospect, this primary objective of "telling" the heroine's story would foreshadow James's growing dissatisfaction with his original development of Isabel's interiority; his desire for an even more nuanced emphasis on Isabel's self–cognition was the product of an increasingly focused interest in the inner dynamics of the human mind, a fascination further corroborated by James's personal correspondence toward the end of the century.[121] These dominant preoccupations during the intervening later years ultimately resulted in James's marked rewrite of *Portrait*; this was reissued in 1908 as a part of the comprehensive New York

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[119] The serializations in both *Macmillan's* and *The Atlantic* are available, as fully digitized originals, in the public domain.

[120] Henry James, *A Life in Letters*, ed. by Phillip Horne (New York: Penguin, 2001), 127. In addition to being one of his most loyal supporters in the literary world, Howells was also the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* during its serialization of *The Portrait of a Lady*. James's letter was in reply to Howells' fear that Isabel (in 1881) was unnecessarily overanalyzed throughout the novel; Howells' other major worry was that other characters, such as Henrietta Stackpole, seemed "overdrawn."

[121] In his letters, James often counseled friends and family to "live through the disasters of experience," as Leon Edel observes, while decrying the deterioration (of ideals, standards, and morals) within English society. Late in his life, with these contemplations at the forefront of his thoughts, he wrote to his beloved niece, Peggy, to discuss his appreciation for the complex over the ordinary — for life's often uncanny particularities, as opposed to its predictable commonalities — in spite of the greater potential for experiencing personal trauma: "I hate American simplicity. I glory in the piling up of complications of every sort. If I could pronounce the name of 'James' in any different and more elaborate way, I should be in favor of doing it." This "glory in the piling up of complications," as evidenced by his novelic alterations, is more wholly manifested in the mind of James's revised Isabel.

Edition, a multi–volume collection of his revised works. Since this modified version of the text quickly became the canonical incarnation of *Portrait* – the edition which general audiences had most common access to and the copy which subsequent early critics most often referenced in their own responses, analyses, and reviews of James's work – it is necessary to identify and examine the nature of the disparities between James's 1908 recasting and its original counterpart. Contemporary critical perspectives on the New York Edition underscore several differing opinions on the purpose and significance altogether of James's alterations of his major novels in general, and on *Portrait* in particular.

A decade–long project, the New York Edition revisions, coupled with a series of newly written introductory Prefaces,[122] reveal both James's sharpened meta–awareness of his stance as what John Pearson terms "a reading writer,"[123] as well as his own sense of ambivalent dissatisfaction with his previous works. We can conclude that the culmination of James's own sense of cognitive dissonance – compounded during his later years by his divergent views on both the decline of Victorian society, and a need for drastic reform – resulted in the revisions and Prefaces. On the whole, the endeavor represents obsessive self–recollection, the reordering of memory, and massive restructuring, both textually and in terms of his own cognition. One of James's primary objectives here was to extend his artistic control in a manner he had not considered before: as an explanatory guide to his revisions, the Prefaces would function as an inextricable, permanent referential frame for his audience. Together, they would ideally "guide" the reader toward a Jamesian mode of thought. In his study of the interconnections between

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[122] The New York Prefaces have been a source of intense debate, deliberation, analysis, and disagreement among critics since their publication. They are densely multifaceted: all at once attempting to instruct the reader on how to appreciate revised Jamesian texts while also implicitly encouraging disregard for the originals; they function as a vehicle of criticism and commendation of other authors, texts, and literary figures, both past and present; and together, they form the most comprehensive explication of his own thought process, theories, and individualized aesthetic, at the most complex point in his life as both an author and critic.
[123] John H. Pearson, *The Prefaces of Henry James: Framing the Modern Reader* (Penn State Press: 2010), 10.

author, text, and reader, Jonathan Freedman mentions the sometimes erratic nature of James's revision process: "For his earlier works like *The American* and *Daisy Miller*, James cut and pasted the original pages on larger sheets and filled the margins with ballooning alterations to almost every sentence."[124] Structurally, the revised texts are altered enough to be viewed as exclusive of their original counterparts, but at the same time, they will always remain bound to those from which they morphed. James dejectedly recognized this inescapable limitation; for all his attempts to step back in time and reassess the nature of contradictory experience as a now–seasoned "master," as Pearson observes, his objective – to literally rewrite his past mind, in essence, and to restructure it – proves futile, and he knows this. "We are condemned, in other words, whether we will or no, to abandon and outlive, to forget and disown and hand over to desolation, many vital or social performances," as he declares in his final Preface, to that of *The Golden Bowl*, "if only because the traces, records, connexions, the very memorials we would fain preserve, are practically impossible to rescue for that purpose from the general mixture."[125] With this, James acknowledges that his goal of controlling his readers' engagement with his texts, along with the passage of time and the changes time's progression embodies, is rendered impossible through mere revision and explication – indeed, it is ultimately an impossible task altogether. Late–era James, in essence, came to view his original novels as nonconsonant with his altered mindset; they reflected the irreversibility of a past that, in his retrospective opinion, had not been given an adequate evaluative depth.

> James's noble aesthetic purpose is threatened by the inclusive and often confusing general
> mixture that is the extraliterary world – the world of the unindoctrinated reader and of
> time, which will not be subjugated to and individual's aesthetic vision. He could neither

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Preface, *The Golden Bowl*, 1909.

abandon nor outlive his aesthetic vision; yet completion of the project would bring an end to his social literary performances and lead to authorial extinction of a very real kind.[126]

Beyond James's own obvious sense of dissonance, there continues, presently, a spirited debate on the overall magnitude of his revisions within *Portrait*, the core of which extends on two fundamentally divergent views regarding their overarching significance. Either they are unnaturally obstructive, having distorted the original nature of the characters, or, alternately, the changes ultimately enrich the text. Earlier Jamesian criticism, similarly, reflects a tendency to favor one view over the other. In 1944, F.O. Matthiesen, the foremost critic on James, outlined a case for the latter in his explanation of the revisions in his seminal volume, *The Major Phase*.[127] "My reason for singling out *The Portrait of a Lady* is that it is a much richer book than either of the two others," he states, arguing on the superiority of *Portrait* over both *Roderick Hudson* and *The American*. "*The Portrait of a Lady* is his first unquestioned masterpiece … James made these revisions at the plentitude of his powers, and they constituted a 're–seeing' of the problems of his craft. … By considering all the issues that the revisions raise, we may see it with renewed clarity." Matthiesen further emphasizes that "larger changes" within the text were "very few," and concludes that James's principal concerns by turn of the era primarily reflected a "more mature sense" of the dramatic. James's "re–seeing," in Matthiesen's sight, was opposed to a recasting of the original structure of 1881's *Portrait*, deflections from which "would be folly"; James instead sought to unearth already existing "buried secrets," as the author himself once wrote.[128] Matthiesen posits this reinvisionment as James's offering of a new sense of clarity, akin

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[126] Pearson, *Framing the Modern Reader*, 11.

[127] F.O. Matthiesen, "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle." From *Henry James: The Major Phase* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 152-186.

[128] In his 1907 Preface to the revised *Roderick Hudson*, James criticizes his previous works at length, describing the process of revision with an extended metaphor on the restlessness of an artist's unrelenting dissatisfaction (the same analogy from which Matthiesen derives the title of his essay): "I speak of the painter in general and of his relation to the old picture, the work of his hand, that has been lost to sight and that, when found again, is put back on the easel

to "the tiniest brush strokes" of a painter: "What must be kept constantly in mind, therefore, is the design of the canvas as a whole. If that is done, we may have the intimate profit of watching the artist at his easel and of gaining insight into his principles of composition."[129] The artist's analogy emerges most significantly, as Matthiesen argues, in James's shifting diction across both versions; 1881's "picturesque," for example, becomes 1908's "romantic" or "amused" in a number of moments, ranging from simple impressions of other main characters from Isabel's vantage point (Madame Merle's "picturesque" smile transforms to one that is "amused"), to Isabel mindfully ascribing a certain context to her perceptions of them (her first sense of Caspar Goodwood in 1881 focused on the fact that "he was not especially good looking," whereas in 1908 he became "romantically, rather obscurely handsome," while Lord Warburton morphs from "one of the most delectable persons" to the much more idealized "hero of romance.") The effects of these changes, Matthiesen asserts, culminate with late–era James's move toward a more clarified appropriation of dramatic language and imagery.

What Matthiesen does not examine, however, is how these altered and added textual elements surround and challenge Isabel's consciousness – elevating the levels of her unacknowledged internal dissonance, placing her on an unbridled path toward self–defeat – and

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for measure of what time and weather may, in the interval, have done to it. … The anxious artist has to wipe it over, in the first place, to see; he has to 'clean it up,' say, or varnish it anew, or at the least to place it in a light, for any right judgement of its aspect or its worth." The artist's ensuing uncertainties and subsequent drive to revise, James says, "yield a thrill … a strange charm" when he looks back upon his prior works and deems them in need of some sort "overhauling … with due care and with a bottle of varnish and a brush."

[129] While James drafted much of *The Portrait of a Lady* from his English home in Rye, near Sussex, he also wrote copiously while visiting Italy, namely in transit between Tuscany (particularly Florence) and Venice — hence the numerous and pervasive analogous references to painting and art throughout all volumes of the New York Edition. He opened the Preface of *Portrait* referring to its beginnings, "in Florence, during three months spent there in the spring of 1879." As evidenced by his Notebooks, James was bewitched by Europe — he had thoroughly traversed the continent as a child with his parents, and had been inspired by its beauty and cultural richness ever since — and had promptly "taken possession of it, inhaled it, appropriated it," as Michael Gorra observes. Because of this everlasting inherent influence, James's travels accord *Portrait* with a dialectical structure "that allows the fiction itself to suggest just when to pick up on certain issues in the writer's own life." James's own cognitive dissonance — embodied in the novel's overarching contrast of the representative contradictions between the Old and New Worlds, of the incompatible conflicts between the past, present, and future — is reflected in Isabel.

thereby contradict the idea that *Portrait's* revisions were chiefly for syntactical or structural elucidation. Their significance delves far beyond the textual surface of the novel, with a profound refocusing on the development of Isabel's cognitive dissonance. The "feelings" of 1881's Isabel are transformed into a definitive center–of–consciousness for her 1908 counterpart: the nature of her mind is no longer an atmospheric set of senses generated and informed by distinct reactions to precise external stimuli, but becomes, instead, a complicated cluster of analyses – both of herself and of those around her – that are assigned emotions or feelings only in the aftermath of an encounter, a moment, an experience, or a provocation. Revised Isabel's consciousness, therefore, is revealed as a singularly omniscient entity: it is the ultimate controller of her responses to other characters and situations, as opposed to a product of the impulsive sway that 1881 Isabel's self–awareness was systematically obedient to. In the end, the revisions trade the initial simplicities of the heroine's seemingly basic "fond[ness] of psychological problems" for an unmistakably more compounded "fond[ness], ever, of the question of character and quality, of sounding, as who should say, the deep personal mystery"[130] – the primary quest of Isabel's overly methodical, overly analytical, overly presumptuous mind, the errors of which function as the main determinants of her own internalized consciousness. It is in this manner that the even more deeply flawed, even more cognitively dissonant Isabel of 1908 gave James, as Matthiesen himself concludes, "one of his fullest and freshest expressions of inner reliance in the face of adversity."

Matthiesen's postulation that James had only exchanged "a single flake of pigment," in the form of words, "here and there," as the basis of his revisions – purely for a greater dramatic

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[130] This revised description underscores one of many examples of Isabel's sense of self-centered superiority, tempered by a childlike sweetness: she, foolishly yet amusingly, believes in herself as not only a great student of psychology, but also as an excellent arbiter of such internal disputes, while never realizing (until nearly the conclusion of the novel) that it is she who is most in need of instruction.

staging of the novel by way of more verbose, sharpened imagery – was met with both agreement

and dispute. Malcolm Cowley's counterargumentative response, published a year after

Matthiesen's essay, spoke of "two Henry Jameses,"[131] the most overt rebuttal of Matthiesen's

conclusion that the revisions absolutely did not alter nor diminish the original nature of the story

or its characters. Cowley frames his analysis within the posthumous establishment of James as a

polarizing figure, "with those who admire or at least concede the virtues of his early stories, but

hold that his later work shows a rootlessness, a snobbishness, an unreality that might well be

explained by his divorce from American life," in direct contrast to those admirers who

considered the main works of James's later phase to be the "high and frosty summits" of great

American fiction. The paradox resides beyond the opposing reception of James's work from both

the general audience and critics: Cowley refers to the author's evaluations of other celebrated

writers, such as Hawthorne[132], to illustrate his insistence that, more often than not, James was

laudatory of the very same characteristics – simple execution, "straightness" in narration,

succinct phrasing, and unadorned development – that he deliberately did not embody in his own

later–phase, major works:

> Mr. Matthiesen believes that James's revisions in the New York Edition were generally
> an improvement over his early style; but after reading the discussion carefully I am not so
> sure that I agree with him. Some of his retouches made the characters more vivid and
> others introduced effective figures of speech. There were many changes, however, that
> merely complicated the style. … In his revisions, James was proud of the way he handled
> the "he said–she said" problem. But why should it be a problem at all? Why not, like
> Hemingway, write the "he said" and "she said" whenever they are necessary for the
> sense, instead of looking for elegant variations? The later James was obsessed with

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[131] Malcolm Cowley, "The Two Henry Jameses." From *A Many-Windowed House: Collected Essays on American Writers and American Writing* (Southern Illinois University Press: 1970), 177-180.
[132] James's favorable analysis of Hawthorne's early style as "less conscious of itself" is in contradiction with what he ascribes to in the Preface of *Roderick Hudson* some twenty years later, but the analogy of the painter endures in both.

finding elegant variations: "she returned," "he just hung fire," "she gaily engaged," and it reminds one of reading a play with too many stage directions.[133] But the worst feature of James's later style is the inversions that are most noticeable in very short phrases. … To change that position arbitrarily ... is to violate the spirit of the language as shaped by all the living and dead millions who speak or who have spoken it. Not only is it a symbol of James's separation from the public; it directly expresses and, in a real sense, it is that separation.

Thus, for Cowley, James's revisions of *Portrait* are the product of "the bad results of exile and expatriation." His conclusion, though somewhat sympathetic – he determines that "the two Henry Jameses" are, in fact, "one Henry James who must be accepted in his strength and weakness" – is equally harsh, and decidedly overlooks James's own admission, also in his favorable review of Hawthorne's early work, that "it is almost always the case in a writer's later productions – there is a touch of mannerism."[134] The so–called "mannerisms" of linguistics and lexicon, however, are far removed from those of psychological semantics and the portrayal of dissonant consciousness – a crucial component of the revisions in *Portrait*, which Cowley does not address in his commentary.

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[133] Edith Wharton, who admired James greatly and became his close friend, ironically leveled the same complaint against James's later works, writing in her 1904 autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, that she had unintentionally offended him when sharing her thoughts on the late-period novels being suspended, in Wharton's view, within a stifling, stage-directed atmosphere; this was much to the detriment of characters and plots, issues which, in turn, threatened to overwhelm the otherwise obvious moral beauty of those works: "His stage was cleared like that of the in the good old days when no chair or table was introduced that was not relevant to the action (a good rule for the stage, but an unnecessary embarrassment to fiction). … He looked at me in surprise, and I saw at once that the surprise was painful, and wished I had not spoken. I had assumed that his system was a deliberate one carefully thought out, and had been genuinely anxious to hear his reasons. But after a pause of reflection he answered in a disturbed voice: 'My dear I didn't know I had!' and I saw that my question, instead of starting one of our absorbing literary discussions, had only turned his startled attention on a peculiarity of which he had been completely unconscious. This sensitiveness to criticism or comment of any sort had nothing to do with vanity; it was caused by the great artist's deep consciousness of his powers, combined with a bitter, a life-long disappointment at his lack of popular recognition."

[134] Henry James, "Hawthorne." From *English Men of Letters*, ed. by John Morley (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), 120.

Taking Matthiesen's premises further in a more favorable light, several prominent critics, including Sydney Krause[135] and Royal A. Gettmann[136], have argued that the 1908 changes throughout the New York Edition were, on the whole, more compositionally aesthetic in substance as opposed to a deliberate reworking of the original nature of certain characters; this summation applies to the scope of James's revisions across all of his major novels, but is perhaps most widely discussed in reference to *The Portrait of a Lady*. With regard to the character of Isabel, specifically, this is a view that Geoffrey Moore reiterates in his "Note On The Text" introduction of Penguin's 1984 reprinting of the revised *Portrait*, describing early James as a "craftsman" and later James as an "aesthetician": "In 1907 James undertook to revise a selected number of his novels and tales for the New York Edition. This was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 24 volumes, the entire project being completed in 1909. *The Portrait of a Lady* was published in the New York Edition in 1908, and it is this text which is printed here, so the reader may compare James the aesthetician of 1908 with James the craftsman of 1881."[137] Krause further elaborates on this idea, with emphasis on a twofold orientation of the revisions: James's first intention was to "refine and expand and comment upon the original ideas," which simultaneously enabled him to implement a second and more complex goal, one that had greater salience at this point in James's authorship – to intensify "the symbolic texture of his language" on the basis of thematic motivation. Krause subsequently directs his focus on the stylistics and

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[135] Sydney J. Krause, "James's Revisions of *The Portrait of a Lady*." *American Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Duke University Press: March 1958), 67-88.
[136] Royal A. Gettmann, "Henry James's Revision of *The American*." *American Literature*, Volume 16 (Duke University Press: 1944-45), 279-95.
[137] A more nuanced explanation of the differences between an "aesthetician" and a "craftsman" in this context enlightens further. If James was more given to craftsmanship in 1881, the implication follows that he was, at that time, chiefly concerned with ensuring the novel's exemplification — in theme, characters, and narrative development — of psychological realism. If, by 1906, he was more of an "aesthetician," the suggestion becomes that, by the end of his later phase, James's views on art's superiority over life (similar to the beliefs of Pater before him) had eclipsed any other concerns, while somewhat inadvertently obscuring his previous devotion to realism. The ends of both perspectives are fallacious and extreme.

diction of the revisions, designating these aspects as edifying but non–transformative, with "no

essential changes in the characters." Furthermore, the distinction of James as more of an

"aesthetician" in the midst of his later phase equates with his own thoughts on the revisions,

Krause implies, reflections the author shared with Howells in their correspondence; he was

adamant that the novels required "retouching" on account of "their original roughness ... So I

have retouched completely." With regard to the newly reprinted *Portrait*, specifically, he

declared a finished result of "excellent fruits," self–assuredly writing to Howells that "I have

hugely improved the book – & I mean not only for myself, but for the public: this is beyond

question."[138]

Two of the most obvious "improved" aspects of the New York Edition are its increased

frequencies of colloquialisms, as well as more candid descriptions of people and places alike,

with which James sought to naturalize basic interactions between characters. James did not,

however, sacrifice complexity of meaning and metaphorically layered implication. The Lord

Warburton of 1881, for example, assures Isabel of Lockleigh manor's "sanitary" appeal,

unintentionally evoking a sense of unwelcome clinical remoteness rather than welcoming upper–

class charm, while his 1908 analog deems the estate effortlessly "safe and right." The simplicity

of 1881 Isabel's reaction to Caspar Goodwood's sudden kiss is recounted in a single

metaphorical sentence – "His kiss was like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was

free" – but 1908 Isabel's much more extensive internal response to the same betrays a borderline

volatility.[139] Additionally, the absence of more informal dialogue in the original text is even

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[138] Horne, *A Life in Letters*, 127. Horne has also written the most authoritative, historically rich, contextually detailed volume on Jamesian revisions and the New York Edition, *Henry James and Revision* (Oxford University Press: 1990).
[139] In the New York Edition, Caspar's "white lightning" kiss is perceived by Isabel to be an act of possessive aggression rather than the "flash lightning" passion of 1881. Several critics have cited this revision as an example of James's changing perceptions of masculine identity, filtered via Isabel's subjectivity; others have referenced the altered moment as another example of 1908 Isabel's lack of impulsive, reactionary feeling in the presence of a "finer

more pronounced by the contractions that James instead preferred throughout the New York

Edition, in line with his evolved opinion, outlined in an 1898 essay in the periodical *Literature*,

on the acceptability of casual diction as part of a novel's structural form.[140] For James, as Krause

believes, the original serialization of *Portrait* in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Macmillan's* also

came to represent another limitation in terms of style – specifically what another critic, Michael

Gorra, deems a certain "physicality of language" that James apparently "could not summon in

1880–81."[141] To this end, Krause was highly critical of Cowley's insistence that the changes

altogether were "generally damaging" to James's original style, convoluting rather than

enhancing the text; but he was also skeptical of several elements underlying Matthiesen's

analyses, which, according to Krause, were dismissive of James's first round of revisions – those

he submitted in transition from the 1880–81 serialization to novel form, which other critics

contend were minor – and, additionally, although perceptive and

insightful with regard to James's concentration on enhanced imagery, did not move enough

beyond the figurative aspects of the revisions. On the other hand, like Matthiesen before him,

Krause decided there were "no changes in the themes or in the essential structure" of the novel

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consciousness." For James, the change of a single word after a twenty-year span of real time, as this instance and the majority of the revisions demonstrate, is never inconsequential or without premeditation.

[140] In his essay, "The Question of Opportunities," James wrote: "Homogeneous I call the huge American public, with a due sense of the variety of races and idioms that are more and more under contribution to build it up, for it is precisely in the great mill of the language, our predominant and triumphant English, taking so much, suffering perhaps even so much, in the process, but giving so much more, on the whole, than it has to 'put up' with, that the elements are ground into unity." This evolved stance on the welcome, eclectic "contributions" that unite the public through its "triumphant" language is far removed from twenty years prior, when James discussed, in a personal letter, his annoyance with the increasing frequency of "informal" language usage in society; this aversion was also apparent in his earlier stories: "What I meant to indicate is the (I think) incontestable fact that certain people in English society talk in an offhand, informal, irregular manner, and use a great many roughnesses and incredulities. It didn't seem to me that one was bound to handle their idiosyncrasies of speech so very tenderly as to weigh one idiom very long against another." Horne, *A Life in Letters*, 103.

[141] The New York Edition is marked by the elevated use of semantically and analogically resonant metaphors, which some critics have dismissed as excessive and overplayed. Others disagree: according to Patrick Hanks, who presents a lexical reading of several Jamesian metaphors, "his style words are constantly being delicately pushed to the limits of meaningfulness and sometimes beyond," emphasizing a creative exploitation of otherwise normal patterns of language. *Lexical Analysis: Norms and Exploitations* (MIT Press, 2013), 221.

– while also acknowledging "an adjustment in meaning has a clarifying effect which goes beyond the individual passage in question and embraces basic matters of theme and structure" as a caveat.

As Krause negotiated the insecure precipice of reluctant acceptance in his hesitant (and self–undermining) recognition of the revisions resulting in a "clarifying effect" that definitively "goes beyond" isolated instances within the text of *Portrait*, the critic Anthony J. Mazzella was alternatively resolved in his assertion that a "New Isabel" had been created in the midst of James's revisions: "A careful analysis of the revision of *The Portrait of a Lady* will reveal that there are two *Portraits*, not one, and that each is a different literary experience. The Isabel Archer who faces her destiny is not the same young woman in both versions, nor is the quality of her destiny the same."[142] With echoes of similar characterizations that Cowley had applied to late–era James himself in addition to his works, Mazzella seeks to locate and understand the same in this "New Isabel." She, like James, has been transformed – mostly detrimentally in terms of characterization, as Mazzella implies – by an evolving yet still unrelenting society, coupled with the nature of expected change that comes with the passage of time. In both 1881 and 1908, Isabel travels "the same road," but "the road has different landmarks and the people are different travelers"; in concurrence, James's travels between Italy, England, and America were complicated by the deaths of both his parents and his long–considered, final decision to reside in Europe permanently. Both 1908 Isabel and 1908 James are at the pinnacle of self–awareness – "more keenly felt, more sharply there, more fully realized" – even though Isabel's sense of self is deeply flawed, a complex disaster turning toward its inevitable conclusion. New Isabel's destiny, much like that of fin de siècle James, is duly transmuted by "a deeper range of images …

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[142] Anthony J. Mazzella, "The New Isabel." From *The Portrait of a Lady: An Authoritative Text*, ed. by Robert D. Bamberg (W.W. Norton: 1995), 597-619.

peopled with characters who have lived other lives and gone different ways," and this, in turn, reflects "the fuller identity of her creator." Mazzella's emphasis on the transformative nature of authorial experience as a non–negotiable factor in any process of revision was also discussed by James at length. At the end of his Preface for *Roderick Hudson*, James writes of the necessity of revisiting the past in order to meaningfully connect it to the present:

> It helps him to live back into a forgotten state, into convictions, credulities too early spent perhaps, it breathes upon the dead reasons of things, buried as they are in the texture of the work, and makes them revive, so that the actual appearances and the old motives fall together once more, and a lesson and a moral and a consecrating final light are somehow disengaged. … I have felt myself then, on looking over past productions, the painter making use again and again of the tentative wet sponge. … The multiplication of touches had produced even more life than the subject required, and that life, in other conditions, in some other prime relation, would still have somehow to be spent. Thus one would watch for her and waylay her at some turn of the road to come–all that was to be needed was to give her time. This I did in fact, meeting her again and taking her up later on.

Whereas James insists that the process of revision enables an author to "revive" his long–since "dead" works from a "forgotten state," and in some manner "correct" the past, however, Mazzella believes otherwise; the novel is not improved, but removed entirely from its original form: "The point is that the original characters exist differently in the revision. And we are responding in a new way to new characters in a new work." Mazzella's emphasis on the "new" elements, in a "new" novel, with "new" characters as well as, most importantly, a "new" protagonist, does not lessen the compelling quality of the original; he opines that both texts exist in a parallel separated by time. Thus, unlike Cowley, who argued that the novel had been diminished by the revisions, and unlike Matthiesen and Krause, both of whom defended the revisions as improvements and enhancements, Mazzella presents a third point in the dispute by receiving the 1908 text as a related yet completely separate entity.

Other critics who view the revisions as transformative have not been as neutral, suggesting that the New York Edition belies the unaffected purity of 1881's original. The result of what Matthiesen and Krause purported to be "improvements," as Nina Baym laments in her analysis of the revisions,[143] was that the already largely ignored 1881 text – along with its context, historicity, and the author himself – eventually became unfairly neglected altogether, and with this departure came "a loss in our sense of early James as opposed to the later." The stylistic and thematic changes of 1908 reinforce James's later interests – the cumulative goal of which underscores a desire to depict Isabel's private consciousness as the center of the novel, as opposed to 1881's portrayal of Isabel's interiority as just one major facet of the narrative. These changes, Baym states, transformed the story into a "drama of consciousness" and, in the process, "obliterated the coherence of the 1881 version." Baym also regards the Preface to the New York Edition as a further negative complication, one that cannot be excluded from the text itself: "James wrote a Preface for the new work which announced that the story centered in the heroine's consciousness and that its action was the development of her perception and awareness. The Preface instructed the reader in how to interpret, what to admire, and what to deplore in the work. This preface is significant because it has largely controlled the critical readings of *The Portrait*." She further maintains that since *Portrait's* Preface was essentially James's cataloguing of his own retrospective thoughts some twenty years after the original was written, it wields an undue authorial influence over the new text, one that was absent during 1881's serialization. The result is an unspoken yet palpable degradation – from both James and the critics who neglect the 1881 publishing – of the original. Baym's chief concern, similar to Mazzella, addresses the reshaping of Isabel once James places the narrative completely within

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[143] Nina Baym, "Revision and Thematic Change in The Portrait of a Lady." *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (John Hopkins University Press: Summer 1976), 183-200.

her newly compounded center of consciousness; she attributes this change to the early versus late interests of James the "aesthetician." Lost in the New York Edition, Baym claims, is his topical investment in the New Woman plot; this is replaced by New Isabel's enhanced intellectual agility, a notion that springs from "the acute, subtle consciousness required for a late James work" and which sacrifices 1881 Isabel's emotionality in the process – the defining characteristic which Baym regards as Isabel's "original" and "main" humanizing quality. The majority of other revisions, Baym says, stem from James's redrawing of Isabel: "There is a corresponding change of tone to treat this more remarkable being. … As Isabel is exalted, other characters are degraded." 1881 Isabel's sensitivity and spontaneity of feeling is replaced by the constancy of profound reflection and instantaneous analysis; the emphasis on her idealistic, New–Woman–drive to "affront her destiny," as James characterized Isabel's journey in the Preface, is significantly reduced by the revisionary centering on her deepened awareness, into which she fully withdraws. Baym implies that such revisions ironically propel Isabel even further away from reality; her self–perceived superiority of imagination in 1881 is replaced by an actual imaginative supremacy in 1908, one that heightens her self–awareness yet also stifles her role in life, instead forcing her to perpetually "read" not only her own mind, but also all aspects of her surrounding environment. This is similar to Mazzella's previous observation that New Isabel is persistently confined to interpreting life "through the pages of a book," much as James's audience, instead of actively participating in her world.

The original context of 1881 – situated around the intensity of James's focus on his present interests, his heretofore life experiences, and perhaps most importantly, an absence of the disillusionment that would become more evident in his work toward the end of his later phase – could never be replicated any number of years later. Baym suggests that because of this, any

thematically altering change to the original text would automatically prove to be devaluing in 1908. "One never steps twice into the same river," Baym observes, in direct opposition to James's adamant declarations for the necessity to revisit, review, and redefine the past, "and no changing artist can write the same work twice." She then concludes:

> It is a baffling and problematical work, much more so than the text of 1881. The changes created many of the problems. They override the social theme of the work and partially erase it. The matrix of values which radiates from "independence" in 1881 centers in "awareness" in 1908, with attendant dislocations of emphasis. Awareness in 1881 is a means toward an end of an independent life; in 1908 the independent life is attained only in awareness – the two things are almost identical. The only possible independence is the independence of perfect enlightenment.

In terms of Jamesian interiority, the varied range of critical opinions on the revisions of *Portrait* elucidate the role of cognitive dissonance in Isabel's narrative. "Divided Isabel" also accentuates the validity of scholarship, both in favor of and against, James's revisions. Festinger's propositions concerning the sway between psychological contradiction and reconciliation – the "conscious mediations … produced by a generalized contradiction of the faculties"[144] that come to continually engage Isabel's mind – shed light on the divided contentions of Matthiesen, Krause, Cowley, Mazzella, Baym, and James himself. If Matthiesen and Krause contend both the original and revised narratives are one and the same, save for an increased tenor in verbiage and metaphor, it can also be argued that late–era Isabel is an evolved, literal connotation of these changes, manifested in the psychological maturation of her earlier image. Thus, the revisions can never be merely technical; they were required to depict the severity of Isabel's dissonance. Alternately, if Cowley, Mazzella, and Baym declare there to be "Two Portraits," "Two Henry Jameses" (Cowley) or "Two Isabels," (Mazzella) with characters

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[144] John E. Opel, *Transformations in the Sublime* (University of Wisconsin-Madison: 2008), 60.

who "have been significantly blackened" for New Isabel's sake (Baym), it can be argued that James's lingering vision of Isabel's consciousness (evident in his continued preoccupation with Isabel's development long after he had finished writing the original) required such a metamorphosis, but she is still the same Isabel; James's revisions only revealed more facets of her character that already existed, aspects he had not considered in 1881. The result was a fuller, more intricate, more nuanced portrait in 1908, one which demanded not only a greater emphasis on the maze of our heroine's mind, but also a much starker contrast with the shallow corruption of those who sought to exploit her.

In the end, if we view Isabel's descent into cognitive dissonance as the focal point of *Portrait*, each of these critical viewpoints on the signification of James's revisions present as valid. The conclusion proposing "Two Isabels" as well as the alternate explanation of a self–consciously intensified 1908 Isabel, who is still in the image of her 1881 original, both highlight James's renewed focus on the psychologically dissonant interior. In 1881's *Portrait*, we are told of Isabel's feelings by way of her impulsiveness and greater tendency toward reactionary emotionalism; in 1908's *Portrait*, we are shown her difficult psyche, often in place of visible sentiments but not at the exclusion of them. Although one methodology does not wield superiority over the other, the revisions do enable a greater depth of understanding, through Isabel's mind, of the variegated anxieties that defined the Woman Question at its most critical juncture – the Victorian fin de siècle.

Comparisons of the original text of 1881 to the New York Edition clearly foreground James's desire to emphasize the rise of Isabel's internal discord – her rising sense of confusion and uncertainty, in particular – especially through the depiction of her repeated attempts at dissonance reduction, a defense mechanism to self–assuredly reaffirm the superiority of her own

"finer mind" through interactions with other characters. By the final sections of the novel, in the moments surrounding Isabel's climactic, solitary fireside meditation in Chapter 42,[145] we have unimpeded access to her consciousness while retaining our privileged position as external observers.[146] If James's primary objective for the revisions had been, as Michael Anesko theorizes, to "intensify certain aspects of his characters,"[147] he was only able to achieve this via the rewritten text – to reveal, as James himself mentions, "buried secrets." What is "buried" in the 1881 text is the extent of Isabel's internal dissonance. By illuminating this feature of her character as central in 1908 instead of as a peripheral product of her experiences, James's transition from narrator (or, more aptly, his disappearance as narrator) to character–interiority as storyteller is more effectively delineated. Isabel's mind – her consciousness – eventually becomes the novel's protagonist: it is the determination of incidents and those who occupy them, and the connected moments it myopically processes alternately illustrate the frailties and esteemed qualities (primarily the determined morality and empathetic sacrifice) of its owner.[148] Isabel's unrelenting consciousness configures the scope and extent – on her own deficient terms – of her aesthetic and cultural education; it dictates all aspects of her existence as "the continuity

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[145] The Vigil of Meditation in Chapter 42 is, as James himself notes in the Preface, "obviously the best thing in the book, but it is only a supreme illustration of the general plan." It is the forced apotheosis of Isabel's dissonance and at the same time the summit of the novel itself, which merits an elaborate discussion of its own.

[146] Though the third-person narrator eventually becomes Isabel's mind itself, James sometimes suddenly breaks this narration in first-person form, showing his readers what Colin Meissner calls "the limitations of the cumulative view," where the author reminds us that our knowledge of a story's events will never be complete. In Chapter Four, for example, James informs us that "no report has remained" of a particular talk between Isabel and her sister Lily; in Chapter 19, he tells his audience directly that "I know not whether it was on this occasion or on some other that the conversation had taken the turn I have just indicated," in reference to a discussion between Isabel and Madame Merle.

[147] Michael Anesko, "The Alienated Modesty of Henry James's Rejected Thoughts." From *Generous Mistakes: Incidents of Error in Henry James* (Oxford University Press: 2017), 17-28.

[148] "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" James ponders in "The Art of Fiction."

between the movement of her own soul and the agitations of the world," the "great fund of life" that she is beholden to.[149]

A closer assessment of Isabel's own analyses of those around her reveals not only how she copes with dissonance, but also symbolizes the very real challenges of a new generation of women situating themselves within this newly emergent femininity: heedless of societal conventions and consequences yet at the same time bound by them, navigating their own destinies regardless of the outcome, at a time when the novel concept of the New Woman was still largely viewed as a threat. Isabel's defensive modes of overreaching justification, obstinate refusal, and outright denial – each instance of which further protracts her imagination – augments an already labyrinthine consciousness that culminates in her final, still–defiant confrontation with a grim reality.[150] Filtered for the audience via her mind, Isabel's most defining experiences come from exchanges with Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond; secondary are her interactions with an array of others, including her good–natured and protective cousin, Ralph Touchett; Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood, both of whom vie for her affections; her best friend, the fiercely independent journalist Henrietta Stackpole; her beloved stepdaughter, Pansy; and Osmond's meddling sister, the Countess Gemini.

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[149] In Chapter Four, James describes Isabel as "constantly staring and wondering," with a great desire for knowledge, preferring "almost any source of information to the printed page" (though she "read in secret"), with a tremendous natural curiosity about life. While those around her appreciate these traits, some also instantly discern that Isabel has amplified herself beyond her own mind and thus set out, almost immediately, to manipulate her.
[150] Isabel has been tricked, repeatedly, but in the end, she still refuses to let this realization force her into spiritual submission. Interestingly, in an 1896 address, William James described an attitude toward "being duped" that personifies Isabel: "For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things." The "worse things" for Isabel, as we discover, would be to abandon Pansy; to accept personal defeat after her misconceptions of virtually everything of importance; to go against her own rebellious nature and her contention that life's difficulties are challenges to be tackled and conquered; and to turn away from her mind's pledge of self-sacrifice and renunciation. Hence, at the close of the novel, Isabel sees "a very straight path" back to Rome, back to the degradation and indignity that is life with Osmond, and back to an existence of perpetual unhappiness — because "When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it—just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!) to accept it. One folly was enough, especially when it was to last for ever; a second one would not much set it off. In this vow of reticence there was a certain nobleness which kept Isabel going" — and her autonomy, regardless of her personal misery, is reaffirmed in its permanent indestructibility.

When Isabel first steps onto the grounds of the Touchett estate, sprung from her comfortably isolated, self–educated, decidedly non–traditional upbringing by her "crazy Aunt Lydia," there is a palpable, unexpected energy that accompanies her arrival:

> The person in question was a young lady, who seemed immediately to interpret the greeting of the small beast. He advanced with great rapidity and stood at her feet, looking up and barking hard; whereupon, without hesitation, she stooped and caught him in her hands, holding him face to face while he continued his quick chatter. His master now had had time to follow and to see that Bunchie's new friend was a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty. She was bareheaded, as if she were staying in the house––a fact which conveyed perplexity to the son of its master, conscious of that immunity from visitors which had for some time been rendered necessary by the latter's ill–health. Meantime the two other gentlemen had also taken note of the new–comer.
>
> "Dear me, who's that strange woman?" Mr. Touchett had asked.
>
> "Perhaps it's Mrs. Touchett's niece—the independent young lady," Lord Warburton suggested. "I think she must be, from the way she handles the dog."
>
> The collie, too, had now allowed his attention to be diverted, and he trotted toward the young lady in the doorway, slowly setting his tail in motion as he went.
>
> "But where's my wife then?" murmured the old man.
>
> "I suppose the young lady has left her somewhere: that's a part of the independence."
>
> The girl spoke to Ralph, smiling, while she still held up the terrier. "Is this your little dog, sir?"
>
> "He was mine a moment ago; but you've suddenly acquired a remarkable air of property in him."
>
> "Couldn't we share him?" asked the girl. "He's such a perfect little darling."

Ralph looked at her a moment; she was unexpectedly pretty. "You may have him altogether," he then replied.[151]

Mrs. Touchett's earlier telegram had referred to Isabel as "quite independent," and both Ralph and Warburton are taken with her assertiveness and confidence – derived merely from the absence of Mrs. Touchett as her escort, as well as the momentary interaction with Ralph's puppy. But while Warburton, his interest piqued, will seek to literally dominate and control Isabel ("You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman," he tells Ralph after they meet Isabel. "There she is!"), Ralph immediately perceives the dangers of her imaginative boldness. Later, he reflects on this realization; his "brilliant" cousin is akin to the "beautiful edifice" of a work of art: "He surveyed the edifice from the outside and admired it greatly; he looked in at the windows and received an impression of proportions equally fair. … This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own."[152] Ralph's devotion to Isabel and her self–sufficient cause, first foreshadowed in his amusing relinquishment of Bunchie the terrier upon their first meeting, materializes in full when he convinces his father – without Isabel's knowledge – to supplement her modest inheritance with his own, much larger bequest. But while Ralph encourages his quixotic cousin and even prays to witness her success as an independent individual, free to live by her own intentions ("Whenever she executes them … may I be there to see!"), he still anticipates the inevitable difficulties that attend her status as a Victorian orphan and is immensely troubled by her naivete. It is only on his deathbed – and after she discovers, from the

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[151] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, 13.
[152] Ibid., 65.

perpetually scheming Madame Merle, that Ralph was the source of her material wealth – that

Isabel also comes to terms with why "he had indeed rather sharply registered himself on her fine

sense … Ralph was unlike any cousin she had ever encountered"[153]: he believed in her "fine, full

consciousness" with the same earnestness as she did, unlike those who sought to possess and

exploit her. The surprising emotional outburst that follows is one that finally exposes Ralph's

impact on Isabel's "fine sense," which her self–absorbed mind was unable to comprehend

before:

> "You did something once–you know it. O Ralph, you've been everything! What have I
> done for you–what can I do to–day? I would die if you could live. But I don't wish you to
> live; I would die myself, not to lose you." Her voice was as broken as his own and full of
> tears and anguish.
>
> "You won't lose me–you'll keep me. Keep me in your heart; I shall be nearer to you than
> I've ever been. Dear Isabel, life is better; for in life there's love. Death is good–but
> there's no love."
>
> "I never thanked you–I never spoke–I never was what I should be!" Isabel went on. She
> felt a passionate need to cry out and accuse herself, to let her sorrow possess her. All her
> troubles, for the moment, became single and melted together into this present pain. "What
> must you have thought of me? Yet how could I know? I never knew, and I only know to–
> day because there are people less stupid than I."
>
> She was full of the sense that he was beyond the reach of pain; he seemed already so little
> of this world. But even if she had not had it she would still have spoken, for nothing
> mattered now but the only knowledge that was not pure anguish–the knowledge that they
> were looking at the truth together.[154]

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[153] Ibid., 66.
[154] Isabel is dealt the blow of Ralph's death almost immediately after the Countess Gemini has disclosed to her the truth about Madame Merle, Osmond, and Pansy's parentage. Her own Vigil of Meditation several days prior to those jarring revelations strengthened her resolve to disregard Osmond's orders and rush to her dying cousin's side.

This episode, along with Isabel's previous self–confrontation in Chapter 42, is among the most significant of her journey. For the first time in her life, she acknowledges the deficiencies of her consciousness; in true Victorian fashion, she "accuses" herself; she is far removed from the girl who once held that "people were right in admiring her if they thought her so [superior]; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs."[155] Ralph's death also marks the final dissipation of Isabel's corroded idealism. It is a powerful moment of both desolation and communion; a perfect representation of the conflicted state of Isabel's mind, dissonance arrived at its surface;[156] and, as Darrel Abel says, "the first and last time in the book in which Isabel allows anyone to invade her soul's privacy."[157] It is this instance that confirms Isabel has fully acknowledged what Festinger describes as "the disconfirmation of central beliefs"[158] as she consciously struggles to come to terms with the reality she first realized by the dying fire.[159]

It took years for Isabel to arrive at this necessarily cataclysmic point, in spite of her many unconscious compulsions toward dissonance reduction along the way. An example of Isabel's flawed metapsychological cognition is clearly seen in her responses to both Warburton's and Goodwood's proposals of marriage. The fact that Isabel is tempted, at different moments, to consider either indicates her incomplete break with Victorian femininity. Isabel's rejection of Warburton is not solely on account of a desire to maintain her independence; she is, on the

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[155] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 51.

[156] For virtually her entire life, Isabel viewed herself as intellectually superior to everyone around her. The nonconsonant belief, that she is naive and foolish, does not occur to her until the fireside contemplation. The death of her staunchest ally and genuine supporter, Ralph, forces her to confront this reality in full.

[157] Darrel Abel, *American Literature, Volumes 1-3* (Barron's Incorporated: 1963), 265.

[158] Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 146. As Festinger notes, in a logical sense, "One would expect most people to abandon a disproven belief (cognition) in favor of a proven one," but this is often not the case, as Isabel — caught between her hold on the past (specifically her lifelong belief in the accuracy and intellectual soundness of her own reasoning and judgement) and her own desired construction of the present (that Madame Merle represents a general superiority of ideal womanhood) — aptly demonstrates. It is only after the evidence becomes irrefutable that Isabel relents and acknowledges she was wrong.

[159] Contemplating the possibility that she has been mistaken quickly dissolves into a seamless succession of realizations on Isabel's part: that Osmond is not independent and cultivated, but hateful and oppressive, and she is the main object of his barely contained fury and scorn; that he and Merle were in fact "unconsciously and familiarly associated"; and that basically, she and Osmond "were strangely married, at all events, and it was a horrible life."

contrary, attracted to his aristocratic bearings and the fanciful ideals – we know already that Isabel is "devoted to romantic effects"[160] – that she envisages with becoming the wife of a high–born "personage."[161] It is what Ralph describes as the inherent conflict that defines Warburton's peculiar social status – "who can neither abolish himself as a nuisance nor maintain himself as an institution" – that both intrigues and repels Isabel, who is bewildered not by her dismissal of Warburton, but as to why she is not inclined to think and behave in the same way "nineteen women out of twenty" of her generation would:

> But what disturbed her, in the sense that it struck her with wonderment, was this very fact that it cost her so little to refuse a magnificent "chance." With whatever qualifications one would, Lord Warburton had offered her a great opportunity; the situation might have discomforts, might contain oppressive, might contain narrowing elements, might prove really but a stupefying anodyne; but she did her sex no injustice in believing that nineteen women out of twenty would have accommodated themselves to it without a pang. Why then upon her also should it not irresistibly impose itself? Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large these fabulous occasions? If she wouldn't do such a thing as that then she must do great things, she must do something greater. Poor Isabel found ground to remind herself from time to time that she must not be too proud, and nothing could be more sincere than her prayer to be delivered from such a danger: the isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place. If it had been pride that interfered with her accepting Lord Warburton such a bêtise was singularly misplaced; and she was so conscious of liking him that she ventured to assure herself it was the very softness, and the fine intelligence, of sympathy. She liked him too much to marry him, that was the truth; something assured her there was a fallacy somewhere in the glowing logic of the proposition–as he saw it–

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[160] Isabel's idealism, reflected in her affinity for art and artistry, renders her even more susceptible to the designs of Madame Merle.

[161] According to Millicent Bell, it is Warburton's not being a "character" in Isabel's own estimation, but rather a "personage" — in her mind, an aggressor of elevated status — that carries with it trepidation. Michael Gorra agrees: Isabel has never thought of anyone before as a "personage," and until meeting Warburton, she only perceived individual distinction of character as "what one liked in a gentleman's mind and in his talk." Though Isabel favors Warburton's mind, as a "personage," he looms threateningly larger for her as a "set of possessions and powers that can't be measured in such familiar terms."

even though she mightn't put her very finest finger–point on it; and to inflict upon a man who offered so much a wife with a tendency to criticise would be a peculiarly discreditable act. She had promised him she would consider his question, and when, after he had left her, she wandered back to the bench where he had found her and lost herself in meditation, it might have seemed that she was keeping her vow. But this was not the case; she was wondering if she were not a cold, hard, priggish person, and, on her at last getting up and going rather quickly back to the house, felt, as she had said to her friend, really frightened at herself.

Isabel is disturbed not by the ease in her ability to refuse Warburton – she plainly maintains that "a free exploration of life," her independence, ultimately would not be possible as Warburton's wife – but the fact that she is not moved to conform with the "Victorian femme d'interieur," angel–of–the–house majority. To behave in a manner befitting the New Woman is effortless in bold speech and oblivious action for Isabel, but it is clear here, for the first time, that her internal dissonance will constantly present a challenge against all her attempts to resist the unavoidably Victorian atmosphere she is immersed in, within the confines of the very setting where Old World culture originated and propagated. In her study on cultural identity during the fin de siècle, Sally Ledger summarizes this dual–edged conflict as tensions erupted between past and present feminine ideologies toward the end of the era: "The elusive quality of the New Woman of the fin de siècle clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently self–identical culture of Victorianism which could not find a consistent language by which she could be categorized and dealt with. All that was certain was that she was dangerous, a threat to the status quo."[162] It is within this discursive clash of spheres that Isabel finds herself following her rejection of Warburton, and she responds to the ensuing inner discontent by self–defensively justifying her decision in a way that even she cannot truly understand ("She liked him too much

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[162] Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester University Press: 1997), 11.

to marry him … there was a fallacy somewhere in the glowing logic of the proposition … even though she mightn't put her very finest finger–point on it…")

Caspar Goodwood, similarly, represents Isabel's temptation to accede to the seemingly secure, standardized path of presumed Victorian happiness, but unlike her reflexive external response to Warburton, which clearly left her inwardly conflicted, her first rejection of Caspar appears to be more uncomplicated. In Chapter 12, he arrives at Gardencourt, having traveled all the way from Boston to propose marriage, and Isabel seems more apathetic than agitated:

> Now that she learned he was there, nevertheless, she felt no eagerness to receive him. He was the finest young man she had ever seen, was indeed quite a splendid young man; he inspired her with a sentiment of high, of rare respect. She had never felt equally moved to it by any other person. He was supposed by the world in general to wish to marry her, but this of course was between themselves. … Isabel delayed for some minutes to go to him; she moved about the room with a new sense of complications. But at last she presented herself and found him standing near the lamp. … Isabel said to herself that it bespoke resolution to–night; in spite of which, in half an hour, Caspar Goodwood, who had arrived hopeful as well as resolute, took his way back to his lodging with the feeling of a man defeated. He was not, it may be added, a man weakly to accept defeat.[163]

This takes place shortly before Isabel's refusal of Warburton; unlike the scene with Warburton, we are here denied access to Isabel's thoughts, left to rely only upon her external demeanor ("no eagerness … Isabel delayed for some minutes to go to him") and the swiftness of her mindful "resolution," which took all of "half an hour" to convey. Caspar, as the last line of the rejection scene foreshadows, does not relent, and soon returns, asking Isabel to reconsider – this time after she has turned down his rival, Warburton. They quarrel; she declares she will not marry anyone, "almost certainly"; and she speaks to him of her "love of liberty" at length with great ardor:

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[163] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 47. Although Caspar is not a "personage," he is as possessive and controlling as Warburton, telling Isabel that "I would rather think of you as dead than as married to another man."

I'm not in my first youth–I can do what I choose–I belong quite to the independent class. I've neither father nor mother; I'm poor and of a serious disposition; I'm not pretty. I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries. Besides, I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me."[164]

Caspar is surprisingly impressed by Isabel's anti–Victorian, nonconformist zeal, and agrees to wait two more years as she has requested. Isabel, for her part, has changed her perception of him and no longer questions his intentions: "As she took his hand she felt a great respect for him; she knew how much he cared for her and she thought him magnanimous." With this newfound respect comes the onset of self–doubt, which Isabel then immediately seeks to alternately deny and justify to herself:

She stood still a little longer, and then, by an irresistible impulse, dropped on her knees before her bed and hid her face in her arms. She was not praying; she was trembling – trembling all over. … She intensely rejoiced that Caspar Goodwood was gone; there was something in having thus got rid of him that was like the payment, for a stamped receipt, of some debt too long on her mind. As she felt the glad relief she bowed her head a little lower; the sense was there, throbbing in her heart; it was part of her emotion, but it was a thing to be ashamed of–it was profane and out of place. It was not for some ten minutes that she rose from her knees, and even when she came back to the sitting–room her tremor had not quite subsided. It had had, verily, two causes: part of it was to be accounted for by her long discussion with Mr. Goodwood, but it might be feared that the rest was simply the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power. … That love of liberty of which she had given Caspar Goodwood so bold a sketch was as yet almost exclusively theoretic; she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale. But it appeared to her she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of

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[164] Isabel's speech to Caspar is as much an advocation of personal liberty as it is a refutation of the major tenets of Victorianism; it is her most starkly vocalized support of New Womanhood in the novel.

victory; she had done what was truest to her plan. In the glow of this consciousness the image of Mr. Goodwood taking his sad walk homeward through the dingy town presented itself with a certain reproachful force; so that, as at the same moment the door of the room was opened, she rose with an apprehension that he had come back.[165]

Isabel tends to conflate feelings of "glad relief" with uncertainty, another defense mechanism against her rising sense of dissonance: the still–peripheral possibility that she *may* be erroneous in her unequivocal rejection of Caspar. In the words of critic Regina Barerra, she typically "confuses imagination with desire."[166] Isabel knows her aspirations toward New Womanhood are as of yet an untested theory, and she believes – or rather, convinces herself to believe – that the first steps in proving its postulates have been accomplished by this "victory" of rejecting the plain offers of a typical Victorian life, from two suitors, in the mere span of "a fortnight." But Isabel's physical reaction – her involuntary trembling, her heart racing – to this second episode with Caspar betrays her false, self–explanatory reassurances. During what Victor Strandberg calls "ten minutes of uncontrollable psychic turmoil," the truth is elucidated: "Her problem, then, is the ageless one of finding or establishing a satisfactory role and identity, something to justify her irrational behavior."[167] Ironically, it is Caspar's reappearance at the end of the novel that enables Isabel to fully resolve her dissonance. This entails that she completes the affronting of her destiny, reaffirm the moral caliber she has always held herself to, and come to an unconflicted conclusive life decision all at once; she fully commits to all three endeavors. In refusing Caspar for the final time, she is neither doubtful nor psychologically dissonant any longer: "She had not known where to turn; but she knew now." The "very straight path" will be,

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[165] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 206.

[166] Regina Barerra, "Introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady*." From Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Signet Classics: 2007), xi. Referring to Lacan's epistemology on the concept of desire as "a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation," several critics, including Joseph Dewey and Brooke Horvath, have theorized that Isabel's repressed sense of desire serves to privilege and preserve her interiority over external expressions.

[167] Victor H. Strandberg, "Isabel Archer's Identity Crisis: The Two Portraits of a Lady." From *University Review, 34* (UMKC: June 1968), 283-290.

for Isabel, one of ultimate self–sacrifice and renunciation in the name of her love for Pansy. Isabel's formerly imaginative identity as a fin de siècle New Woman and her natural–born identity as a Victorian "angel," both constantly infringing upon one another for the last six years – the core components of her dissonance – are now finally synthesized, albeit in perhaps the most tragic way imaginable.

If Caspar Goodwood should be recognized for aiding Isabel in coming to terms with her dissonance, it is Madame Merle who must be credited with forcing her to confront its actual presence. Ignoring the reservations of Ralph, who is suspicious of Merle from the onset – he has known her for years – Isabel decides that she has much to learn from this lustrous and elegant representative of the Old World, who, as she decides immediately upon their meeting, "had as charming a manner as any she had ever encountered." According to Oscar Cargill, Isabel seeks to emulate Merle completely; Merle is a reflection of the independent "lady" she aspires to become,[168] and Isabel is preoccupied by a desire "to imitate her, to be as firm and bright as she."[169] Isabel's estimation of the older woman's merits quickly becomes boundless; James dedicates a portion of Chapter 19 to an extended description of her from Isabel's perspective,[170] and the line leading swiftly from admiration to devoted reverence is thus drawn. Merle's perfect appropriation of social graces, her "charming, sympathetic, intelligent, cultivated" manners, her "rare, superior, and pre–eminent" demeanor, her engagement with numerous artistic endeavors that ensured "she was never idle," and her "ability to think … to feel" inspire Isabel to

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[168] Oscar Cargill, *The Novels of Henry James* (Macmillan, 1961), 94. Even after Isabel becomes disillusioned by Madame Merle, as Cargill observes, she still feels a need to "measure herself" against a template inspired by the woman, "in terms of self-possession and human dignity."

[169] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 172.

[170] "It is said that imitation is the sincerest flattery; and if Isabel was sometimes moved to gape at her friend aspiringly and despairingly it was not so much because she desired herself to shine as because she wished to hold up the lamp for Madame Merle. She liked her extremely, but was even more dazzled than attracted." (337).

momentarily set aside her inchoate dissonance, and instead return to the cultivation of her own overconfidence:

> She often wondered indeed if she ever had been, or ever could be, intimate with any one. … Certainly, on the whole, Isabel had never encountered a more agreeable and interesting figure than Madame Merle; she had never met a person having less of that fault which is the principal obstacle to friendship–the air of reproducing the more tiresome, the stale, the too–familiar parts of one's own character. The gates of the girl's confidence were opened wider than they had ever been; she said things to this amiable auditress that she had not yet said to any one. Sometimes she took alarm at her candour: it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels.[171]

Ralph, the realist who keenly understands the confines of Isabel's thinking to a greater degree than anyone else, knowingly responds to Isabel's inquiries to him regarding her new friend: "I was sure you'd think her very pleasant." She then completely disregards his obvious disapproval of Merle (and subsequently, subtle warnings from others as well), fleetingly dismissing his lack of praise on account of her cousin simply "being odious." In Madame Merle's presence, Isabel's dissonance dissipates, and Merle is thereby able to completely manipulate her young friend. No one else – not Ralph, the Countess Gemini, or Henrietta[172] – is able to disconnect Isabel from her excited imagination once Madame Merle has captured it: "If for Isabel she had a fault it was that she was not natural ... She was in a word too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are

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[171] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 163.

[172] Henrietta has been fearful for Isabel's future since she learned of Mr. Touchett's generous bequest; she worries it will "ruin" her best friend, or at the very least, "confirm" her "dangerous tendencies" — her imaginative idealism, which ultimately could not subsist with reality. "I mean your exposure on the moral side," she tells Isabel. "The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality — the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up. … you think you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing yourself and pleasing others. You'll find you're mistaken." By a cruel twist of fate, this becomes an accurate summary of Isabel's destiny.

supposed to have been intended to be…"[173] The others subsequently wane, in varying degrees, from Isabel's consciousness.

When Merle tells Isabel that she and Ralph are not on good terms, and suggests that perhaps one day, Isabel, too, will come to dislike her, the young woman is incredulous at such a prospect: "Begin to dislike you? I shall never begin." Nevertheless, she remembers Ralph's disregard for Merle, but again refuses to entertain any thought on the matter aside from passing curiosity: "There was something between them, Isabel said to herself, but she said nothing more than this. If it were something of importance it should inspire respect; if it were not it was not worth her curiosity. With all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners."[174] Her refusal to go about "raising curtains" and "looking into unlighted corners" lends Isabel to the unspoken risk of what Festinger refers to as Selective Exposure Phenomena: the subconscious "selectivity of information search and interpretation," concurrent with seeking and retaining consonant information only. Isabel's primary fount of carefully curated knowledge is, of course, Madame Merle.

> Dissonance motivated selective exposure is undoubtedly caused by many variables. These factors include: (a) the level of dissonance; (b) the impact of the information choice, and whether or not the choice is real; (c) demands for honesty and impartiality; (d) usefulness or utility of the information; (e) attractiveness of the information; (f) refutability of the information; and (g) de facto selective exposure.[175]

Until Isabel's moment of truth, Madame Merle remains the sole source of false information that conforms to her subjectively crafted reality; Isabel's "truths" are eventually reflected in the form of Merle's carefully placed, deliberately discreet yet effective praise of Osmond. Isabel's continued suspension of dissonance renders her at the total mercy of Madame Merle, who in turn

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[173] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 338.
[174] Ibid., 250.
[175] Festinger, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 19* (Academic Press: 1986), 43.

utilizes her Machiavellian authority to arrange Isabel's marriage to the complicit Osmond.[176] It is

only after she witnesses a telling scene between Osmond and Merle that Isabel realizes she

cannot deny what is before her own sight:

> … she had received an impression. … Madame Merle was there in her bonnet, and
> Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware she had come in.
> Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not
> noticed, was that their colloquy had for the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar
> silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame
> Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair,
> leaning back and looking at her. Her head was erect, as usual, but her eyes were bent on
> his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was
> an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a
> desultory pause in their exchange of ideas and were musing, face to face, with the
> freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was
> nothing to shock in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image,
> lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their
> absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. But it was all over by the time
> she had fairly seen it.[177]

Just as no other character could help Isabel see through and beyond the polished veneer of

Madame Merle, her internalization of Victorian cultural and social mores will not permit her to

simply ignore what she has witnessed; the concreteness of visual reality has indelibly supplanted

the theoretical abstractions that previously governed her consciousness. The optics of role

reversal – the female guest standing, the male host sitting, coupled with a distinct sense of deeper

familiarity between both – is disconcerting to Isabel, who at the time cannot rationalize the

setting before her as anything other than "her husband's being in more direct communication

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[176] Osmond tells Merle that upon marrying Isabel, her "too many ideas" must "be sacrificed" for his sake — a fulfillment of Ralph's premonition, which he shared with Isabel, that Osmond would put her "in a cage."
[177] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 457-458.

with Madame Merle than she suspected. That impression came back to her from time to time, and now she wondered it had never come before."

Isabel's sense of dissonance, long subdued by Merle's influence, has finally resurfaced; it will now take permanent root and direct her thoughts and actions onward. It is this incident that leads to Isabel's nightlong Vigil of Meditation, the sublime moment heralded by James in his Preface. This is the beginning of her induction into full–fledged oppressive Victorian womanhood, and the end of her New World, New Woman idealism that entailed, above all else, "she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was."[178] Isabel will don this new "mask"[179] for the remainder of her life; it is one that she is repulsed by and always sought to avoid. At the same time, however, she will retain her self–determination and morally constructed identity; her conscious and calculated decision to willingly return to unhappiness with the "exquisitely miserable revulsion,"[180] incarnated as the repulsive figure of Osmond, is manifest proof of this. In a failed attempt at self–preservation during her vigil, Isabel's consciousness, "assailed by visions, in a state of extraordinary activity" desperately seeks to defensively reduce her dissonance. She considers Warburton's potentially dishonorable intentions with his proposal to Pansy, pondering "these ugly possibilities until she had completely lost her way"; she reflects most deeply on Osmond's callousness, his ability to "spoil everything for her," how he "put the lights out, one by one," and on her own mistrust of him; she thinks of her own noble intentions

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[178] Ibid., 69. For Isabel, appearance must reflect reality, and James underscores this perspective to examine the fragile dynamics encompassing morality and aestheticism as her journey progresses. By contrast, Osmond's declaration that "one ought to make one's like a work of art," for himself, extends only to an external, worldly self-image — the opposite of the intrinsic purity of character that Isabel deems both artistically and spiritually pleasing, a necessary component of an honorable, fulfilling, self-sufficient life.

[179] References to Isabel's new "mask," an unwanted yet unavoidable product of her unhappy life with Osmond, start to appear, often in the context of her interactions with Ralph: "for him she would always wear a mask"; "if she wore a mask it completely covered her face"; "now there was no use pretending, wearing a mask"; "Her mask had dropped for an instant, but she had put it on again, to Ralph's infinite disappointment."

[180] F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, *The Notebooks of Henry James* (University of Chicago Press: 1981), 17.

and efforts, her lack of deceptive machinations, and her suffering, which had by now become an "active condition"; and she finally correctly concludes that, since Osmond has been unable to change her nature to his own liking – "he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance," but she "had too many ideas … The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all" – he now simply "hated her." Although Isabel does not yet have full knowledge of the plot that has been carried out against her, this initial confrontation with internal dissonance prepares her for Countess Gemini's exposure of Madame Merle and Osmond, as well as her final encounter with Merle, both of which soon follow in quick succession.[181]

The implication that the Old World, with its corrupting decadence and propensity for greed and materialism, has driven Isabel – who initially represents the simple early American philosophies of independence, personal freedom, and self–reliance – toward a new, post–dissonant sense of interiority, presumably for the remainder of her life, exemplifies a permanent subversive aporia that, by the final stages of the narrative, has become central to Isabel's existence. Her refusal to "turn herself inside out" following her realization of Merle's and Osmond's deception is akin to what Festinger calls "the agony of that irresolvable ambivalence,"[182] a hearkening back to the early and mid–Victorian woman's predisposition toward self–sacrifice through self–denial. Isabel knows she will never be able to justify, rationalize, or substantiate her dire situation; her internalized discord, "the agony," will persist eternally. Thus, in the absence of any capacity for self–assurance, she accepts her circumstances

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[181] "I think I should like never to see you again," Isabel tells Madame Merle in their final exchange, actualizing Merle's own speculation to Isabel, years ago, that one day her young friend would perhaps come to dislike her. Now, seeing the woman she once fervently revered for the final time evokes an array of sentiment — but no longer dissonance — in Isabel: "Isabel had been thinking all day of her falsity, her audacity, her ability, her probable suffering; and these dark things seemed to flash with a sudden light as she entered the room." In spite of all that has happened, Isabel feels considerable empathy for Merle, stemming from their shared love for Pansy.
[182] Qtd. in Zygmunt Bauman, *The Psychology of Experiencing* (Harvard University Press: 1991), 36.

and will live nobly in spite of Osmond's oppression, as she constantly navigates "that irresolvable ambivalence." In the Preface to *Portrait*, James mentions that his dichotomously imagistic and abstract interpretation of Isabel's consciousness was intended to represent a general feminine experience of life and its inevitably contradictory complications: "It was naturally of the essence that the young woman should be herself complex; that was rudimentary – or was at any rate the light in which Isabel Archer had originally dawned." This multivalent portrait is further obscured by the fact that Isabel represents a constant oscillation between the New Woman and traditional Victorian womanhood; ironically, Isabel becomes fully cognizant and self–aware when she purposefully chooses to regress into a life as the latter within the Old World, where "consciousness can flourish in its recognition of Europe's two faces of moral complexity."[183] Isabel's emergent dissonance is also presented structurally in addition to figuratively: James, as narrator, gradually retreats as her story progresses, effectively transferring his third–person authorship of Isabel to our heroine herself, manifested in her personal impressions of others, comprised in full from the depths of Isabel's own mind: her center–of–consciousness becomes *Portrait's* prime author during the second half of the narrative. This transition is multifariously expository, and ultimately becomes a question of anticipation for James's audience, as he had intended in 1908: when will Isabel metacognitively realize, acknowledge, and address the extent and consequences of her dissonance?

Early on, freshly arrived from her coddled life in the New World, Isabel's sense of internal conflict is virtually nonexistent; as a confident young woman determined to "affront her

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[183] John H. Pearson, *The Prefaces of Henry James: Framing the Modern Reader* (Penn State Press: 2010), 156.

destiny," she is proud, intelligent, aspirational, and had even been apathetically spoiled,

according to critic Alfred Habegger, by a "careless and ineffective father"[184] who had since died.

James's early introduction of Isabel with her "intellectual energy and moral spontaneity, so

lamentably lacking in the English and Europeans,"[185] at once places her in direct opposition to

the Old World she seeks to inhabit on her own terms:

> Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once
> innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of
> curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and
> to be if possible even better, her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of
> the delicate, desultory, flame–like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions
> … It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent,
> and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state.[186]

This initially "meagre knowledge" almost solely centers around what critic Paulina Kar posits is

a "self–centered quality in the heroine which in its turn is related to her taking an abstract,

theoretical, romantic view of herself and the world."[187] Isabel's Emersonian view of herself is

immediately acknowledged upon her arrival in Europe; in addition to the animated discussion

about "the quite independent young lady" before her actual appearance, she soon quickly

corrects Ralph, who remarks in jest that his mother has "adopted" Isabel: "I'm not a candidate

for adoption … I'm very fond of my liberty."[188] She focuses her life on the maintenance of her

own brand of personal freedom; her understanding of the concept is misinformed, however,

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[184] Alfred Habegger, "The Fatherless Heroine and the Filial Son: Deep Background for The Portrait of a Lady." *From New Essays on The Portrait of a Lady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 49-94. The flaws that contour Isabel's psychological awareness, as well as the consequences of her experiences, may be traced back to her early lack of a maternal figure coupled with the directional neglect of her father, who had always indulged her.
[185] Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 42.
[186] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 62.
[187] Paulina C. Karr, *The American Classics Revisited: Recent Studies of American Literature* (American Studies Research Center: 1985), 305.
[188] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 23-24.

residing amongst other self–learned notions that are only theoretical in nature and which, until a grim moment of final clarity, "coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance."[189] Her early refusals of Warburton and Caspar, for example, alternatively indicate an ignorantly negative understanding of freedom, one removed from "unspecified external ties"[190] with a view that true self–sufficiency automatically excludes any form of traditional connection (in this case, marital) that might inhibit the workings of her "remarkable mind." Isabel is somewhat of an unconscious, unintentional narcissist, and Festinger, in discussing the role of narcissism within cognition theory, refers to this type of mindset as a powerful drive that often precipitates an entropic descent into individual dissonance: " … there is high agency, desire for self–enhancement, a sense of entitlement, and inflated self–views."[191] Once she fully comprehends the reality of her dire situation, Isabel's dissonance becomes the apex of her center of consciousness, contained within the dualistic realms of her mind, a contradictory amalgamation of conscious moral choice, instinctual nature, and conflict of feeling – simultaneously functioning as a catalyst that explicitly challenges traditional Victorian ideals of personal identity as an uncompromising social construct. In confronting her previously intentional dismissiveness, Isabel absorbs a formerly neglected understanding of individuality, which was, by then, starting to materialize within the unease of post–Victorian progression. This was also analogous to the continued development of literary realism: in order to become "real," a character must continually accept and navigate the presence of nonconsonant variables that will inevitably and categorically shape individual interiority. To this end, the profundity of Isabel's consciousness is

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[189] Ibid., 284. Isabel's willful ignorance is yet another disastrous product of her refusal to confront anything that is discrepant with her own determinations.

[190] Donatella Izzo, "Setting a Free Woman Free: The Portrait(s) of a Lady." *From American Studies, Vol. XXII* (University of Naples: 1998), 101-122.

[191] Festinger, qtd. in Joanne V. Wood, Abraham Tesser, and John G. Holmes, eds., *The Self and Social Relationships* (Psychology Press: 2013), 81.

meant to be overwhelming, even consuming; a subjectively unique portrait of every character that comes into contact with her, as a result, is so pronounced that critic Adeline Tintner equates Isabel's "consciousness and imagination up to the expanded imagination of her author," James himself.[192] The inherent, atypical multifacetedness of this type of unfettered personality further tempers the initial divide between Isabel and reality, and the resulting discrepant link between the New–and–Old–worlds–unworldly–then–enlightened–Isabel render *Portrait* an emblem of how cognitive dissonance forced a transformative confrontation between individual inner turmoil and the trends of an obstructive society that, for so long, prohibited its cathartic emergence.

In the end, Isabel Archer is, as James contends, a victim of "natural delusion": an uninhibited New World woman who is ultimately forced to come to terms with her own choices and decisions, which have caused her, unwittingly, to fall prey to a sinister older woman and a harsh, unloving, selfish husband. In this sense, *Portrait* is a psychological bildungsroman that traces free–spirited Isabel's backward journey from an unrestricted place – a setting both predictable and spiritually liberating – to an obfuscative culture that is both resistant to change and yet at its dawn, an inauthentic world that promptly upends her carefully crafted interiority. In a countering of perceived values of femininity during this time, Isabel is bold and independent, steadfastly refusing otherwise ideal proposals of marriage until accepting the vain Osmond: she erroneously believes him to be an ideal example of the independence she cherishes. From the moment of her arrival within the Old World, Isabel's fall is pronounced: her refusals of the conventional path; her entrapment by Madame Merle and Osmond; her descent into misery as Osmond's wife; her denial of maternity; her loss of fortune and wealth, and then Ralph; and her discovery that Pansy – with whom she has closely bonded – is actually the illegitimate daughter

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[192] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Twentieth-Century World of Henry James: Changes in His Work After 1900* (LSU Press: 2000), 104.

of Osmond and Merle. What drives this narrative of decay – a young woman's deterioration from newly rich, self–sufficient, and empowered, to oppressed, dominated, and mistreated – is the manner in which James pens every circumstance, occurrence, and point of character interaction of the novel to consciously unfold around that which "supremely matters," Isabel's subjective mind, which drives the entirety of her experience.

In his Preface to *The American*, James outlines this underlying notion of centrality as it should ideally be embodied within a character: "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."[193] Similarly, in *Portrait*, Isabel's "audience" – the other characters in the novel – reside within the larger realm of her self–consciousness: filtered through Isabel's faulty imagination, together they represent the multiple possibilities of eclectic directions with regard to her life. In his Preface to *Portrait*, James refers to these surrounding characters as "the definite array of contributions to Isabel Archer's history." He invites us into Isabel's psyche, with all of its conflicting, self–defensive discernments, denials, justifications, and rationalizations, providing the reader extraordinary insights into her dissonance. The resulting trajectory of Isabel's life and experiences, with each of its interwoven difficulties and conveyed via her consciousness, is analogous to the literal form of psychological realism itself, as Frank Magill notes: "Throughout his career, James experimented with the varieties of consciousness (the word can be found everywhere in his fiction and criticism) … and it deepened the psychological realism that was to be James's chief

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[193] Preface, *The American*. In the summation of Dorothy J. Hale, James implies here that the fully realized artistic subject mirrors back to the author the state of mind in which the creative process began. To embody the intricacies of interior consciousness within a character is, for James, to ensure the subordination of projection to discovery. This corresponds with James's notion of the disappearing narrator as a hallmark of genuine realism.

intellectual contribution to the novel form. ... Like Flaubert, he weighed every phrase, every nuance of diction and rhythm, every comma. ... Certainly, no one who reads James closely could fail to note the delicate but constant Henry James."[194]

Isabel is, literally, "a young person of many theories," as James states; she is the simultaneous exemplification of end–stage Victorianism and early–stage New Womanhood, representing the confusion, conflicts, tensions, suspense, and uncertainties that denote a typical 19th century woman's exacting psychological experience at the fin de siècle. Initially, she is empowered by her sense of independence, further heightened by her newly–bestowed wealth on account of Ralph, who is determined to "see what she does with herself ... I should like to put a little wind in her sails ... I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants." While Ralph views his cousin as prodigious with a promising future as long as she remains liberated, the mercenary Madame Merle establishes herself as the prime influence within the young woman's consciousness, thereby controlling her vulnerabilities and naïveté. There is heavy irony in Isabel's decline; early in the narrative, she is described as cultivating the "fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons whom her lot was cast," and "among her contemporaries she passed for a young woman of extraordinary profundity ... these excellent people never withheld their admiration from a reach of intellect of which they themselves were not conscious." When the story's focus shifts closer toward, and then enters, her center–of– consciousness – namely through more encounters with the pivotal characters in her life – it becomes clear that Isabel's academic intelligence is in stark negative contrast to her decidedly inaccurate analyses of others; she is revealed as the primary threat to her own "fine mind." Ralph had previously warned his cousin against having "too much conscience ... Don't ask yourself so

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[194] Frank N. Magill, ed., *Critical Survey of Long Fiction: English Language Series* (Salem Press: 1991), 1715.

much whether this or that is good for you. Don't question your conscience so much," with the implication that Isabel's identity is restrictively tempered by social constructs of conformity, obedience, and feminine conduct that comprise an ideal Old World social order.

As it turns out, Isabel's simplistic virtue ironically inhibits all aspects of her psychological acumen. By the conclusion of the narrative, this has been reversed: Isabel's self–awareness, as well as her perception of all others, has richly matured as a result of her difficult experiences. As a cruel consequence, however, this invaluable personal growth has occurred at the expense of her independent life, now a permanent misery, with her material fortune gone. The one exception to this reversal of fortune is Isabel's spiritual freedom: it will always be maintained beyond reproach, reflected in her unadulterated love for her "good little Pansy," the result of Isabel's inclination toward "some private duty … her tenderness for things that were pure and weak."[195] Isabel's life objective has shifted from nurturing her own independence to ensuring Pansy is never driven to relinquish hers; Isabel becomes the girl's protector against the same Old World that failed her, the conscious antithesis of her own relationship with Madame Merle, and will project her own desires for New Womanhood onto her young stepdaughter. Pansy, in the end, becomes both Isabel's restrictor and redeemer: a tangible embodiment encapsulating the distressing ambivalence of the liminal feminine experience at the Victorian fin de siècle.

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[195] *The Portrait of a Lady*, 216.

Chapter III

"Let Yourself Go!" On the dissonant periphery between Victorianism and New Womanhood
with Fleda Vetch, *The Spoils of Poynton*

"Fleda Vetch," the critic Patrick Quinn wrote, in his 1954 essay on the dual roles of

morality and motivation in *The Spoils of Poynton*, "is a study in the psychology of ethical

absolutism."[196] It is precisely this adjudged dynamic of purported feminine "absolutism" that has

largely defined a majority of the negative Jamesian criticism of Fleda in particular, and of *Spoils*

in general. James W. Gargano subsequently acknowledged this continuing debate, describing

how the three main perspectives on Fleda construct her as either "a selfless idealist, an immature

romanticist, or a moral bigot."[197] Dissonance theory explains how Fleda emphatically and

unambiguously occupies and maintains her presence within all three antithetical spaces: she is a

selfless idealist, psychologically pressed between the suffocating dictates of Victorian

womanhood and the dawn of New Womanhood, while still unwavering in her determination that

one "mustn't break faith," ever, as "The one great thing is to keep faith"; she is an immature

romanticist, keeping her adoration of Owen secret and hidden, going so far as to refuse to

acknowledge the truth of her feelings, even to herself, for as long as possible on account of his

not–yet solemnized promise to marry another woman – constantly reminding herself that "there

was a kind of punctilio for a man who was engaged"; and she is a moral bigot, a fact that

becomes only more conspicuous in the presence of the practical, worldly, rebellious, and shrewd

Mrs. Gereth, who repeatedly chastises her obstinate young friend for her antiquated "proud and

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[196] Patrick J. Quinn, "Morals and Motives in *The Spoils of Poynton*." *The Sewanee Review Vol. 62* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1954), 563-577.

[197] James W. Gargano, "*The Spoils of Poynton*: Action and Responsibility." *The Sewanee Review Vol. 69 No. 4* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1961), 650-660.

reserved" scruples. In his discussion on the intersections between internal conflict and personal decisions within the realm of dissonance, Festinger describes a set of variables that can clearly be ascribed to James's characterization of Fleda's growing confusion: "It appears that people actually provoke feelings of conflict and uncertainty, presumably because they have insufficient metacognitive knowledge of the decisional situations or psychological factors that cause or reduce such conflicts. They may, for example, rely … on the common assumption that it is nice to be able to revise a decision at a later point in time. Such subjective theories about adequate decision making are prone to mistakes."[198] For Fleda, the causational "decisional situations" that successively emerge as she becomes more and more entrenched within the battle of wills between Mrs. Gereth and her son Owen "mesh together in her overworked consciousness, into a tangle of emotion and rationalization, a knot which gathers into itself all threads of the narrative, a nexus of interest," as Virginia Smith observes.[199] Similar to Isabel Archer before her, Fleda is, according to James, defined in part by a certain "acuteness and intensity" of perception; her personal evaluations, of both individuals and situations, are irreconcilable with the glare of reality; and her inflexible reliance upon her own impressions leaves her unable to acknowledge and address the fomenting dissonance that initiates upon her meeting with Mrs. Gereth at the Brigstock estate, Waterbath. Unlike Isabel, however, she also embodies a greater sense of social insecurity, an extreme hesitancy that constantly challenges and undermines her awareness until the narrative's sudden denouement. This will prove to be her unyielding vulnerability; Fleda's heretofore untapped ability to "almost demonically see and feel," the revelation of an excessively

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[198] "An inconsistency between cognitions" — literally, Fleda's forthcoming position as unwilling go-between for Mrs. Gereth and Owen — "can lead to a violation of an individual's self-concept." The notions of decisional conflict, the subsequent desire for decisional revision, and a break in self-conceptualization are unwittingly exemplified by Fleda at the culmination of her dissonance, resulting in a seemingly adverse resolution.

[199] Virginia L. Smith, *Henry James and the Real Thing* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 115.

heightened consciousness that reaches far beyond the "mere little flurried bundle of petticoats"[200]

that ostensibly designate her otherwise, will be met with equal force by a disequilibrium in her

sense of self that is never truly resolved.

Festinger's main tenets of the "displaced psyche" reflect in Fleda at various points in the

story. She is subjected to psychological unrest as a result of impasses (her trying position at the

center of the Gereth–Brigstock standoff); unanticipated anomalies (her unexpected love for

Owen); contradictions (relentless pressure from Mrs. Gereth in direct opposition to her own

standards of conduct); disruptions of goals (the ultimate loss of both Owen and Poynton, with all

its invaluable "things,"); extreme novelty that cannot be comprehended (Fleda's inability to

assume her position as a New Woman, as much as she aspires to); and interruptions of organized

sequences of actions (the dubiety and miscommunications that directly result in Fleda's losses).

Each obstruct and complicate Fleda's consciousness in specific moments, altogether constructing

a new interiority of turbulent confusion. She is eventually reduced to replaying the events of her

story in her own mind, destined to be defined by them indefinitely.[201] In the end, Fleda is thus

resigned to her unprecedented position at the dissonant periphery between optimistic theoretician

and defeated realist against the unsettling backdrop of Poynton engulfed in flames – a befitting

metaphor for the incendiary philosophical discordance that marked fin de siècle culture.[202]

Fleda's journey toward what preeminent early modernist author Joseph Conrad deemed

"the full light of imperishable consciousness"[203] begins upon her acquaintance with Mrs. Gereth.

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[200] Preface, *The Spoils of Poynton*.

[201] The implication at the end of the story is that Fleda, having rejected her chance at happiness in the form of marriage to Owen, will instead remain Mrs. Gereth's spinster companion. Her chosen path of renunciation — equal parts intentional and devastating — will thus define the rest of her life.

[202] According to Len Platt, Poynton's conflagration depicts the imminent end of traditional aristocracy, a foretoken of the potentially volatile and destructive unpredictability the twentieth-century turn might bring.

[203] Conrad, in an essay on James, who he described as "the historian of fine consciousness," states that while all other aspects of the novel are relative, "the light of consciousness" as illuminated especially by Jamesian characters in the later works have the potential to subsist as "the most enduring of the things of this earth, imperishable only as

Their chance meeting at the garishly decorated Waterbath precipitates a moment of near–

telepathic connection, such that "as they sat together, their eyes met and sent out mutual

soundings." Both, to Mrs. Gereth's delight, are equally disturbed by Waterbath's furnishings,[204]

and together they are naturally prone "to be rendered unhappy by the presence of the dreadful."

The immediate friends discuss the "intimate ugliness" of Waterbath, and Mrs. Gereth tells Fleda

of her suspicions that Owen, with his "his monstrous lack of taste" coupled with an "exaggerated

prudence," is besotted with the oldest Brigstock girl, Mona – a loutish and uncultured Philistine

of a girl – and of her unconditional refusal to receive such a vapid character as her future

daughter–in–law. Fleda, who has unsuspectingly but nevertheless acutely "put a finger on" the

"hidden spring" of Mrs. Gereth's consciousness in sharing her own equally disdainful

perceptions of Waterbath, is hesitant to judge the Brigstocks themselves. Mrs. Gereth,

emboldened by Fleda's reciprocity, presses on, rhapsodically initiating a conversation about

Poynton, her country home outfitted with precious objects d'art, to her new confidante; they are

interrupted by the noisy approach of Owen and Mona; a fleeting instance of awkward silence

ensues. Narrative consciousness is explicitly transferred to Fleda at this moment; she becomes

"That member of the party in whose intenser consciousness we shall most profitably seek a

reflection of the little drama with which we are concerned,"[205] with her "intenser consciousness"

at once oriented toward attention to both Gereths. Later, the four return to Waterbath following a

church service, and Fleda is intrigued by what she perceives to be Mrs. Gereth's scheming:

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against the short-lived work of our industrious hands." From Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, 10.

[204] We are first introduced to Mrs. Gereth through her own consciousness (before the center of interiority promptly shifts to Fleda). Through her mind's eye, we learn of the "aesthetic misery" that she has endured during her first day at Waterbath, which included being "kept awake for hours by the wall-paper in her room" at night. Mrs. Gereth is thereby primarily established as "of an admirable fine paste, with her pride and her pluck," as James notes in his Preface, but she is also immediately defined by a material worldliness that will ultimately place her at odds with the broader ethical propensity of her young charge, Fleda.

[205] Preface, *The Spoils of Poynton*.

Owen is separated from Mona (who accompanies his mother instead) and instead walks back in conversation with Fleda. This ostensibly mundane situation, in addition to her initial tête–à–tête with Mrs. Gereth, heightens Fleda's awareness; it is the commencement of what Leo Bon Levy refers to as "her imagination of her own position … a drama of thought and feeling."[206] Tellingly, the first revelation on the state of Fleda's consciousness focuses on her desire, seemingly trivial at this point, for Owen – and all the secret anticipation this spontaneous impulse suddenly brings:

> Fleda had other amusements as well … such as reflecting that, masterful and clever, with a great bright spirit, she was one of those who impose themselves as an influence; such as feeling finally that Owen Gereth was absolutely beautiful and delightfully dense. … Owen Gereth at any rate, with his inches, his features, and his lapses, was neither of these latter things. She herself was prepared, if she should ever marry, to contribute all the cleverness, and she liked to think that her husband would be a force grateful for direction. She was in her small way a spirit of the same family as Mrs. Gereth. On that flushed and huddled Sunday a great matter occurred; her little life became aware of a singular quickening. Her meagre past fell away from her like a garment of the wrong fashion, and as she came up to town on the Monday what she stared at in the suburban fields from the train was a future full of the things she particularly loved.

In the space of a single afternoon, Fleda's consciousness has shifted from withdrawn reticence to overimaginative optimist. Most importantly, from this introductory moment of interiority at the end of Chapter Two, we are given extraordinary insight into Fleda's intrinsic nature and how social and cultural bearings have reinforced her mindset. She is established as an unlikely yet eager protege of Mrs. Gereth, welcoming this exchange of "her meagre past" for an embrace within "a spirit of the same family" of her older friend; she believes in the superiority of her

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[206] Leo Bon Levy, *Versions of Melodrama: A Study of the Fiction and Drama of Henry James, 1865-1897* (University of California Press: 1957), 105.

perceptions; and she is subjectively predisposed to romanticism.[207] Fleda's "little life" is not

exquisite, but neither is it lacking; before meeting Mrs. Gereth, she is unbothered by her minimal

circumstances, readily assuming the role of primary caretaker for her elderly father, and content

with her aesthetic sensibilities as an artist in the absence of actual material possession. The

Victorian ethos that has so obviously defined Fleda's upbringing has taught her to not only

embody a correspondingly strict set of standards, but to also become a "central transmitter of

these cultural values," as Sandra Kumato Stanley suggests.[208] By placing Fleda's center of

consciousness within the larger confines of a late–Victorian discernment that will progressively

devolve into disarray, James presents her as both an immediate foil for Mrs. Gereth, and an

imminent one for herself.

The first favorable interaction with Mrs. Gereth functions as a means of psychologically

positive reinforcement for Fleda; she is convinced of the validity of her own perceptions on

account of a mutual aesthetical alignment with her older friend, a high–born, cultured, well–

traveled figure of sophistication. Mrs. Gereth, however, is not truly reflective of the maternal

ideal that Fleda is subconsciously relying upon for implicit approval and guidance; she is,

instead, an embodiment of the disenfranchised, dispossessed Victorian mother, deprived of any

legal recourse as her son positions himself to inherit treasures that she has spent decades

amassing. According to Ann Sumner Holmes and Claudia Nelson, one manifestation of

burgeoning anti–Victorian sentiment at the end of the century was incorporated in negative

portrayals of Victorian mothers, both actual and figurative:

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[207] Mrs. Gereth, in her "mothering" of the motherless Fleda, stands against the traditional morality and altruism that envisions 19th century motherhood. She, Madame Merle, Maud Lowder, and Susan Stringham, among other Jamesian mother-figures, are all problematically distorted versions of the idealized Victorian mother.
[208] Sandra K. Stanley, "Female Acquisition in *The Spoils of Poynton*." In *Keeping the Victorian House*, ed. Vanessa Dickerson (New York, Routledge: 1995), 131-48. Some of the most earnest representations of interior consciousness in James's works stem from the figure of the artist or the character who appreciates art — Fleda happens to personify both — possessing a heightened aesthetic sensitivity.

It would seem that if one of the preoccupations of the nineteenth century was the creation of iconic maternity, one of the preoccupations of the twentieth has been its destruction. ...The disparity of these random examples emblematizes the extent to which such images had invaded the national imagination; there are any number of similar instances, which one may choose to consider in the context of a revulsion on the part of the fin de siècle against femininity in general. ...These competing visions of motherhood emerged against a background of growing confusion and anxiety regarding sexuality."[209]

Mrs. Gereth, who James describes in his Preface as ultimately "only clever" and thus confined by a mercenary, reactionary duplicity, epitomizes the repressed frustrations of Victorian womanhood – particularly the facets of displaced widowhood and estranged motherhood – and she will soon attempt to rectify her lack of circumstantial and situational control by purposefully instigating dissonance within Fleda's consciousness.

This instructive alliance as imagined by Fleda is not restricted to shared artistic appreciation. Encouraged by Mrs. Gereth's personal commendations in sharp contrast to their joint derision of the Brigstocks and Waterbath, Fleda is further convinced of the supposed infallibility of her broader intelligence; she conceives herself to be of the same disposition as the imposingly influential, "masterful and clever, great bright spirit" of Mrs. Gereth. The most self–evident affirmation of Fleda's newly distorted consciousness within the mirror of indoctrinated Victorian femininity lies in her succinct yet revelatory contemplations of marriage. As a potential wife, she views herself as the sole contributor of intelligence; she imagines a husband in the image of simple–minded, vacuous Owen, relieved and "grateful for direction." For Fleda, the concept of marriage entails a dyadic interaction that extends beyond the wife's expected role of support for and subservience to her husband as fostered by Victorian culture; rather, for a woman of her own "cleverness," the marital relationship is akin to one between informed advisor and

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[209] Ann Sumner Holmes and Claudia Nelson, eds., *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925* (Springer: 1997), 4.

oblivious advisee. Fleda's wish for this type of uniquely companionate marriage is the first

indication that her putatively strict Victorian code is not without its own determinants, provisions

that place her squarely within the margins of New Womanhood. The year before *Spoils* was

published in 1896, the writer and journalist Hulda Friederichs penned a two–part series in a new

periodical, *Young Woman*,[210] exploring the same conflicts between "Old" and "New" notions of

femininity that Fleda is attempting to traverse. The result was an extensive refutation of publicly

misleading portrayals of the New Woman, largely commodified in parody, falsely represented as

an "odious, loud creature who appears ... on the stage, in the caricaturist's work, and in the cheap

sensational novel … the real New Woman … has to be reckoned with as an important factor in

the life of to–day." James's construction of Fleda is a rebuttal of widely held social conceptions

of the New Woman as a primitive disruptor of traditional femininity. She is, instead, an

envisionment of Friederich's outline of the "real" concept: still "the centre of the home circle,"

and now also "the being towards which men turn in times of pain, anxiety, and trouble; the

helper of the helpless, the healer of the wounds of life, the faithful, loyal friend, the interpreter of

all that is most tender, graceful, true, and fair … she can be all this and more, with the more

chances of success, the more she is allowed to develop her mental faculties; the less she is

dependent for her daily bread and for her pleasures, on man, her former master, but now her

fellow–worker, her friend, her equal." As his rough notes on *Spoils* reveal,[211] James intended to

depict Fleda through the same ideology: she is an indisputable paragon of virtue to the extent that

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[210] Friederichs was a pioneering figure in late-Victorian women's journalism, with her activism as the focus of her work. In addition to writing for magazines directed toward young women readers, including *Young Women* and *Women at Home*, she was also a freelance interviewer for the *Westminster Gazette*, a much larger, widely circulated periodical with a more generalized audience in the late 1880s.

[211] James, *Notebooks*, 219. His extensive outline of *Spoils*, most of which consists of a third-dimensional plan for construction, complete with rationalizations on his development of Fleda, recalls Wilkie Collins' observation in his Preface of *The Woman in White*: "It may be possible in novel-writing to present characters successfully without telling a story; but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters: their existence, as recognizable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told."

the "fineness" of the novel "is the fineness of Fleda … my thing is that Fleda becomes rather fine, DOES something, distinguishes herself to the reader." His original intentions for Fleda's disposition – "to represent Fleda as committing, for drama's sake, some broad effective stroke of her own," with a similarity to his drawing of Mrs. Gereth – would have subjected his heroine to the same derogatory elements of the false fin de siècle New Woman narrative that Friederichs decries.

    Fleda's tempered establishment at the fringes of both Victorianism and New Womanhood, each side magnified by her unlikely partnership with Mrs. Gereth, leaves her deeply vulnerable to the instigation of internal dissonance and subsequent subversion of her sense of self. Mrs. Gereth's active process of undermining Fleda's consciousness begins in the month before the latter's first visit to Poynton, as the pair "suffer together" at the Gereths' borrowed London home in anticipation of traveling to the grand house for the upcoming summer. It is here, at Cadogan Place, where Mrs. Gereth pontificates a carefully crafted lore that interweaves the story of her life, her marriage, and how Poynton came to be; Fleda is, predictably, enthralled and captivated:

> There had been in the first place the exquisite old house itself, early Jacobean, supreme in every part: it was a provocation, an inspiration, a matchless canvas for the picture. Then there had been her husband's sympathy and generosity, his knowledge and love, their perfect accord and beautiful life together, twenty–six years of planning and seeking, a long, sunny harvest of taste and curiosity. Lastly, she never denied, there had been her personal gift, the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector–a patience, an almost infernal cunning, that had enabled her to do it all with a limited command of money. There wouldn't have been money enough for any one else, she said with pride, but there had been money enough for her. … It was fascinating to poor Fleda, who hadn't a penny in the world nor anything nice at home, and whose only treasure was her subtle mind, to hear this genuine English lady, fresh and fair, young in the fifties, with gayety and conviction … Fleda, with her mother dead, hadn't so much even as a home … Her father

paid some of her bills, but he didn't like her to live with him; and she had lately, in Paris, with several hundred other young women, spent a year in a studio, arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter. She was determined to work, but her impressions, or somebody's else, were as yet her only material. … She had a sense, partly exultant and partly alarmed, of having quickly become necessary to her imperious friend, who indeed gave a reason quite sufficient for it in telling her there was nobody else who understood.[212]

Mrs. Gereth's rosy portrait of a "beautiful life" – replete with a generous husband and abundant wealth, enshrined within the ornate treasures of an equally dignified manor – marks the first subtle fragmentation of Fleda's scruples. The motherless young girl, mostly shunned by her father, finds in Mrs. Gereth a model of ideal feminine Victorian stability: a charmed marital life teeming with exotic acquisitions from foreign expeditions, and a perfect abode to house these receptacles of happiness in. But Fleda is also undeniably mesmerized by the material value of "the things," having possessed neither "a penny in the world" nor "anything nice at home," at once drawing comparisons to the limited matrix of her own existence. This slight moment of longing will lead to others of increased emotion and intensity, and as Akio Namekata claims, they imply that Fleda is perhaps "not such an embodiment of superior moral principles as to go straight on without wavering on the course of action she had once decided on. No, she is human enough to be capable of many misgivings."[213] Fleda's self–awareness of her material desires are, at this point, manifesting at a subconscious level – she truly does not frame those feelings of awe alongside any sense of discordance with her personal virtues – and thus, Mrs. Gereth's initiation is complete. We know Fleda is, as James says in his notes, predisposed to behave "in the light of honour and duty," but now we also know that these inclinations do not preclude her from

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[212] *The Spoils*, 14.
[213] Akio Namekata, "Some Notes on *The Spoils of Poynton*," in *The Literary Review* (The English Literary Society: 1970), 19-36.

imagining, however briefly, a more uplifted life that transcends the legal, economical, and social

constraints of Victorian dogma.

Following the stay with Mrs. Gereth at Cadogan Place, Fleda's arrival at Poynton and her

subsequent tangle in the Gereth–Brigstock feud is marked by her metacognition emerging at a

conscious level, and she begins to directly experience numerous cognitive contradictions that

provoke dissonance.[214] It is only after viewing Poynton in all its glory that Fleda, now

"palpitating" with "the full revelation," is suddenly aghast at "the cruel English custom of the

expropriation of the lonely mother" – the result of a gross lack of comprehensive equity laws that

would give Mrs. Gereth at least some control over her late husband's estate and possessions.

Fleda, sufficiently disturbed with the abrupt realization, then attempts to rationalize Mr. Gereth's

oversight in designating a will in favor of his wife, assuming that Mrs. Gereth could surely

"depend upon Owen's affection" – in addition to the son's lifelong apathy regarding Poynton, as

described by his mother – and leave her with the house and its treasures. When Fleda suggests

this – surely, a "good–humored, graceful compromise" could be reached – she is disconcerted by

the "smothered ferocity" of Mrs. Gereth's response: Owen is no longer "free" to relinquish either

the objects or the property, and it is Mona who will dictate his decisions from now on. Fleda,

who instinctively strives to remain hopeful about human action and moral possibility, will

remain uncomfortable with Mrs. Gereth's ill characterization of Mona, in spite of her own

disdain for the Brigstocks; she also cannot control her growing pity for Owen, which is matched

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[214] Festinger discusses this "direct interaction" with nonconsonant elements at length. The imputed process of
dissonance realization, followed by the subsequent drive toward reduction, involves the mind's "conscious
realization of conflicting cognitions, followed by an active phase of coping with such cognitions." Fleda, at first,
represses such cognitions (in an echo of Friederichs' dismay of the Victorian woman's confinement by "three
words" that "are stamped all over her brain and her heart ... Conceal, Restrict, Simulate"), until her "secret" betrays
her.

only by her sympathy for his mother. The stage is hence set[215] for Fleda to consequently become the impossibly paradoxical figure James describes in his Preface – maintaining independent willpower, but nevertheless consumed by the irreconcilable dissonance of external pressures: "The free spirit, always much tormented, and by no means always triumphant, is heroic, ironic, pathetic or whatever, and, as exemplified in the record of Fleda Vetch, for instance, 'successful,' only through having remained free."

For the moment, however, the tangible beauty of Poynton quells Fleda's fomenting dissonance; she shifts from being considerably worried that Owen – having greeted her in his mother's company at Cadogan Place so often – will become suspicious of their friendship and her intentions, to allowing the material world she finds herself in quickly overwhelm her:

> She perfectly understood how Mrs. Gereth felt–she had understood but meagrely before; and the two women embraced with tears over the tightening of their bond–tears which on the younger one's part were the natural and usual sign of her submission to perfect beauty. It was not the first time she had cried for the joy of admiration, but it was the first time the mistress of Poynton, often as she had shown her house, had been present at such an exhibition. She exulted in it; it quickened her own tears; she assured her companion that such an occasion made the poor old place fresh to her again and more precious than ever. … She had commended Fleda's flair, and Fleda now gave herself up to satiety. Preoccupations and scruples fell away from her; she had never known a greater happiness than the week she passed in this initiation.[216]

Fleda has been touched by another's indulgence – in the form of persuasive accolades and the opportunity to experience luxury, both deliberate gifts from Mrs. Gereth – and her admiration

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[215] *The Spoils* was the first story James wrote after the disaster of *Guy Domville*. Although he vowed to never return to the stage, his late-period prose ineluctably absorbed yet another element of dramatic influence as a result of his foray into playwriting. In an 1896 entry on *Spoils* notes, he wrote, "I mustn't interrupt it too much with elucidations or it will be interminable. IT MUST BE AS STRAIGHT AS A PLAY — that is the only way to do."

[216] *The Spoils*, 22. Incidentally, the authentic meaning of "happiness" will become an anguished point of perpetual contention for Fleda in the aftermath of her experience.

of Poynton is implied to be perhaps not altogether spiritual after all. There persist the interstices

of certain cultural and economic configurations that underscore her self–consciousness of her

own geographical displacement (she lives with her father, having no real home of her own),

along with her marginal position in society (working class, of humble means; she is neither high

born as the Gereths are, nor nouveau riche as the Brigstocks). What appear as limitations,

however, ultimately prevent Fleda from entirely ceding her nature to the potentially corruptive

influence of Poynton and Mrs. Gereth; they also ensure her character and conduct remain high

above the likes of Mona Brigstock.[217] However, there is also no indication that Fleda would not

submit to the unvirtuous end of an end–century mindset[218] that conflates discreet symbolism with

immoderate decadence, had her inherited circumstances not preemptively disqualified her. The

question of Fleda's morality existing as a solitary entity of innate truth, exclusive of

circumstance and culture, or, on the other hand, as a construct of her own devotion to idealized

Victorian doctrine and social milieu comes into focus. The fact that it may be a reflection of the

latter troubles her. From here, Fleda's constant attempts to retain her self–identity as she seeks to

reduce and resolve the internal conflicts that afflict it will drive the rest of the narrative.

By the time Owen brings his soon–to–be fiancée and her mother to Poynton as his guests

several weeks later, Fleda has reluctantly acknowledged the likelihood that Mrs. Gereth intends

to separate the couple by presenting her new friend "as an exemplary contrast" for Owen to

consider. Perturbed, she attempts to dismiss the possibility, instead drawing confidence in

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[217] Stanley, 135. Fleda's affirmation of the normative social order, her desire to conform rather than subvert, and her marginal status as an unmarried young woman all render her vulnerable to Mrs. Gereth.
[218] James frequently implies that Fleda's morality is not entirely intrinsic and categorical, but because it comprises a code of conduct she has seized, internalized, and practiced without fail, it has become her source of personal pride. Otherwise, as Oscar Wilde would later write, "Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels," who recognize that "disobedience … is man's original virtue."

presuming her "maneuvers to show herself to moral advantage"[219] will shield her from Mrs.

Gereth's plot. With these thoughts in mind, Fleda decides that a feigned stance of ineffectual

passivity toward Mrs. Gereth's dilemma will enable her to defend Owen – to "cover him …

protect him" from the manipulations of both his mother and Mona. While Fleda further justifies

her concentration on Owen's happiness as a component of her own contribution to "sweetness

and light"[220] virtues, an example of her "aim at the solutions congruent with her high moral

standards,"[221] she also simultaneously refuses to examine the reasons underlying her need to

shelter Owen, afraid of what she will discover. This is why Mrs. Gereth's timely outburst (in

Owen's presence) following the Brigstocks' visit terrifies Fleda:

> I couldn't bear the thought of such a woman here–I couldn't. … Who would save them for
> me–I ask you who would? … You would, of course–only you, in all the world, because
> you know, you feel, as I do myself, what's good and true and pure." No severity of the
> moral law could have taken a higher tone in this implication of the young lady who had
> not the only virtue Mrs. Gereth actively esteemed. 'You would replace me, you would
> watch over them, you would keep the place right,' she austerely pursued, "and with you
> here–yes, with you, I believe I might rest, at last, in my grave!" She threw herself on
> Fleda's neck, and before Fleda, horribly shamed, could shake her off, had burst into tears
> which couldn't have been explained, but which might perhaps have been understood.

Fleda's hidden desire for Owen is, to her, representative in equal parts of forbidden fantasy and

iniquitous amorality. Mrs. Gereth, currently oblivious to the truth of the girl's feelings for her

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[219] Robert C. McLean, "The Subjective Adventure of Fleda Vetch," in *Henry James: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. Tony Tanner (Macmillan International: 1968), 204-221.
[220] In his unfavorable 1865 review of Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, James argued that "Society is maintained by natural sense and natural feeling. We cannot conceive a society in which these principles are not in some manner represented." James views Fleda as an Arnoldian "depository of intelligence" whose duty it is to spread and uphold ideal standards, regardless of the insurmountable odds stacked against her.
[221] Nevena Stojanovic, "On Values, Interests, and Rewards: Fleda Vetch's Quiet Victory in Henry James's The Spoils of Poynton." In *An Introvert in an Extrovert World: Essays on the Quiet Ones* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2015), 82-89.

son, has inadvertently ruptured Fleda's ability to repress her dissonance. Just as Fleda had "put a finger on her hidden spring" when they first connected at Waterbath, Mrs. Gereth has now done the same; in suddenly vocalizing the prospect of Owen choosing Fleda instead of Mona, she has validated a sentiment that Fleda was prepared to eternally deny, "the unintended insult to her dignity, which has come dangerously close to exposing her secret desire for Owen."[222] Fleda is actually much more distraught by this self–perceived, surreptitious moral deficiency on her part – the fact that she secretly loves a man who is engaged to another woman – than on account of Mrs. Gereth's literal "offering" of her as a wife to Owen.[223] She nevertheless decides, "after the tide of emotion had somewhat ebbed," to remain in the company of Mrs. Gereth,[224] and soon becomes the de facto mediator between mother and son as they grow increasingly estranged. A series of dramatic events follow in quick succession: Mrs. Gereth – following an extended argument with Owen over Poynton after he announces his engagement to Mona – agrees to move to Ricks, the quaint family cottage, on the condition that she is permitted to take with her what she "liked best"; Fleda, who had been dreading sharing Owen's compromise with his mother, is both relieved and silently bothered by the deal; she returns to London to attend her sister's marriage, and in the meantime, receives a letter from Mrs. Gereth informing that "her migration" to Ricks has been completed. A chance meeting with Owen the next day, in the middle of the city, heightens the "divided spirit" she has been harboring since settling the mutual

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[222] Smith, 115.

[223] While Fleda cultivates a "finer consciousness" and a "treasure" of a "subtle mind" that is responsive to all around her, Mrs. Gereth suffers from the self-serving imperviousness of a "serene conscience" that is neither nuanced nor intellectually disposed. This is one of several characteristics that places her closer in mindset to Mona than to Fleda.

[224] Fleda remains, in spite of her humiliation, because she concludes that Mrs. Gereth's sensitivities have been corroded on account of her desperate plight, and she sympathizes with Mrs. Gereth's rising despair: "The truth was simply that all Mrs. Gereth's scruples were on one side and that her ruling passion had in a manner despoiled her of her humanity." Fleda thus perceives the indelicacy as central to the new normal of Mrs. Gereth's nature. Additionally, Fleda is arguably just as intrigued by the drama that excites her consciousness as much as she is drawn to Owen; she wishes to stay close to both, though she tries to convince herself otherwise. One of James' objectives in writing *The Spoils* was to illustrate how depraved materialism can permanently damage an individual's estimation of human relationships — in effect, an exchange of humanity for consumerism — and Mrs. Gereth, along with the Brigstocks, becomes a reflection of this trade-off.

compromise. Daniel Schneider's general discussion of James's preoccupation with the "divided self" is exemplified in Fleda's escalating inability to compartmentalize her nonconsonant affections for Owen, Mrs. Gereth, and Poynton; she represents "a soul so deeply split in its inclinations, so checked and inhibited by its 'variety of imagination' that it finds itself at a profound disadvantage" in dealing with the "hard, functional" people of the external world – those, as typified by Mrs. Gereth, "who know exactly what they want and set out to achieve their ends without hesitation or compromise or loss of energy," the opposite, such as Owen, who elicit pity within this atmosphere of aggression; and still others, in the form of the bellicose Mona,[225] who responds to Mrs. Gereth's hostility with an even greater, more clever antagonism on her own part.

Fleda has already bound herself to what Festinger describes as a "behavioral commitment,"[226] and Mrs. Gereth's rattling speech has effectively challenged her perception of that commitment. She has been plunged into a new self–awareness – one that forces her to focus intently on any means of dissonance reduction and "deal with dissonant relations"[227] in order to remain the discrete "free spirit" James proposes her to be. Fleda's cognition of internal disequilibrium is now at the forefront of her consciousness, and her encounter with Owen at Oxford Street – following a weeklong break from Mrs. Gereth where she has had time to withdraw and reflect – marks the first time she must actively defend her original behavioral

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[225] In contrast to Friederichs' explanation of genuine New Womanhood, Deborah Wynne describes Mona Brigstock as "intent on her rights, a New Woman at home in fin de siècle culture." Mrs. Gereth is of the same prototype, "a militant female collector," but having lived her life during the apogee of the Victorian era, is nonetheless "trapped in the past."

[226] As Festinger elaborates, "The perception of behavior is one of the many cognitions that a person holds. It is an important cognition because, compared to attitudes, it is highly resistant to change. It is the behavioral commitment that produces consequences and the perception of foreseeability and aversiveness of those consequences that determine the arousal of dissonance." Fleda is determined and desperate to sustain her commitment: "She had, in fact, no consciousness of any intention but that of confining herself rigidly to her function."

[227] Fleda has a tendency toward absurd self-incrimination; at different moments, she blames herself for both Mrs. Gereth's and Owen's woes. Festinger observes that when an individual's assumption of responsibility for an "adverse event" is largely illusory, exaggerated, or delusional, the resulting dissonance can increase in severity.

commitment. As they converse and walk together, Owen is clearly drawn to Fleda, and this

alarms her more. This new suggestion[228] that he may, to some degree, return her "unethical"

secret feelings triggers a sudden defensive mechanism within Fleda: she literally flees,[229] nearly

bursting into tears, running away in an attempt to reduce her discomfort and fear. Schneider

presents a philosophical explanation in conjunction with the cerebral mechanisms of Fleda's

psychological processes, referring to this type of flight as "the escape motif," a standard

Jamesian thematic pattern especially prominent in his later narratology. For her mind to be

seized by others is to compromise her morals, and thus, Fleda's "divided self seeks isolation as

its main maneuver … to preserve identity under pressure from the dread of engulfment, to escape

the gaze of its persecutors … we see the inclination to shrink from life's wars in almost all of

James's heroes and heroines." He refers to Fleda specifically as a falsely idealistic, sentimental

"consummate self–deceiver" who "again and again" seeks to escape the confines of external

intimidations; there is, ultimately, no reprieve for her, but rather a lesson that there persists

> a connection between the Fleda Vetches of this world and a detached observer
> who spends a lifetime building his palace of thought. If the soul is threatened by 'the
> other' and unable to compete on practical terms, it can choose to live in a world in which
> there is no question of competition – a world of fantasy, a house of fiction ... to make

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[228] James's original plan, as outlined in his notes, did not include the eventual reciprocity of Fleda's feelings from Owen; the fact that he changed course reinforces his view of life as an unpredictable composition of decidedly natural senses and natural feelings; effective, meaningful fiction must reflect the same unbridled path: "I have, a little, to guard myself against the drawback of having, in the course of the story determined on something that I had not intended — or had not expected — at the start. I had intended to make Fleda 'fall in love' with Owen, or, to express it *moins banalement*, to represent her as loving him. But I had not intended to represent a feeling of this kind on Owen's part. Now, however, I have done so; in my last little go at the thing (which I have been able to do only so interruptedly), it inevitably took that turn and I must accept the idea and work it out. What I felt to be necessary, as the turn in question came, was that what should happen between Fleda and Owen Gereth should be something of a certain intensity."

[229] Several critics have pointed to the etymological connotations of Fleda's name in this regard: flight, escapism, and disappearance.

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himself invulnerable by locking up life in his categories, his theories. Encased in his house of fictions, hiding from all real threats, such a person creates a fantasy world in which he has absolute control and forces all the creatures in his universe to do his bidding. He is perfectly safe in this self–created world; nothing will occur in it that he does not wish.[230]

The next meeting between Fleda and Owen occurs at Ricks, again by happenstance. The context of this encounter is – owing to the last – much more problematic for Fleda than the spontaneity of what transpired at Oxford Street. Her "divided soul" is presently both upset and enthralled to discover that the surreptitious Mrs. Gereth has removed virtually the entirety of Poynton to accompany her "migration." But when Fleda retires to the "the chamber embellished for her pleasure" by her manipulative host, her spirit diminishes:

> She couldn't care for such things when they came to her in such ways; there was a wrong about them all that turned them to ugliness. In the watches of the night she saw Poynton dishonored; she had cared for it as a happy whole, she reasoned, and the parts of it now around her seemed to suffer like chopped limbs. … He had looked to her to help him, and this was what her help had been. He had done her the honor to ask her to exert herself in his interest, confiding to her a task of difficulty, but of the highest delicacy. Hadn't that been exactly the sort of service she longed to render him? Well, her way of rendering it had been simply to betray him and hand him over to his enemy. Shame, pity, resentment oppressed her in turn; in the last of these feelings the others were quickly submerged.
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> Mrs. Gereth had imprisoned her in that torment of taste; but it was clear to her for an hour at least that she might hate Mrs. Gereth. Something else, however, when morning came, was even more intensely definite: the most odious thing in the world for her would be ever again to meet Owen. She took on the spot a resolve to neglect no precaution that could lead to her going through life

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[230] Daniel J. Schneider, "The Divided Self in the Fiction of Henry James." *PMLA* 90, No. 3 (1975): 447-60. Fleda has consistently displayed a tendency to retreat into her imagination, oftentimes deluded, whenever she senses potential confrontation; she "dodged and dreamed and trifled away the time … she gave herself, in her sentient solitude, up to a mere fairy tale," for example, as she sought to avoid thinking about the "ugliness of this duty" — her task of bearing Owen's requests to his mother, even as she braces to remain neutral.

without that accident. Her position had become, in a few hours, intolerably false; in as few more hours as possible she would therefore put an end to it.

Fleda's newfound resolve quickly succumbs to the incessant reasoning of her overburdened, dissonant mind: she concludes the "sharpened" Mrs. Gereth will surely wonder as to why "she had grown so warm about Owen's rights" and thereby initiate a discussion that would cause Fleda to be "nervous for her secret." Thus, her "one safety was in silence," at least for the time being, and she resigns herself to the ongoing misery of all–encompassing pretenses. In true fashion, as early critic Anna Leach comments, "There are moments when he [James] is cruel,"[231] and what follows Fleda's extended introspection epitomizes this notion: "the most odious thing" comes to pass, and she finds herself alone with Owen at Ricks. This time, the enclosed proximity disallows her to flee, and so recommits to "confining herself rigidly to her function" – her original behavioral commitment. In such close proximity Fleda cannot "shrink away" by removing herself physically, so she assumes an aloof, inscrutable manner with Owen through a simultaneously defensive and adaptive deportment.[232] With her consciousness in overdrive, she carefully dissimulates with the intention to again negotiate both sides[233] of the dispute, once more accommodating Owen's requests to intercede on his behalf. Under this planned guise of neutrality, she also circumvents Owen's increasingly personal questions – "You won't go away, I hope?" "If you should leave my mother, where would you go?" – with a consciously managed

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[231] Anna Leach, "Henry James: An Appreciation." In *The Forum*, Volume 55 (Forum Publishing Company: 1916), 559.
[232] Within the framework of Festinger's experiments on response, this is a repetitive trend: "A commitment from which they could not withdraw caused a higher incidence of dissonance … While the disconnect may be deliberate, it may not be conscious. It operates as a defense mechanism for practicing avoidance and denial." Fleda, unable to extricate herself from her position as mediator with the added burden of her feelings for Owen, yields to both during her final interactions with him.
[233] Fleda, for all her optimism and faith in the precedence of human decency, never thought of this familial dispute as a division of "sides" until viewing the treasures at Ricks: "It had come indeed to a question of 'sides,' Fleda thought, for the whole place was in battle array."

calmness that contradicts her demeanor at Oxford Street. Her behavior here is also correspondent with Schneider's remarks on James's insistence in creating the dissonant center of consciousness as "a radar of sorts … a scanning mechanism" that harbors a "constant dread and resentment of being turned into someone else's 'thing' … and a sense of being in someone else's power and control. Freedom, then, consists of being inaccessible." Fleda establishes her inaccessibility first with Mrs. Gereth through evasive resistance and avoiding confrontation; she does the same with Owen by feigning detachment and repeatedly dismissing his attempts to speak on a personal level.

Fleda is, however, only momentarily successful at immersing herself within this formulated phase of seeking shelter through a falsified appearance coupled with the force of her recently–tenuous willpower. Owen, for all his foolishness, is as grateful for her continued mediation as he is baffled by her unexpected remoteness, and it is his well–intentioned yet transgressive inquiries about her life outside of the Gereths' orbit – "You don't–a–live anywhere in particular, do you?" – that breaches the strict parameters of her mind's plans, threatening to expose her actual helplessness and inadequacy.[234] She is now "wound up to such a height that there might well be a light in her pale, fine little face," and in a burst of feeling, Owen suddenly imposes on her his unregulated thoughts: "When I got into this I didn't know you, and now that I know you how can I tell you the difference? And she [Mona] is so different, so ugly and vulgar, in the light of this squabble. No, like you I've never known one. It's another thing, it's a new thing altogether. Listen to me a little: can't something be done?" Fleda, in all her restored vulnerability, is petrified, slipping from her stance as "an actress" discordantly working through "a scene and a presentation," and returning to the mercy of her dissonant consciousness:

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[234] As Schneider notes, "we discover the fear of seizure by the eye everywhere" in James's fiction. There is a correlation between this recurring motif and James's own childhood insecurities, according to Schneider, rooted in his having "played of the role of the angelic, all-compliant son."

It was what had been in the air in those moments at Kensington, and it only wanted words to be a committed act. The more reason, to the girl's excited mind, why it shouldn't have words; her one thought was not to hear, to keep the act uncommitted. She would do this if she had to be horrid. … Owen, as if in quest of his umbrella, looked vaguely about the hall–looked even wistfully up the staircase … "I think it's awfully nice here," he observed; "I assure you I could do with it myself."

"I should think you might, with half your things here! It's Poynton itself–almost. Good–bye, Mr. Gereth," Fleda added. … "Oh, I don't mean with all the things here," he explained in regard to the opinion he had just expressed. "I mean I could put up with it just as it was; it had a lot of good things, don't you think? I mean if everything was back at Poynton, if everything was all right." … Fleda didn't understand his explanation unless it had reference to another and more wonderful exchange–the restoration to the great house not only of its tables and chairs, but of its alienated mistress. This would imply the installation of his own life at Ricks, and obviously that of another person. Such another person could scarcely be Mona Brigstock. He put out his hand now; and once more she heard his unsounded words: "With everything patched up at the other place, I could live here with you. Don't you see what I mean?"

Fleda saw perfectly, and, with a face in which she flattered herself that nothing of this vision appeared, gave him her hand and said: "Good–bye, good–bye."

Fleda, who as we remember sees and feels "almost demonically," retreats from Owen's gaze[235] posthaste and nearly forces him out the door, "quite waving him away," even holding the door "a minute, lest he should try to come in again." Escaping to the safe isolation of her room upstairs, she admits to herself "that she now for the first time knew her temptation. Owen had put it before her with an art beyond his own dream." There follows an extended introspection from Fleda that is diametrically punctuated by euphoria, dread, distress, delight, self–developed virtue, and hope;

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[235] Owen, adding to Fleda's discomfort, had also possessively grabbed her hand "very firmly and kept it even after an effort made by her to recover it — an effort not repeated, as she felt it best not to show she was flurried."

she aims to counter the salience of her dissonance by acknowledging Owen may return her feelings, but at the same time, she still holds that their potential union would be impossible – immoral – unless Mona gives him up freely and unconditionally:

> To know that she had become to him an object of desire gave her wings that she felt herself flutter in the air: it was like the rush of a flood into her own accumulations. These stored depths had been fathomless and still, but now, for half an hour, in the empty house, they spread till they overflowed. He seemed to have made it right for her to confess to herself her secret. … He had no right to appear to wish to draw in another girl to help him to an escape. If he was in a plight he must get out of the plight himself, he must get out of it first, and anything he should have to say to any one else must be deferred and detached. She herself, at any rate–it was her own case that was in question–couldn't dream of assisting him save in the sense of their common honor. She could never be the girl to be drawn in, she could never lift her finger against Mona. There was something in her that would make it a shame to her forever to have owed her happiness to an interference. … Their protected error (for she indulged a fancy that it was hers too) was like some dangerous, lovely living thing that she had caught and could keep–keep vivid and helpless in the cage of her own passion and look at and talk to all day long.[236]

Fleda understands that her now–conscious admissions will betray her in Mrs. Gereth's presence: her "excited mind" is appearing to be "too conscious"; and the exhaustive masquerade is now unnaturally exaggerated, no longer a contrivance that will protect Fleda from her host's "fixedness." Mrs. Gereth, for her part, almost instantly surmises the truth of Fleda's feelings, and Fleda – by now accustomed to her position as a "divided soul" – is both relieved to discontinue, at least partially, the subterfuge that fails her, she implores Fleda, beseeching her perpetually miserable protégé to abandon every obsolete, romanticized design of puritanical morality she harbors and, instead, purposefully "do what you will" to effectively entrap Owen and "get him

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[236] *Spoils,* 116.

away from" Mona in an aggressive assertion of post–Victorian womanhood. "You know you can." But there is one component of Fleda's dissonance that Mrs. Gereth remains unaware of: the fact that Owen reciprocates Fleda's feelings. Fleda perceives this oversight and is determined to keep it concealed, if only to relieve herself, however slightly, from the freshly incessant persuasions of Mrs. Gereth. This withholding, in the end, also leads to a triangle of miscommunication that engulfs its participants. In the meantime, Fleda recovers a certain candidness that has been released along with the burden of her secret; she is consequently less intimidated by, and more direct in opposing, the designs of Mrs. Gereth. But even as Fleda argues in earnest against meeting Mrs. Gereth's indelicate "conditions," she imagines, "with a faculty that easily embraced all the heights and depths and extremities of things," being pursued by Owen. Prodded by Mrs. Gereth – who appeals to Fleda's sense of guilt – they do meet again at her father's house in London. In the midst of Fleda's agitation and Owen's brazen assertiveness, they are unceremoniously interrupted by Mrs. Brigstock, who comes to confirm suspicions of her own;[237] Owen leaves with Mrs. Brigstock, leaving Fleda to once more reflect – and to once more flee, this time to her sister's house on the outskirts of town. Owen promptly tracks her down; informs her of his quarrel with Mrs. Brigstock, on her account; and then, in a moment that, according to Patrick Quinn, results from Owen having "too long been gasping in

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[237] Right before Mrs. Brigstock barges in on the young couple, Owen says to Fleda, seemingly without any forethought: "There's only one person on the whole earth I really love … you're surely able to guess the one person on earth I love?" to which Fleda almost shouts in response, deeply flustered and in denial, "Your mother!" Mrs. Brigstock arrives too late to witness this, but it is the aftermath, "the voice of the invaded room" that had "made the little place a vivid picture of intimacy," in her sight, between Owen and Fleda: "Mrs. Brigstock, in the doorway, stood looking from one of the occupants of the room to the other; then they saw her eyes attach themselves to a small object that had lain hitherto unnoticed on the carpet. This was the biscuit of which, on giving Owen his tea, Fleda had taken a perfunctory nibble: she had immediately laid it on the table, and that subsequently, in some precipitate movement, she should have brushed it off was doubtless a sign of the agitation that possessed her. For Mrs. Brigstock there was apparently more in it than met the eye. … Mrs. Brigstock clearly took in also the sprawling tea-things and the mark as of high water in the full faces of her young friends." Martha Manta cites this scene, with the broken biscuit in particular, as an example of James's paradigmatic linkage between silent pieces of evidence and the shocks of meaning. Just as Poynton's treasures signify Fleda's dissonance, the biscuit on the carpet is materialization of her fear of being perceived as a wantonly "bad woman in a play."

the thin air of moral perfection that Fleda would have him breathe,"[238] he impulsively asks her to marry him.

Fleda is, at this point, enveloped by the same conflicting emotions that had splintered her consciousness at Ricks; this time, her resolve falters – she is no longer playing a part, no longer inaccessible to Owen. But her overriding moral code[239] quickly reemerges, and she no longer harbors any obligation to repress her misgivings in favor of one side over another. Though her sense of conflict is (and forever will be) irresolvable, she is now unimpeded in openly articulating her "imagination of disaster"[240] to Owen; they are now "together without a veil," and Fleda, still ashamed, has "not a shred of a secret left; it was as if a whirlwind had come and gone, laying low the great false front that she had built up stone by stone." Her "master narrative," as Dickerson maintains, aligns with a utopian, ultimately unattainable, version of Victorianism; this is what dominates her awareness throughout, and "what she will identify as her truth."[241] This is what she conveys to Owen telling him he must to back to Mona: "You're not all right–you're all wrong! … Everything must come from Mona, and if it doesn't come we've said entirely too much. You must leave me alone–forever. … You mustn't break faith. Anything is better than that. The great thing is to keep faith. Where is a man if he doesn't?" Over the course of the next two weeks, a rapid series of events seal Fleda's fate. Mrs. Gereth sends all the spoils back to

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[238] Quinn, "Motives and Morals," 575.

[239] Although James, according to his notes, intended for Fleda's "scruples" to represent a selfless, altruistic conceptualization of romantic heroism, several critics argue her code of morality is actually highly expedient. Lloyd Davis maintains that in Owen's presence, her main concern is of "Owen would admire her, adore her," while Joseph Anthony Ward determines Fleda to be "isolated in a world of various shades of egotism," including her own, "where tradition gives way to expediency."

[240] In 1896, James wrote of himself, "I have the imagination of disaster … and see life as ferocious and sinister." Still, he is neither cynic nor pessimist; and Fleda, who "demonically" sees and feels, is a mirror of the same. As Kenneth Graham observes, she exhibits something of a Transcendentalist faith in morals and motives, but also understands that destructive human frailties — including her own — constantly lurk from within. The fin de siècle world is complicated: "difficult, resistant to imagination and spirit," but at the same time, "not fatally inert, and it is not impermeable to consciousness." The "free spirit," defined by a nobleness of responsibility and virtuous action amongst an underbelly of degeneracy, epitomizes this struggle.

[241] Fleda's "truth" confines her to lifelong marginality: "She had given everything and got nothing."

Poynton after an unsolicited tip from a distressed Mrs. Brigstock led her to believe Owen and Fleda were together at last; Mona seizes the opportunity and coerces the cowardly Owen into quickly marrying at the registrar's before her adversaries have a chance to react; and Fleda and Mrs. Gereth are left to commiserate together. Of course, the consequences are dire – just as Fleda suspected they would be – and while Quinn cites Fleda's ultimatum to Owen as an example of her lack of practicality – she embodies a "dim relation to actual life," to be certain, it is obvious that a type of valorized romanticism, developed from lifelong obligation to a severe moral code, has in fact conditioned her behavior. At a time when a growing number of women were seeking to break free from the constant, tiresome negotiation of antithetical mid–19th century convictions,[242] Fleda is still submerged within their depths.

Fleda's dispositional opposition to both Mrs. Gereth, a woman of the era twice her age, and Mona, a girl of her age, illustrates her mindful unwillingness to adapt. Mrs. Gereth is trapped by her time; internally, she exhibits many of the oversimplified notions of the New Woman – combative, antagonistic, confrontational, argumentative[243] – that Friederichs warned against. She is also, however, if only outwardly, a product of early Victorianism and thus has a reputation to uphold, instead redirecting all her frustrations and desires onto Fleda, in the hopes that her new friend will act on her behalf. Mona, on the other hand, is of the same stereotypical mold as Mrs. Gereth: devious, manipulative, scheming. But Fleda's refusal to compromise her consciousness

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[242] During this period, John Stuart Mill famously addressed the Victorian woman's involuntary "artificial state" in *The Subjection of Women*: "What is now called the nature of women is eminently an artificial thing — the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others." The subordinate mid-Victorian "Angel" was expected to contentedly embrace her role of wife, mother — and of her husband's property. The other option was spinsterhood — a choice that entailed social isolation, ostracization, and repudiation. Both possibilities often began and ended in misery, with little room to navigate.

[243] Mrs. Gereth, in an attempt to assuage Fleda after uncovering her secret, tacitly refers to a rebellious streak in her younger days, another example of her incessant desire to escape Victorian subjugation at a time when the idea was impossible: "When I was a girl I was always in love, and not always with such nice people as Owen. I didn't behave as well as you; compared with you I think I must have been horrid. But if you're proud and reserved, it's your own affair; I'm proud too, though I'm not reserved—that's what spoils it."

does not, as Gargano explains, reaffirm her to be "a bloodless Victorian" who justifies her "neurotic renunciation" in the name of a pale ideal, as critics often argue.[244] Her rejection of the opportunity to appropriate both Owen and "the things," as his mother and fiancée battle for the same, is not without real temptation – her imaginative interludes reveal her struggles with dissonance. Her interiority is defined by a lofty subjectivity, while the women around her either attempt to, or are successful at, effectively reinventing their roles within a changing, charged social atmosphere – one that is much more privy to the true hollowness of Victorian dogma, and just as well versed in navigating, circumventing, and exploiting its contradictions.

Since James's characterization of Fleda's dissonance exists within this end–century context, the motives underlying her self–sacrificial renunciation have been perceived with eclectic variation, as critical assessments reveal. Early, contemporaneous reception of Fleda largely focused on a profound appreciation of her perceived piety, as an 1897 review from *The Critic* demonstrates:

> The character of Fleda is one of the finest of the author's conceptions. She carries her love of ideal beauty over from the department of appreciation into that of action, and seeks to apply to conduct the tests for art. Whether one agrees with her notions of duty or not, he must recognize the delicacy and fidelity with which she is drawn. Here is the 'portrait of a lady' beside which even Isabel Archer's presentment seems crude and unfinished. In her character, and, indeed, throughout the book, the writer comes so near truth that he attains absolute beauty. ... In short, the cleverer Mr. James becomes, the more convincing he grows. One gets from his work at his best an intimation of perfection, a deep consciousness that here is something so fine that it could not be bettered; and this consciousness almost becomes overwhelming to the reader of *The Spoils of Poynton*.[245]

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[244] Gargano, 658.
[245] Jeannette Leonard Gilder and Joseph Benson Gilder, eds., *The Critic*, Volume 27 (Good Literature Publishing Company: 1897), 301.

As the significance of Freudian criticism advanced, so did uncomplimentary re–evaluations of

Fleda's nature from within the framework of psychoanalysis. Quinn describes her as a deluded

"agent of destruction" who wreaks havoc on herself and the Gereths; Robert McLean, who

contends Fleda as written did not accurately signify James's stated intentions of her depiction,[246]

goes further, labeling her as a "cunning" character who "victimizes" both Owen and his mother,

an unreliable figure of distortions and intentional misbeliefs who attempts to force others into

conformity with her own avowed moral extremism. The conceptualization of Fleda as an

intransigent, hysterical, self–serving neurotic is to ignore the fact that she struggles,

unremittingly, with internal conflict – rooted in both the feelings she refuses to acknowledge as

well as the pressures from those around her: Mrs. Gereth, Owen, and the unseen Brigstocks.

Both Mrs. Gereth and Mona Brigstock are single–minded and unyielding, without internal

conflict or misgivings, and it is Fleda who attempts to mitigate, resolve, and unite all at once.

Her dissonance reflects her humanity – it evokes in her a sense of irrational guilt that seems

almost Kafkaesque in nature, it elicits her empathy, it inspires her compassion – in direct contrast

with the other two women. Fleda's final acknowledgement of her disequilibrium, coupled with

her resolve to accept its cumulative, potentially tragic consequences, both empowers and

dislocates her. She is an Arnoldian incarnation of "sweetness and light," "the best which has

been thought and said"[247] in society; she also, in self–directed adherence to her own

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[246] As David Lodge points out, "Most of the critics who have commented on *The Spoils of Poynton* fall into two groups. Either they take Fleda to be the heroine of the story in the traditional sense — heroic in her readiness to sacrifice her own happiness rather than compromise her principles, sensitive and perceptive in her dealings with the other characters, to whom she is morally superior; or they have taken her to be neurotic and self-deceiving, pathological, contributing more harm than balm to the domestic row between the Gereths." He also highlights the fact that James's notes on the novel were written over a decade before the Preface, even though much of the latter is derived from the former. What results is a classic instance of the general theoretical question on bearings of authorial intention on interpretation.

[247] Fleda's nature is in the image of Matthew Arnold's precepts as set forth in *Culture and Anarchy*.

rank of morality, synthesizes a Paterian relativity to "know one's own impression, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly."[248] The "real" New Woman as described by Friederichs most closely resembles Fleda – as a "free spirit" untouched by unnatural ruses, as a working artist, as a parental caretaker, as a sensitive intellectual, and as a potential bride for Owen: "The New Woman is the Old Woman made perfect, seeking opportunities for education, employment, and love while maintaining her position as the moral and spiritual center of the home. The New Woman extends the traditional role … she retains her feminine graces, yet she is also man's equal and his partner in marriage … but is also morally superior." Stanley also draws upon this obvious parallel, observing that James "chooses as his heroine one who does not extoll change, but tradition."[249] Likewise, in a 1907 essay, James himself glorifies the integrity of such a woman, "the closed vessel of authority … an exquisite, an almost unconscious instrument of influence to a special end,"[250] one who will ensure that her psycho–social values configure a genuine form of morality.

At the core of *Spoils*, then, persist two major questions: firstly, whether or not "keeping faith" amounts to a woman's success within the shifting trends of Victorian fin de siècle culture; and secondly, if Fleda's bifurcated cognition – and her inability to overcome it – is indicative of how those trends may manifest in the New Woman as she finally turns away from the role of Victorian angel. The novella's ending, featuring the burning of Poynton, provides a final clue. If Waterbath symbolizes the cheaply failed endeavors of the nouveau–riche striving to assimilate within the bourgeoisie community, then Poynton represents the highest idealization of its opposite. Fleda's refined aesthetic sensibilities repel her from the former and draw her to the

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[248] Walter Pater, "Preface" to *The Renaissance* (1873). Fleda also embodies self-directed subjectivity, projecting her own "free spirit" on the codes she has chosen to live by, enticed by but not drawn into others' more lenient interpretation and practice of those same codes.
[249] Stanley, 138.
[250] From "The Speech and Manners of American Women," published in *Harper's Bazaar*, November-July, 1907-08.

latter, but her sublime appreciation for all that is intrinsically spiritual and symbolic also precludes her from Mrs. Gereth's obsessive, primarily acquisitive valuation of the house and its treasures.[251] In the company of Poynton's grandeur and the companionship of its affluent mistress, Fleda is also acutely aware of her modest social and economic state – imagining herself to be, at various instances throughout, a burden of inferiority, "a leech," "a mouse," "a lonely fly," "a parasite," and "a servant–girl." Just as Fleda constantly resists Mrs. Gereth's repeated attempts to objectify her soul[252] – with the goal of installing her as future proprietor of "the things" – she also consciously separates herself from the treasures, focusing her aesthetical reverence on provenance and historicity, in willful opposition to the unsavory Gereth–Brigstock combination of commodification and consumerism.[253] For all of Fleda's efforts, however, there eventually appear insinuations that she, too, despite all her circumspect moral sensibilities and conscientiousness, is possibly not entirely immune to materialistic desires. At her father's house, for the first time, she takes notice of his paltry collection of items – "objects, shabby and battered, of a sort that appealed little to his daughter," and she wistfully ponders the "rich fancy" of what would follow "if *she* were mistress of Poynton"; at newly–married Maggie's home, she observes her sister's unappealing "old things," concluding that, on "the bright side," these marks of poverty would never trouble her with "such a problem as Mrs. Gereth's." Still again, after sending Owen back to Mona, confronting the tangle of misunderstanding with Mrs. Gereth, and waiting for word on its outcome, she imagines becoming Poynton's mistress: "Yes, it was all for her; far round as she had gone she had been strong enough: her love had gathered in the spoils.

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[251] "Being an aesthete," as Sebastian Kluitmann observes, "does not prevent Mrs. Gereth from having just as materialistic an attitude as the Brigstocks."

[252] Not insignificantly, Mrs. Gereth calls Fleda one of her "best finds."

[253] A major component of Fleda's aesthetic appreciation of "the things" is situated in Mrs. Gereth's romantic story of their collection. They possess such intrinsic, historic beauty that they ironically stifle Fleda's ability to focus on developing her own creativity when they surround her: "Poynton moreover had been an impossible place for producing; no active art could flourish there but a Buddhistic contemplation."

She wanted indeed no catalogue to count them over; the array of them, miles away, was complete; each piece, in its turn, was perfect to her; she could have drawn up a catalogue from memory. Thus again she lived with them, and she thought of them without a question of any personal right."[254] James subtly illuminates these dissonant, atypical elements of Fleda's character to contend that fin de siècle romanticism can be dangerously corruptive; the exaltation of idealized Victorianism upends and alienates an otherwise unadulterated mind and lends the consciousness susceptible to a brazenly wild and unrealistic, deluded imagination.

Fleda, of course, sets aside these fantasies once she is confronted with reality – the loss of both Poynton and Owen. She directs her sadness and guilt to what the deprivation entails for Mrs. Gereth, not herself, once again practicing self–blame as she finds consolation in the reminder that, at her insistence, Owen did not "break faith." But when Owen, writing from abroad months later, implores her to pick a treasure – "a remembrance" of sorts, preferably the Maltese cross – from Poynton to keep as her own, her imagination takes flight for the final time:

> She would go down to Poynton as a pilgrim might go to a shrine, and as to this she must look out for her chance. She lived with her letter, before any chance came, a month, and even after a month it had mysteries for her that she couldn't meet. What did it mean, what did it represent, to what did it correspond in his imagination or his soul? What was behind it, what was beyond it, what was, in the deepest depth, within it? … She would act with secret rapture. … She moved there in thought–in the great rooms she knew; she should be able to say to herself that, for once at least, her possession was as complete as that of either of the others whom it had filled only with bitterness. And a thousand times yes–her choice should know no scruple: the thing she should go down to take would be up to the height of her privilege.

After all that has passed, for Fleda to abandon her scruples at the eleventh hour, for her to imagine herself as deserving of privilege and possession on another's account, and for her to

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[254] Fleda, in this moment, comes dangerously close to personifying the inanimate objects with a superiority over the natural world, with its suddenly "base animals or humans."

blaspheme by likening her love of Poynton and its artifacts to religious practice in the same manner as Mrs. Gereth – each of these temptations are unnatural and abnormal. For all her failed unpragmatic hypostatizing, Fleda's final lesson resides in an understanding that she will not possess because she cannot possess; she cannot exchange her untainted spirituality and originally noble intentions for the Maltese cross. While all those around her are now dispossessed, she has escaped, though not entirely of her own volition, from the corruptive influence of Poynton and its inhabitants, despite the cost to her worldly contentment. To "keep faith," then, at this turn entails sovereignty of the "free spirit," from which to rebuild in the face of personal disaster. Likewise, that dissonance which narrates and quantifies the spirit's disillusionment serves it well in the end; in Fleda's case, it instigates a literal and allegorical "burning of old cultural ideals in their own conflagration," as Stanley says, forcing the peripheral New Woman to seek new metaphors for a new era. For them, feminine acquisition will be defined "as an act of empowerment: an effort not to despoil, but to preserve, the independent will."[255] Thus, as Fleda, taking in the fire from afar, performatively declares she will "go back," it is toward this currently painful, but eventually transformative reality.

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[255] Stanley, 140. In the final scene of the novel, Fleda is emerging from her stratum of dissonance, inhabiting a new awareness within an expanded consciousness and broadened worldview — a product of her life's trial of strength.

Chapter IV

"Because you're a dove." Dissonance before death: Milly Theale and Kate Croy,
The Wings of The Dove

In 1918, two years after Henry James died in London, American poet and literary scholar

John Warren Beach published the first extensive review of his late–period novels, designating

them as "the most distinctive, where James more often achieves in them the thing at which he

was always more or less aiming."[256] With the publication of *The Spoils of Poynton* in 1896, a

revitalized "period of maturity" began, in the view of Beach, as a result of his ill–fated

playwriting venture. What followed were impressionistic "carefully planned works of art" that

were clearly influenced by James's draw to the scenic creativity of the stage. His focus on

illustrating human experience was, at this point, driven by a more dynamic establishment of the

dramatis personae. James's conceptualization of "the germ" of ideas as originating from within

character (specifically, immersion into individual consciousness) rather than plot was further

enhanced during this time. There is, most poignantly, increased experimentation with narrative

structure in the form of alternating points of view and accessibility to more than one primary

center of consciousness. Beach perceives this greater liberty as a result of James, later in life,

holding that style was distinct from design, and thus, "there is nothing to keep him from 'letting

himself go.'" This creative period was also one of equally prolific output; in between the

serializations of *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Sacred Fount*, he published a volume of travel

writing, completed editing the *New York Edition*, continued his critical compilations, and

returned stateside for a lecture series on Balzac. The culmination of these final years is defined

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[256] According to Beach, James's earlier novels displayed "more likeness to the work of his contemporaries and predecessors in English fiction," but his later works "contained more of himself." The revisions comprising the New York Edition are also reflective of this shift.

by what Leon Edel has referred to as James's ultimate "trilogy," published in immediate succession: *The Wings of the Dove* in 1902, *The Ambassadors* in 1903, and *The Golden Bowl* in 1904. *The Wings of the Dove*, in particular, is a distinct first departure from previous Jamesian "design," its origins a synthesis of elegiac reverence and personal grief in the name of his beloved cousin, Minny Temple.

Three days after Minny's death in 1870, James wrote a long, melancholic remembrance to his brother William, declaring that "To the eye of feeling there is something so immensely moving in the sudden and complete extinction of a vitality so infinite and so apparently infinite as Minny's."[257] Minny died young, leaving something of a "blank slate" for the outside world, but within her own family, she was an important figure in the lives of the James brothers; we know of her refreshing and endearing presence through their correspondence with and about her, and her stark influence on both, in their personal and professional lives, would prove lasting. Minny exemplified the promise of an uninhibited New World: she was decidedly anti–Victorian, brash, inquisitive, and animated – "a most honest little phenomenon," according to William. In Minny, Henry James found "a breathing protest" against "English grossness, English compromises and conventions – a plant of pure American growth." He declared that her image would "preside in my intellect, in fact, as a sort of measure and standard of brightness and repose." Marveling over her propensity for deeply seasoned thinking, James pondered Minny's "change of state" in death, concluding that her "earth–stifled" corporeal existence had transitioned into one of permanence "as a steady unfaltering luminary in the mind," where her "sereneness and purity" would abide. Ten years later, serialization of *The Portrait of a Lady* commenced, and James, who acknowledged Minny being "in mind" during his development of

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[257] Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds., *William and Henry James: Selected Letters* (University of Virginia Press: 1997), 69.

Isabel Archer, also admitted to his friend, the essayist Grace Norton, that Isabel, after all, could not epitomize Minny; his cousin was, in essence, an incomplete portrait of unrealized potential, whereas Isabel's trajectory has been finalized by the novel's end: "Poor Minny was essentially incomplete and I have attempted to make my young woman [Isabel Archer] more rounded, more finished. In truth everyone in life is incomplete, and it is in the work of art that in reproducing them one feels the desire to fill them out, to justify them, as it were."[258]

Beyond her youthful audacity, Minny's life was defined by internal dissonance, and as James's correspondence with Norton reveals, such contradictions were a source of his own fascination and intrigue: "She was a divinely restless spirit – essentially one of the 'irreconcilables'; and if she had lived to great age, I think it would have been as the victim and plaything of her constant generous dreams and dissatisfactions. … Her life was a strenuous, almost passionate question, which my mind, at least, lacked the energy to offer the elements of an answer for." He noted that her brief time was punctuated with "such noble flights and such touchingly discouraged drops," on the one hand reflecting "the supreme case of a taste for life as life, as personal living," while on the other, she remained paradoxically alienated from this world, "a world to which she was essentially hostile." At the forefront of her irreconcilability was Minny's inability to accept conventional theological doctrine, an ongoing dilemma she discussed at length with James throughout her illness. Though he hardly engaged her doubts – his own father's adherence to Swedenborgianism had distanced him from religion in general as a young man – he was pleased with her unique combination of "moral spontaneity," sensitivity, and intellect. In his discussion of Minny's impact on her cousins, Edward Short describes her refusal to "enter the reality of Christianity" as a natural result of "a kind of Emersonian

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[258] Phillip Horne, *Henry James and Revision*, 189.

pantheism."[259] Self–reliance, "to be true to my whole nature," as Minny wrote to William James, perhaps meant that she was "a good deal of a pagan," but regardless, it was "the certain noble acts of bygone stoics and philosophers" that had captured her imagination and empathy. Minny's "sense for verity of character and play of life in others," in the summation of James, together with her capacity for responsive open–mindedness and subtlety – an idealization of what he deemed the "finer consciousness" in his heroines – made her, as Virginia Fowler states, "at once the most wonderful creature he was ever to know and yet the least equipped for life in this world."[260] Despite hovering so close to death, as James observed, Minny still "did cling to consciousness," one that encompassed and reflected her inner conflicts; her mind's ebullience was never lacking, even in her final days, and in seeking to explain how her dissonant psychological virtues inexorably changed those around her, especially himself, this observation would be pivotal.

Two decades later, James's pledge to immortalize the essence of his cousin's short but meaningful existence materialized in the form of Milly Theale, bringing to literal completion in *The Wings of the Dove* one of his final contemplations in the mournful letter from 1870: "The more I think of her the more perfectly satisfied I am to have her translated from this changing realm of fact to the steady realm of thought."[261] In the same way his perceptions of Minny had been anchored by her vivacious nonconformity and its inspiration of awe and appeal from those who admired her – she "attacked life" itself, in the words of critic Fred Kaplan – so is James's construction of Milly, the out–of–place, lively yet ailing, curious, excited and enthusiastic,

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[259] Edward Short, *Philological Quarterly, Volume 31* (University of Iowa: 1952), 198.
[260] *Selected Letters*, 119.
[261] Years later, James ended his autobiography, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, with an elaborate sketch of Minnie, extensively referenced by her letters, and declared that for both William and himself, "her death made a mark that must stand here for a too waiting conclusion. We felt it together as the end of our youth." Her image was to him "the essence of tragedy," and writing *Wings* provided a therapeutic opportunity to enshrine Minny's spirit "by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art."

center–of–attention American heiress, a "young person conscious of a great capacity for life," as James proclaims in his Preface, "but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamored of the world."

In his quest to commemorate Minny's "divided self" and allegorize the dualisms that defined her, Milly's presence as an entity of contradiction and complication is duly magnified. The transplanted world Milly finds herself in – like Isabel Archer before her, right at the heart of Old World degeneracy and decadence – is far removed from the "pure American growth" both she and her real–life counterpart originally inhabited. Within this exchange comes another: an array of Old World subjects, each of whom illuminate and augment Milly's consciousness as she provides individualized edification of theirs, either constructively or adversely. In order to arrive at Milly's interiority, then, and narrate the process of her transformed consciousness, James first introduces her through the cognition of an Old World cast that encircles her. The first of these characters is the counterimage of Milly: the "master psychological strategist,"[262] Kate Croy.

If Milly Theale embodies the best of Isabel Archer and Fleda Vetch, then Kate Croy is, in the words of a contemporaneous review from *The Spectator*, "the arch–vampire, the supreme harpy and anti–heroine of the plot,"[263] an exponentially amplified yet reticent blend of Adela Gereth's obsessive materialism and Madame Merle's premeditated duplicity. We meet her as she waits for her father at his lodgings, her consciousness mired in the "vulgar rooms," the "shabby sofa," the "sallow prints," and the "dull glass," the products of poverty and its bearings confining her. And yet she looks around with just as much cautious distance as intense disgust; in the midst of her restless impatience, she "tried to be sad, so as not to be angry; but she was angry that she couldn't be sad." Kate's introduction thus "begins as one of shame," but she is also strangely

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[262] Eric L. Haralson and Kendall Johnson, eds., *Critical Companion to Henry James: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (Infobase Publishing: 2009), 192.
[263] *The Spectator, Volume 89* (F.C. Westley: 1902), 499.

dispassionate and unemotive. Gerald Henry Levin views Kate's self–aware apathy here as a purposeful suggestion from James on the narrow distinction between impression and reality: "What matters … is potential, not actual, feeling" – the "actual," the "truth,"[264] is to be discovered much later on. Kate is, in effect, subjectively reinforcing her perception of an impoverished past within the fixed dimensions of this domestic space and its "misery," while retreating from its negative truths. What little we will see of her consciousness is presumably conditioned by this intertwined past, matched with an implied proclivity for self–regulation and adaptation in the present so as to maintain "the impression she produced," which is one of desired social ascension. Diane Elan further elaborates on this opening scene, suggesting that Kate's surveillance of her surroundings "serve[s] a more indexical function: relating the conditions of the present to those of the past. … part of their value resides in what they tell her about her father's limited prospects."[265] It is also indicative of how she will approach an imminent test of character: she recognizes, she reflects, she waits, she deliberates, and she responds with self–interest.

Lionel Croy is subject to a more revelatory evaluation in the mind of his daughter. The familiarity of paltry surroundings has heightened Kate's awareness of what Daniel Hannah calls "the slipperiness of appearance,"[266] and by the time her father walks in, her consciousness of a heretofore inescapable past returns in recognition of his permanent falsity. She remembers "the futility of any effort to hold him to anything," and that even in his dishonesty, he is indifferent "to the moderate finish required for deception." If one purpose of the Jamesian center–of–consciousness is to illustrate the individual mind's subjective drive to separate truth from

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[264] Gerald H. Levin, *Richardson the Novelist: The Psychological Patterns* (Rodopi: 1978), 142.
[265] Diane Elam, "Waiting in the Wings." In *Acts of Narrative*, by Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman, eds. (Stanford University Press: 2003), 33-46.
[266] Daniel Hannah, *Henry James, Impressionism, and the Public* (Routledge: 2016), 128.

falsehoods based on the perceived certitude of personal experience, it becomes apparent that, on

account of her father, Kate has internalized some form of trauma. In effect, then, the

"impossibility" with which Kate defines her father originates from the recurrent realization that

"not only is he other than what he appears to be, it is impossible to fathom the identity of that

other"[267] – he is "wretched," a source of past distress whose image continues to direct her

present:

> ... but she now again felt, in the inevitability of the freedom he used with her, all the old
> ache, her poor mother's very own, that he couldn't touch you ever so lightly without
> setting up. No relation with him could be so short or so superficial as not to be somehow
> to your hurt … there was no truth in him. This was the weariness of every fresh meeting;
> he dealt out lies as he might the cards from the greasy old pack for the game of
> diplomacy to which you were to sit down with him. The inconvenience–as always
> happens in such cases–was not that you minded what was false, but that you missed what
> was true. … It was so respectable, a show that she felt afresh, and with the memory of
> their old despair, the despair at home, how little his appearance ever by any chance told
> about him.

But even in the midst of recalling her father's persistently abhorrent behavior, burdened by the

memory of "their old despair" and her mother's suffering, Kate nevertheless still intuitively finds

in him a certain "plausibility." Kate's familiarity with the ruthlessness of Victorian social

economy results in her willful dismissal of any suggestion that her mother was victimized; it is

her father's instruction by example in the potential benefits of socially driven, dualistic

appearances – "of not giving herself away but maintaining the construction others place on her"

– that she has chosen instead, a mechanism of self–preservation that determines the real "way to

live" is in accordance with whatever "version" of the self meets current societal and economic

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[267] Elaine Pigeon, *Queer Impressions: Henry James' Art of Fiction* (Routledge: 2013), 115.

conveniences.[268] This masquerade of roles and types is a continuing lesson, even in the dim father–daughter meeting. Lionel Croy's deviance and opportunism has clearly transformed his daughter; he has, in effect, "tampered with her spring."[269]

Consequently, James implies that Kate's consciousness is entirely dictated and displaced by her dysfunctional relationship with her father, reaffirmed by her experiences thus far. Her silent acknowledgement of Lionel Croy's odious nature, however, does not negate an inexplicable sense of loyalty to him, as she tells Merton Densher: "And yet it's a part of me … my father's dishonor." Kate is inured to the point of disconnected compartmentalization, recalling that "Sometimes, alone, I've to smother my shrieks when I think of my poor mother," while she at the same time remains "lucid and ironic," explaining to Densher that for her avaricious father and equally destitute sister, "My position's a value, a great value, for them both … It's the value–the only one they have … Of course, it holds me. It's a perpetual sound in my ears. It makes me ask myself if I've any right to personal happiness, any right to anything but to be as rich and overflowing, as smart and shining, as I can be made."[270] A moment after this exchange, she suddenly declares to Densher that her father "is wonderful–he's charming," before pausing to add, "He would make himself delightful to you."

The most significant aspect of Kate's stoic dissonance is not in her refusal to acknowledge the corruptive paradox of both her consciousness and her words, but rather in her pathological denial of its implications altogether. She has inadvertently revealed the presence of

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[268] Ibid.

[269] Preface, *The Wings of the Dove*. "The image of [Kate's] so compromised and compromising father was all effectively to have pervaded her life," James further elaborates. While the shadow of Lionel Croy is intended to be present throughout the narrative, it fades in intensity as Kate and Milly forge their bond. The diminishing presence of Kate's father as a powerful influence on her adult life (he is largely displaced by Mrs. Lowder, and then by Kate herself) renders it more difficult to elicit sympathy for her.

[270] Kate is self-loathing as well as resentful — "It was through Kate that Aunt Maud should be worked, and nothing mattered less than what might become of Kate in the process" — but she is also desensitized, in perpetual self-preservation mode.

disconcerting unease, embodied in the outbursts of emotion for her mother, and the visible dismay that punctuates her consciousness during the meeting with her father; she is, for now, not "too inhuman" like him. But unlike Isabel and Fleda, who were both actively and incessantly repressing an escalating sense of internal discord in advance of inevitable confrontation, Kate has volitionally mastered a separation between her thought process, her awareness, her resulting beliefs, and her interactions in public and private so as to avoid even the slightest feelings of dissonance and its correspondent psychological disequilibrium. This is not evidence of a supposed lack of conscience, but instead a culmination of the threat Kate has long discerned to her own self–conceptualization and autonomy. As Festinger observes,

> When self–image or self–esteem are threatened, as we have seen, we become rationalizing animals rather than question beliefs. Culture, traditions, scripts, beliefs, and archetypes create the screen; strategies protect it ... The state of conflict is uncomfortable and at some point either something must give in a major was or new rationalizations must be formed. Depending on what is at stake people will go to great lengths of distortion, denial, and self–persuasion in order to justify past or current behavior and beliefs.[271]

The "screen" that has risen over Kate – or, in the description of Rebecca Barnes, "The atmospheres that cling around"[272] her – originate from her dejected childhood, with her earliest formative memories residing in "the dishonour her father had brought them, his folly and cruelty and wickedness." Her father's unspecified atrocity and the early loss of both her brothers, along with her mother's perpetual torment, complete a portrait of increasing desolation. Kate's "strategies" in moving beyond these "polluted atmospheres" involve a series of calculated machinations once she is of age. Her mother's death led her to seek relief with her Aunt Maud,

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[271] Qtd. in Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: 50 Years of a Classic Theory* (Sage: 2007), 95.
[272] Rebecca Barnes, "Smog at the Garden Party: Atmospheric Pollution in Henry James' Wings of the Dove." From *Edwardian Culture: Beyond the Garden Party*, Samuel Shaw, Sarah Shaw, and Naomi Carle, eds. (Routledge, 2017), 81-107.

there being "not a penny in the other house"; there, further subjected to "other people's interpretation of her conduct," she finds herself noticing, for the first time, "how material things spoke to her"; and, in spite of Mrs. Lowder's "looming personality," she eagerly adapts to this "different world," resentful at having been excluded from it for so long. The second act of Kate's climb upward is complicated by her love for Densher, who – equally penniless – earns unanimous disapproval from everyone else. This new challenge, not unexpected, is followed by the timely arrival of Milly Theale, and presents for Kate a new utilization of her consciousness. In repudiation of the prototypical Jamesian heroine, Kate's behavioral commitment will be to deception and duplicity; her objective will not focus on deterring the immorality or oppression of the exterior world, but instead be dependent on her sustained aptness in ignoring the existence of dissonance – her ability to disregard any natural sense of guilt, shame, misgivings, or remorse as she sets her plot in motion. In the morally magnetic presence of Milly, then, Kate's test of consciousness will manifest in whether she is able to assume a fully aberrant psyche – if she can, effectively, become a "too inhuman" replication of her father. According to John Carlos Rowe, throughout his later phase, James's portraits of women became more complicated, elaborate – and then, ultimately, devious, sinister, and amoral – as they progressively discovered the stagnant patriarchal configurations of society. In this Old World cultural order, the given "powerlessness of women" essentially dictates that the one who is intelligent, sensitive, and compassionate finds herself betrayed. Those who have accepted and internalized rife moral hypocrisies, on the other hand, are either driven to flagrant criminality or, as Rowe notes, assume a third alternative: "such women are transformed into ambivalent Machiavels who may be either agents of revolution or mere imitations of their male role models."[273] Kate Croy is a construct of

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[273] Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*, 64.

both, and within this dimension she will typify the manner in which "the 'arts' of social manipulation" emerge in the midst of an adaptively automated consciousness coupled with the debilitating characteristics of an exceedingly superficial social decorum.

In his Preface, James explains that his portrait of Milly is comprised of two parts: half originates from her own consciousness, while the other half is created by those, especially Kate and Merton, who are "affected" by her:

> If one had seen that her stricken state was but half her case, the correlative half being the state of others as affected by her (they too should have a 'case,' bless them, quite as much as she!) … I somehow wanted them correspondingly embossed, wanted them inscribed and figured with an equal salience; yet it was none the less visibly 'key,' as I have said, that through my regenerate young New Yorker, and what might depend on her, should form my centre, my circumference was every whit as treatable. Therefore I must trust myself to know when to proceed from the one and when from the other.

The two opposing centers of Kate and Merton are necessary in order to reach what Darshan Maini terms "the central centre" – Milly's consciousness. In the process, Kate's darkly established interiority in the first two Books also becomes a requisite for identifying Merton's dissonance and how he will transform, but most significantly, the psychological stage Kate has thus set in her role as the primary successive center renders it necessary "for James's purpose that the reader pass through Kate's consciousness"[274] in order to comparatively decipher Milly's own. The resulting study in divergence – of mindset, of intrinsic nature, of extrinsic domination and its insinuations, and of purpose – begins with Kate seizing Milly's fascination. Her initial intrigue is largely founded upon a meticulously curated imagination of what London represents. In Milly's mind, London is the ultimate bustling metropolis, full of colorful life; it is where, as she tells Susan Stringham, they will be among people – to interact with, to observe, to experience "the

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[274] Darshan Maini, *Henry James, The Indirect Vision: Studies in Themes and Techniques* (McGraw-Hill: 1973), 70.

human, the English picture itself, as they might see it in their own way – the concrete world inferred so fondly from what one had read and dreamed."[275] Likewise, Milly's impression of Kate after they first become acquainted at Lancaster Gate is based on a similarly oversimplified, warped image of the New Woman – a combination of what she has heard secondhand, read, and creatively interpreted on her own accord, in the absence of actual experience:

> Kate Croy really presented herself to Milly … as the wondrous London girl in person (by what she had conceived, from far back, of the London girl; conceived from the tales of travelers and the anecdotes of New York, from old porings over *Punch* and a liberal acquaintance with the fiction of the day). The only thing was that she was nicer, since the creature in question had rather been, to our young woman, an image of dread.[276]

To Milly's surprise, Kate is not a vision of the forcefully aggressive young woman from end–century Punch cartoons, but she still exudes the same aura of self–assured confidence and phlegmatic control. Beyond this idealization, Kate has also entered Milly's consciousness as an element of a valorized world, a place of "light literary legend" that she has long sought to access, one of abundant ideas within a society completely unlike the uninspired rote of New York and Boston. She immediately analyzes Kate in terms of the same overabundant sentimentality with which she filters Europe, suspends Kate within her own "story," and conceives her, "by a necessity of the imagination, for a heroine." At the same time, as a component of this "story," Milly decides that she herself represents a diversion for Kate (she had previously mentioned to Lord Mark at Lancaster Gate that any connection between them would be based on Kate's pity at "the height of the disinterested"), one that enables Kate to conceal "some secret, some smothered

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[275] A direct reflection of James's own animated impression of and draw to London, as he recorded in a November 1881 diary entry: "London is on the whole the most possible form of life. I take it as an artist and as a bachelor; as one who has the passion of observation and whose business is the study of human life."

[276] Sally Ledger, among others, examines the negative New Woman-Punch cartoons correlation in detail. "Riding on bicycles, garbed in bloomers — part and parcel of the campaign for rational dress at the fin de siècle … portrayed as mannish, over-educated, humourless bores," the distorted portrayals represent a passive-aggressive "product of middle and upper class specificities," and a figure of intrigue across the Atlantic.

trouble" – yet another derivation from Milly's "consciousness proportionately crowded."[277] That "crowded consciousness," in turn, becomes a means for Milly – who by now senses her illness is serious – to live unrelentingly. We already know from her relationship with Susan Stringham that Milly, in speech and conduct, is often indirect and ambiguous; she is hardly ever given to answering openly. This is because her imagination "stirs in the quiet," and there she "finds the expression which best suits her."[278] Milly's tendency to "crowd" her mind also operates as a vulnerability that estranges her, unwittingly, from this very center of "ideas" and "people," even as she flourishes amongst them.[279]

As Milly's idiosyncratic perceptions of her new friends, especially Kate, set in motion a series of machinations around her, they also reveal the limited range and depth of her self–awareness. Milly's "American innocence and ignorance"[280] further illuminate a contrast with Kate's demeanor – namely her unfazed boldness – and after spending a week in Kate's company, closely observing her new friend, all the while engaging in the "pleasantries, ironies,

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[277] Milly's experience of London will begin along the lines of a Paterian aesthete — what Pater described in *Studies in The History of The Renaissance* (1873) as a "swarm of impressions" that are "unstable, flickering, inconsistent," and her initial goal will be to receive "as many pulsations as possible" during her limited earthy time, "to pass most significantly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy" — her draw to Kate. Pater's explanation is remarkably useful in deconstructing James's analogous perception of the dissonant "crowded consciousness," which is similarly "greater or lesser according to the intensity of impression" and thereby provides a starting point for either awareness, imagination, insight, or a combination thereof.

[278] John Auchard, *Silence in Henry James: The Heritage of Symbolism and Decadence* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 1986), 57. "She almost felt as if he were showing her visions while he spoke…" Like Isabel before her, Milly is a flawed overthinker; like Fleda, she feels almost too deeply, but the assumptions that prompt those feelings are never correct.

[279] A telling example of Milly's isolation is apparent when we compare her idealized London, as gleaned from fiction, to Kate's genuine London, as defined by distressing personal experience. Milly's London is signified by Kate, but Kate's London is far removed from Milly's vision, signified instead by the degeneracy of both the Croy family and her Aunt Maud, who "WAS London, WAS life — the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray." Kate imagines herself as "just the contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered, honourably free."

[280] Dorothea Crook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, 208.

all these luxuries of gossip and philosophies of London and of life" – Milly starts to realize that Kate

> simplified in advance, was beforehand with her doubts, and knew with singular quickness
> what she wasn't, as they said in New York, going to like. In that way at least people were
> clearly quicker in England than at home; and Milly could quite see after a little how such
> instincts might become usual in a world in which dangers abounded. There were clearly
> more dangers roundabout Lancaster Gate than one suspected in New York or could
> dream of in Boston. At all events, with more sense of them, there were more precautions,
> and it was a remarkable world altogether in which there could be precautions….

Milly's reflections here mark the initial germination of dissonance within her consciousness, and since Kate is her synecdochal representation of English society, she is left to ponder the possibility of a darker side in the city – one beyond the immaculately polished confines of Lancaster Gate. As Milly mulls over these thoughts, the pair visit "poor Marian," where Milly is taken aback by "the sense of how in England, apparently, the social situation of sisters could be opposed, how common ground for a place in the world could quite fail them: a state of things sagely perceived to be involved in a hierarchical, an aristocratic order." Milly's sudden notice of dual appearances is further pronounced when Susan conveys that Merton – the secret focus of Milly's affections, whom she met by chance when he visited New York on a journalistic assignment – knows Kate and her aunt well. Milly is confused as to why Kate has never mentioned Merton during their time together, and her initially well–defined portrait of her new confidante becomes somewhat obscured:

> She had lived with Kate Croy for several days in a state of intimacy as deep as it had
> been sudden, and they had clearly, in talk, in many directions, proceeded to various
> extremities. Yet it now came over her as in a clear cold wave that there was a possible
> account of their relations in which the quantity her new friend had told her might have
> figured as small, as smallest, beside the quantity she hadn't.

In terms of awareness and experience, what truly separates her from Kate[281] will not become fully apparent to Milly until her final days; for now, Milly believes that she and Kate share the same views on life, people, and the world at large. A series of circumstances and peculiarities that soon start to overshadow her interactions with Kate, however, will prompt the onset of Milly's dissonance, leading her to draw "illogical conclusions from her flickering perceptions and feelings."[282] At the fore here is Milly's presumption of others' silence as validation of her own assumptions. While Kate's reticence regarding Merton Densher strengthens Milly's belief in a closely guarded secret, Marian Condrip's declaration that Merton loves Kate is received by Milly in terms of what has not been said: any words that indicate Kate returns his feelings. For this reason – one that is subconsciously grounded in her own desire for Merton – Milly concludes that the Kate–Merton connection amounts to nothing more than a one–sided infatuation. After all, as Milly tells Susan, if Kate "did care," for Merton, "Mrs. Condrip would have told me," without any further inquiry. In this mode of rationalization, Milly at first prevents her sudden encounter with the decaying underbelly of English society from affecting her consciousness in a way that would compromise her imagination. For Milly, there must be no disparity between life and art, one's judgement is in harmony with tangible facts, immanence is treasured above all, and appearances are not anchored in vanity.[283]

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[281] And by extension, the American-New World and English-Old World experience.

[282] Kristin Boudreau, *Henry James' Narrative Technique: Consciousness, Perception, and Cognition* (Springer: 2010), 114.

[283] Milly's emotional reaction to the Bronzino portrait, shown to her by Lord Mark and uncannily in her likeness, is testament to her spirituality. The painting is a temporal object intended for aesthetic appreciation, but Milly can only perceive it in terms of the ethereal and the metaphysical. It compels her to acknowledge that she, too, will likely soon be "dead, dead, dead," just as the beautiful woman in the image, not only physically but without any legacy of thought and feeling — or so she believes. In this vein, Boudreau asserts that Milly is bothered most by the fact that the "dead" portrait is unable to "convey any idea of the woman's subjectivity," and this reminds Milly of the temporal, fleeting nature of experience.

The notion of an "energetic reticence"[284] is, by contrast, more precisely negotiated by the cosmopolitan Kate, who has already accurately derived from Milly's unspoken candor a sense of her severely limited consciousness. While Milly is worried at the prospect of appearing unforthcoming once her previous acquaintance with Merton is discovered, a subsequent conversation between Merton and Kate reveals he had already mentioned meeting Milly in his letters, long before her arrival in London. Kate correctly interprets Milly's refusal to mention Merton as an indication of her attachment to him; this silence is tempered by Milly's developing understanding of her mortality. Moreover, Milly's overly emotional state, her obscured visits with Sir Luke – and notably, her prevaricating non–answers to Kate's questions about those visits ("But what does he say?" "But does he allow then that you're ill?") – also lead Kate to conclude that she is ill. With a self–declaration that her "cleverness" has by now grown "infernal," as she tells Merton, who remains confused ("But the amount of light men DID need!"), her complicated plan to deceive Milly comes into focus. As the narration of her consciousness revealed in the opening chapter, Kate has become overtly proficient in avoiding dissonance by compartmentalizing the different sides of her life and preventing, to the best of her ability, any intersection between them. With her latest plot, she is also "resplendent" in her justifications; Milly will benefit from having her affections returned by Merton in her waning days, and his inheritance of her fortune would be a mere byproduct of a good deed: "For all that, if she's stricken, she must see swept away. … I shouldn't trouble about her if there were one thing she did have. She has nothing. … She at any rate does love life. To have met a person like you to have felt you become, with all other fine things, a part of life." Nor does Kate allow Merton's hesitancy discourage her ambition.

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[284] Auchard, *Silence in Henry James*, 91. The upkeep of censorship that enveloped her childhood has become for Kate an aspect of intuitive communication as well as a mechanism that assists in her ability to manipulate.

Kate's seemingly darker turn, however, is not without its own equivocations. Ruth

Bernard Yeazell observes that "the sinister motive which in hindsight we might attribute to Kate

is nowhere explicit; we cannot know if at this point Kate has consciously acknowledged them

even to herself … the reader never comes to know if she is being completely sincere or simply a

hypocrite,"[285] since we no longer have unfiltered access to Kate's interior self. Even Merton is

uncertain of the genuine intent underlying her motivations; he at first discerns a "noble

compassion" in Kate's speech regarding Milly, but only momentarily. In reference to the

enigmatic projection of "an air of privacy that prohibits familiarity" with regard to Kate's current

mindset, Susan Mizruchi notes that aside from the novel's opening, "we never truly get inside

Kate Croy … nor is Kate presented to the reader with the assurance that informs the portrait of

Milly."[286] Likewise, Linda Schermer Raphael posits that since Kate's consciousness has already

been established as informed by her devastating family background, embodied in paternally–

induced representations of pride, greed, and shame, we can conclude that her intent is not purely

a product of innate depravity. It is possible, instead, that Kate's resistance to the very same

societal dynamics that stifled her mother, her struggle to change the trajectory of her existence,

and the detrimental influence of the overbearing Maud Lowder have altogether corrupted her

consciousness with elements of terrible wisdom.[287]

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[285] Ruth B. Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (University of Chicago Press: 1980), 82. Yeazell insists that critical perceptions of Kate as little more than a hypocrite or a liar ignore her multifaceted "power as an artist — her power to reshape the world according to the demands of her imagination. By proclaiming Milly's desire to live 'wonderful' and 'beautiful,' Kate suppresses much that is sinister, but she also draws attention to all the wonder and beauty that may indeed be found in Milly's situation. Speaking so strongly of the 'beauty' which she sees, Kate almost makes her vision truth." However, this contention presupposes that Kate genuinely sympathizes Milly in spite of her own devious interests. Even if Kate's feelings are somewhat obscured, her remote indifference and immunity to dissonance is unmistakable, especially after Milly's death.
[286] Susan L. Mizruchi, *The Power of Historical Knowledge: Narrating the Past in Hawthorne, James, and Dreiser* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 215.
[287] Linda S. Raphael, *Narrative Skepticism: Moral Agency and Representations of Consciousness in Fiction* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: 2001), 109.

The disjunction of appearances thus continues, but integral to this dissimulation is Kate's obvious immunity to dissonance, implying what Schneider calls "an additional complication of 'the figure in the carpet,' a divided self who is unsympathetic and who stands between two women, the immemorial fair and the dark heroine."[288] If our initial access to Kate's consciousness functioned as a sympathetic foundation upon which to gauge her subsequent actions, Milly's arrival countermands that framework. Milly's trial in coming to terms with her illness is far more critical, but she responds with a renewed desire "to live," in the words of Sir Luke, informed by a revitalized sense of excitement "that carried her on." In the absence of any evidence of internal disequilibrium from Kate, her earlier status as a victim whose life has been blighted by her father's unspeakable behavior somewhat fades, while Milly, under greater duress, is simultaneously evolving toward a beatification of sorts. Ironically, it is Kate who first compels Milly to examine the contradictions that animate those around her – inconsistencies she has detected since coming to London, but consciously chose to either rationalize, ignore, or dismiss altogether:

> "You're an outsider, independent and standing by yourself; you're not hideously relative to tiers and tiers of others." And Kate, facing in that direction, went further and further; wound up, while Milly gaped, with extraordinary words. "We're of no use to you – it's decent to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be – " she went indeed all lengths – "to drop us while you can. It would be funny if you didn't soon see how awfully better you can do. We've not really done for you the least thing worth speaking of – nothing you mightn't easily have had in some other way. Therefore you're under no obligation. You won't want us next year; we shall only continue to want YOU."

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[288] Daniel J. Schneider, *The Crystal Cage: Adventures of The Imagination in The Fiction of Henry James* (Regents Press of Kansas: 1978), 60.

In an uncharacteristically open moment of blunt honesty, Kate appears to be signaling a warning to Milly. But even here, in this outwardly unrehearsed instance of "wound up" spontaneity from Kate, her impassioned speech is still prepensely minatory in nature. There is no apparent dissonance or instigation of guilt; Kate is merely providing herself with a calculated moral alibi, whereby "the reciprocity of exploitation amounts to a sufficient morality" in her consciousness.[289] Kate later tells Merton she strives to "play fair" with Milly, and the preceding conversation with Milly conforms to this conceptualization. As Nina Schwartz points out, Kate's "warning" to Milly, giving her a chance to "escape," reads more as an act of self–defense against her own intuition of the potential failure of her plan – and what such a failure would entail for her – rather than as an act of charity.[290]

Milly, for her part, is at the dawn of an awakening in this moment. At first alarmed[291] by Kate's unprompted words, she asks from where they came, and is told, simply, "Because you're a dove."

> With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an accolade; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. It even came to her, through the touch of her companion's lips, that this form, this cool pressure, fairly sealed the sense of what Kate had just said. It was moreover, for the girl, like an inspiration: she found herself accepting as the right one, while she caught her breath with relief, the name so given her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange

[289] Darrel Abel, *Classic Authors of the Gilded Age* (Barron Educational Series: 2002), 335. Even in the end, Kate once again reinforces this falsity by claiming to believe Milly truly benefited from the duplicit plot; she implies to Merton shortly before Milly's death that the plan's entire premise was one based first and foremost on sympathetic charity: "The great thing is that she's satisfied. Which is what I've worked for. The peace of having loved. Of having BEEN loved. That is, of having realised her passion. She wanted nothing more. She has had ALL she wanted. She won't have loved you for nothing." Kate is in the end stages of her performance, and she retreats further from the truth with her final act.

[290] Nina Schwartz, *Dead Fathers: The Logic of Transference in Modern Narrative* (University of Michigan Press: 1994), 89.

[291] At least momentarily, Milly is truly frightened by Kate's out-of-character spiel, imagining herself "alone with a creature who paced like a panther," but she attempts to appear amused rather than duly flustered.

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dusk in which she lately had walked. THAT was what was the matter with her. She was a dove.[292]

Milly's epiphany is resounding; it partially permeates her restricted consciousness and precipitates a newfound drive to take control of this "dovelike" identity that has been conferred upon her by others: "She should have to be clear as to how a dove WOULD act." No longer entirely oblivious to others' impressions of her, and realizing her own awareness lacks the acuity that Kate possesses, Milly "seizes on this replacement [of identity] with a strange sense of relief. From now on she will be a dove, and she must study to discover what her new role will entail."[293] The urgency to somehow deflect from her natural response to those around her without compromising her virtue is immediate. After deliberately misleading Mrs. Lowder regarding her knowledge of Merton's whereabouts, avoiding the "oversweet fragrance" of the woman's contrivances, Milly's next step in defining "the dovelike" is to go about "quite readopting her plan in respect to Sir Luke Strett … deceptively," missing her appointment while leaving instead to people–watch at the National Gallery. It will soon become apparent, however, that this neoteric shift in Milly's consciousness does not extend to her created imagination of Kate, whom she steadfastly holds in deferential reverence: high above herself, too sophisticated

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[292] Mary Cross writes on the "dove" trope with emphasis on its emergence as a thematic metaphor through repetition and cross-referencing once Kate introduces the image. Her "You're a dove" is first offered "as an accolade to Milly, who takes it as an inspiration, turning it over and over in her mind as she tries to become one … the in constant repetition, the word becomes an epithet, one other characters use to talk about Milly." Milly's subsequent involvement in shaping others' perceptions of her will never be effective because, as William Stowe points out, instead of repelling the label and seeking removal from its connotations of passivity and submissiveness, she instead "immediately and eagerly appropriates it as a model for her behavior and her view of herself in the world." Milly falsely believes she can change what being "a dove" signifies, and she only realizes this impossibility at the end of her life.

[293] Judith Woolf, *Henry James: The Major Novels* (Cambridge University Press: 1991), 117.

for "such a one as Milly Theale"[294] and yet, for some inexplicable reason, appreciative of her company.

The scene at the National Gallery illustrates exactly how oblivious Milly remains – even though she will eventually understand life as a series of scenes to be acted upon rather than pictures to be observed. For now, engrossed in analyses of the Gallery's other visitors, particularly the American tourists, in order to recognize life, "as opposed to learning" it, Milly sees Kate and Merton, together, but her initial shock soon dissipates as Kate "somehow made her provisionally take everything as natural." Milly, for her part, for the first time consciously assumes the part of the Old World perception of an "American girl" in an attempt to discount what she has just observed of the closeness between Merton and Kate:

> The finest part of Milly's own inspiration, it may further be mentioned, was the quick perception that what would be of most service was, so to speak, her own native wood–note. She had long been conscious with shame for her thin blood, or at least for her poor economy, of her unused margin as an American girl – closely indeed as in English air the text might appear to cover the page. She still had reserves of spontaneity, if not of comicality; so that all this cash in hand could now find employment. She became as spontaneous as possible and as American as it might conveniently appeal to Mr. Densher, after his travels, to find her. She said things in the air, and yet flattered herself that she struck him as saying them not in the tone of agitation but in the tone of New York. In the tone of New York agitation was beautifully discounted, and she had now a sufficient view of how much it might accordingly help her. The help was fairly rendered before they left the place; when her friends presently accepted her invitation to adjourn with her to luncheon at her hotel it was in Fifth Avenue that the meal might have waited.

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[294] For all her fondness for labyrinths and abysses — in life, "That's just the fun of it!" as she tells Susan early on — Milly is still bothered by Kate's remoteness and her inability to understand it, as Maya Wakana states: "What pains Milly is the caution Kate seems to exercise with her. Milly has not withheld herself from Kate, so why should Kate withhold herself from Milly?"

Milly's perplexity on account of the obvious familiarity between Merton and Kate is at once

blurred by her simultaneous need to "differentiate herself in order to save the propriety of the

meeting,"[295] and in doing so she dons the appropriate mask to play her expected part in English

society: that of the unseasoned American. The "reserves of spontaneity" ensconced within a

"New York" tone, all nestled into "the unused margins" of American girl Milly not only conceal

her "agitation" at fortuitously running into the pair, but also serve as a type of experiment for

her, according to Maya Wakana: she notices how adeptly Kate and Merton manage the

"interaction ritual" by closely watching the pair's "perfect manners, all around"; she diffuses

what could have been an embarrassing moment for all three, since neither Kate nor Milly have

ever mentioned Merton to one another; and she assumes control of the situation, inviting both to

lunch with her. Still, however, Milly finds herself inextricably under "the vividness of Kate's

behaviour," and this strengthens her insistence that while Merton loved Kate, she, on the

contrary, "couldn't help it – could only be sorry and kind" in return. Although Kate's earlier

speech effectively forced Milly to partly acknowledge the discrepancies between her inventive

consciousness of others and the realities that underlie contrived appearances, she is still willfully

dismissive of the same when the focus is Kate, who is, to Milly, beyond reproach. Alone, she

once again reminds herself of Kate's noninterest in Merton: "Wouldn't that, without wild flurries,

cover everything? Milly at all events tried it as a cover, tried it hard, for the time; pulled it over

her, in the front, the larger room, drew it up to her chin with energy. If it didn't, so treated, do

everything for her, it did so much that she could herself supply the rest." This swirl of

reassurances is followed by her internal reiteration of "the only thing she did know … she liked

him, as she put it to herself, as much as ever." Milly cannot view Merton outside of her own

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[295] Duco van Oostrum, *Male Authors, Female Subjects: The Woman Within/Beyond the Borders of Henry Adams, Henry James and Others* (Rodopi: 1995), 147.

desire for him, another flawed complication of her "crowded consciousness" that is recognized and exploited by Kate.

Several critics have argued that while Milly's consciousness appears to be undergoing disequilibrium by this point, she has already knowingly conceded validity of the dissonant elements that have pervaded her experiences in London thus far, and this admitted knowledge recreates her as "Kate's accomplice, not her victim. From the moment she meets Kate and Densher at the National Gallery, Milly knows herself 'handled ... – absolutely even dealt with for her greater pleasure.'" Depending on how much she can introspectively admit to herself at any given time, as Darrel Abel further contends, "Milly even knows that Kate loves Densher, a situation she first suspected since Aunt Maud's first inquiries," but she deliberately suppresses the deepest recesses of her consciousness in favor of giving precedence to her own love for Merton. The self–defensive benefit Milly earns from continued denial additionally reinforces Kate's authority over her; as Rivkin states, it allows Milly to "confirm Kate's representation that Densher is available, even as it allows her to maintain her own story that life is within her grasp … With Kate's participation, Milly labors to design a version that will be supported."[296] Kate is Milly's "controller of consciousness," successfully representing a forged network of relations that metaphorically serves as a shelter for the "unwilling invalid." William McNaughton also emphasizes Milly's reflexive self–deception as a means of dissonance avoidance: "Throughout, she chooses to interpret and respond to certain events and characters in ways that bring maximum benefit for her, given her possible demise and the options available to postpone it. What is being argued here about Milly is that, like Kate and Densher – like most humans, James

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[296] *The Gypsy Scholar, Volumes 1-4* (The University of Michigan: 1974), 17.

implies – she has a well–developed ability to rationalize; this capability keeps her alive until

Lord Mark's words cause her to turn 'her face to the wall.'"[297]

      Kate's unguarded dialogue, the National Gallery incident, and Sir Luke's subsequent

encouragement "to LIVE" all lead to Milly's decision to relocate to Venice.[298] Over the course of

several months, she builds an experience of complete opulence: surrounded by the company of

those most important to her, in her own "palace," the ancient Palazzo Leporelli, with a cultured

attendant to oversee every detail of her stay. Ironically, this grand Venetian setting is also where

Kate raises her vision of the world as a stage for her own drama of ambition. She draws even

closer to Milly; the two become an "independent pair," spending less time joining the brisk

social bustle around them and more in "each other's attention," away from all others. At the same

time, Milly's odyssey continues to nurture her consciousness of "real" life; everything about the

Venetian atmosphere, from its art to its people, cultivates an awareness "whereby she saw that

neither Lancaster Gate was what New York took it for, nor New York what Lancaster Gate

fondly fancied it in coquetting with the plan of a series of American visits."[299] As a result, Milly

– by this time more prone than ever to fatigue and the complications of her declining health –

soon begins to withdraw with greater frequency from Kate and her retinue, deliberately seeking

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[297] Julie Rivkin, *False Positions: The Representational Logics of Henry James's Fiction* (Stanford University Press: 1996), 103. Inversely, Kate's reflexive ability to rationalize in a way that not only protects herself but allows her to appear to be correct, even though she is, internally, grossly aware of her self-corruption. This is a product of her finely attuned capacity to avoid dissonance, to not feel disequilibrium at all; it is a self-preservational mechanism that protects her life and enables her to live without guilt, sadness, or regret. Kate is — to borrow a phrase from James Gargano in his description of what Fleda Vetch is *not* — essentially a "bloodless Victorian."

[298] In the meantime, Milly's consciousness remains under Kate's calculated control: "It's in HER that life is splendid; and a part of that is even that she's devoted to me," Milly tells Sir Luke, in all her admiration, excited that Kate will accompany her to Venice, "But she's above all magnificent in herself."

[299] James was captivated by Venice for well over half his life; it comes to life as a setting in numerous novels, is the subject of several travel essays in *Italian Hours*, and was, for him, a place of both warm familiarity and uncharted territory. Rowe draws on James's fascination with the Venetian landscape to explain why Milly's consciousness is more receptive to evolving in Venice as opposed to London: it presents an almost perfect atmosphere where the interrogation of identity and art merge, and thus, "Milly becomes the artist of her own composition." She cannot sustain this composition once her dissonance, bearing the truth, overwhelms, and she quickly becomes "increasingly vague and disembodied until she is finally present only through the interpretative consciousness of others."

moments of self–imposed isolation at random, to "just a little, all by myself, see where I am," with something of a "dire impatience." Her condition worsens; she contemplates "the turns of life and the moods of weakness"; and it is under this growing consciousness of death – the beginning of Milly's active transition from central presence to solitudinous flight from the world, both literally and metaphorically – that Lord Mark arrives to visit.

Milly's detachment dictates her composed response to Lord Mark's muted proposal of marriage; at any point before the removal to Venice, she would have been characteristically evasive about her illness. Now, she freely tells Mark "I'm very badly ill," and that her sole remedy is "to live." Most significantly, however, Lord Mark's inquiries restore to the forefront of Milly's consciousness the dissonance that had long been dormant. In all her aporetic vulnerability, she dwells – silently, dejectedly, and extensively – on this latest confrontation with reality, drawing nearer to Kate's truth all the while:

> … he mustn't be mistaken about her value – for what value did she now have? It throbbed within her as she knelt there that she had none at all; though, holding herself, not yet speaking, she tried, even in the act, to recover what might be possible of it. With that there came to her a light: wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? SHE mightn't last, but her money would. For a man in whom the vision of her money should be intense, in whom it should be most of the ground for "making up" to her, any prospective failure on her part to be long for this world might easily count as a positive attraction. Such a man, proposing to please, persuade, secure her, appropriate her for such a time, shorter or longer, as nature and the doctors should allow, would make the best of her, ill, damaged, disagreeable though she might be, for the sake of eventual benefits.

Milly is gradually losing the ability to deny, avoid, and rationalize her dissonance; for the first time, she interprets her self–value in terms of the commodified culture she discovered but failed

to truly comprehend in London.[300] In recognizing the monetary draw of her worth within this consumerist economy – by designating herself as a priceless object, to be consumed through her wealth by any prospective suitor and then by death itself – Milly's awareness begins to overlap with Kate's. At the same time, she is still unwilling to unravel the tangled web of relations and motives that Kate has woven. It is this refusal that leaves her completely unprepared against Lord Mark's next jarring assertion: that Kate does, in fact, return Merton's feelings for her:

> "Ah I beg your pardon!" – and Milly quite flushed at having so crude a blunder imputed to her. "You're wholly mistaken. It's not true."
>
> His stare became a smile. "Are you very, very sure?"
>
> "As sure as one can be" – and Milly's manner could match it – "when one has every assurance. I speak on the best authority. … I take it – "But Milly, with the positive tremor of her emphasis, pulled up.
>
> "You take it from Kate?"
>
> "From Kate herself."
>
> "That she's thinking of no one at all?"
>
> "Of no one at all." Then, with her intensity, she went on. "She has given me her word for it."
>
> "Oh!" said Lord Mark. To which he next added: "And what do you call her word?"
>
> It made Milly, on her side, stare – though perhaps partly but with the instinct of gaining time for the consciousness that she was already a little further "in" than she had designed. "Why, Lord Mark, what should YOU call her word?"
>
> "Ah I'm not obliged to say. I've not asked her. You apparently have."

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[300] Wakana, among other critics, speaks of Milly's estrangement first from her own conceptualization of herself (a "dove," not poised to inhabit the worldliness Kate thrives upon), and then from the self-reflection given to her by Kate (in determination to claim the "dove" designation as her own, in vain). Likewise, Sarah Wootton discusses Milly's acknowledgement of the possibility of self-estrangement — "One never knows one's self," as she tells Lord Mark early on — in terms of her perpetually incomplete double-consciousness. Jean Kimball designates Milly a "compromised conscript" who has been irrevocably harmed by self-estrangement. These impressions manifest in Festinger's explanation of how the fluidity of self-identity can be permanently destabilized: "Not only do life events affect the sense of self, but the response to such events is in turn influenced by the pre-existent sense of self. When psychological resources are already taxed by intrapsychic or interpersonal demands, life events may bring considerable damage. The personal assessment of such events, whether consciously or unconsciously arrived at, may tend to be negative or positive ... They are often experienced psychologically but not expressed, and when they are held in they may endure and affect behavior in many ways."

> Well, it threw her on her defence – a defence that she felt, however, especially as of Kate. "We're very intimate," she said in a moment; "so that, without prying into each other's affairs, she naturally tells me things."
> Lord Mark smiled as at a lame conclusion. "You mean then she made you of her own movement the declaration you quote?"
> Milly thought again, though with hindrance rather than help in her sense of the way their eyes now met – met as for their each seeing in the other more than either said. What she most felt that she herself saw was the strange disposition on her companion's part to disparage Kate's veracity.

Milly continues to controvert and militate any negative perception of Kate, thus continuing – narrowly, by this point – to abrogate her rising awareness by ascribing the standard "beautiful reasons" to others, especially in defense of the one who has become her closest friend. But this entire interaction with Lord Mark surreptitiously amounts to what Susan L. Mizruchi describes "an almost ludicrous dance of evasion."[301] Milly's internal consciousness is now sensitized to the point of self–antagonism, and she vigorously struggles to oppose Lord Mark's dialogue – effectively preventing any further verbalization of that which she has long refused to consider. Even as Lord Mark's accusations provoke disunity in Milly's "presence of mind," her steady resistance to his words illustrates how Milly, in all her "caged freedom," continues to grapple with control over her consciousness, and by extension, the nonconsonant occurrences and incongruous feelings that are defining the end stages of her life – a deleterious effort that will prove futile.

Before Milly's conclusive "life event" – before she attains full consciousness and turns "her face to the wall" as reality destroys the remaining threads of New World idealism – Milly has one final instance where she summons every facet of her now–compromised identity and

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[301] Susan Mizruchi, *The Power of Historical Knowledge*, 204.

transiently achieves dominion, over both her waning appearance and over the social perceptions that have followed since her arrival in Europe. During a dinner party at the palace, in the presence of everyone, Milly triumphantly arrives, and it is through Merton Densher's consciousness that she is received: "in wide warm waves the spell of a general, a beatific mildness … but what he especially recognised was the character that had already several times broken out in her and that she so oddly appeared able, by choice or by instinctive affinity, to keep down or to display." This is Milly, "let loose among them," exchanging her wonted dark mourning attire for "a wonderful white dress," glamorous, in all her pearls–and–lace splendor, without a trace of illness, forcefully transmuting the performative utterances of her mind into an empiricist performative act, consciously synthesizing the contradictions that whirl about her. As C. Hughes states, Milly is "clear, in white, but unclear in intention," acting out her view of herself and escaping the sweeping Old World generalizations of the perspicuous American girl. Borne from a terminal attempted rebuke against her dissonance, Milly's impressive spectacle is also intended for Merton, "a belief in herself as marriageable, and therefore in the possibility of Densher's love for her."[302] These beliefs are interdependent: in order to live, Milly seeks Merton's reciprocation, but in her consciousness, a return of feelings must be unimpeded by the signs of deterioration and death which, in London, had all but effaced her self–conception. In this moment, finding her desired self–reflection in the vicinity of both Merton and Kate, she wills them to believe her performance. Merton, moved and mesmerized, does; Kate, astute and amused, does not.

The visiting group, save for Merton, returns to London in the days following Milly's grand entrance, but there follows a palpable disconnect between Milly and Merton. He inadvertently lets slip his knowledge of her illness, both offending her and undermining Kate's

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[302] Claire Hughes, *Henry James and the Art of Dress* (Palgrave: 2001), 83.

plan; he deliberately avoids inviting her and Susan to visit him at his lodgings; and, in "all his nervousness," he takes three weeks alone to metacognitively analyze the ways in which both he and Milly "watch" one another from within the confines of Kate's created maze, with Milly "knowing he tried to keep her in tune with his conception, and he knowing she thus knew it. Add that he again knew she knew, and yet that nothing was spoiled by it, and we get a fair impression of the line they found most completely workable." When Milly suddenly shuts him out – courtesy of a vindictive Lord Mark's reappearance with the undeniable truth – the "workable line" Merton has deduced also breaks down. Lord Mark's revelations effectively destroy Milly's ability to consciously maintain her performance; instead, the strength of London's duplicit social scene, the burden of past motivations, impositions, and decisions, and the memory of subterfuge as a state of being jointly resurface to submerge the individuality of Milly's determined final act. Lord Mark's sabotage also immediately reaches Merton: bereft of Milly's sustaining powers, her ordering of experience as sign, he is left "in fear of himself."[303]

Merton, at Milly's request, does meet her one last time, but as with her final conversation with Lord Mark, our access to these pivotal moments – underscored by the imminent endings of both Milly's "American girl" consciousness and her life – is denied. The only indications we have of Milly's responses at this point are vague notations from others,[304] but as William Stowe argues, the permanent shift out from Milly's interiority is necessitated in order to forever commemorate her "heroic resistance" – her withstanding of conventionalization, of possession, and of her mortal destiny. To be admitted into Milly's final catharsis, then, would also be to witness her dissonance ultimately defeat her. Instead, the enduring manifestation of Milly's spirit

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[303] Elizabeth E. Allen, *A Woman's Place in The Novels of Henry James* (Springer: 1984), 172.
[304] For example, Susan pleading with Merton to deny the entire truth of what Lord Mark has told Milly, and Merton's subsequent declaration to Kate that he could not lie to Milly about their involvement.

will embody "no unnecessary reminders of her pathetic fate,"[305] in congruence with James's own declaration in his Preface: "The poet essentially *can't* be concerned with the act of dying … accordingly, the last thing in the world it [Milly's journey] proposed to itself was to be the record predominantly of a collapse." Milly's legacy, "the truth … in the soul of drama," resides not in what "a catastrophe … of oppositions" subjected her to, but in how her "American girl" consciousness tirelessly strove to navigate and process those oppositions – thereby becoming a formidable pneuma of opposition herself, one that, in death, is supposedly transcendent:

> My young woman would HERSELF be the opposition – to the catastrophe announced by the associated Fates, powers conspiring to a sinister end and, with their command of means, finally achieving it, yet in such straits really to STIFLE the sacred spark that, obviously, a creature so animated, an adversary so subtle, couldn't but be felt worthy, under whatever weaknesses, of the foreground and the limelight. She would meanwhile wish, moreover, all along, to live for particular things, she would found her struggle on particular human interests, which would inevitably determine, in respect to her, the attitude of other persons, persons affected in such a manner as to make them part of the action. If her impulse to wrest from her shrinking hour still as much of the fruit of life as possible, if this longing can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too – that of their promoting her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests and advantages, from motives and points of view, of their own. Some of these promptings, evidently, would be of the highest order – others doubtless mightn't; but they would make up together, for her, contributively, her sum of experience, represent to her somehow, in good faith or in bad, what she should have KNOWN.

When she initially arrived in London, Milly fancied herself stepping into a world derived from its verisimilitudinous fiction, "a mixed wandering echo of Trollope, of Thackeray, perhaps mostly of Dickens," determined to become part of the vision that she had spent a lifetime designing. What she leaves behind in her physical departure from this newly fractured vision is

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[305] William W. Stowe, *Balzac, James, and the Realistic Novel* (Princeton University Press: 2016), 167.

literally expropriated by Kate, who further suppresses Milly by burning her posthumous letter to

Merton. Milly's monetary bequest – presumably, along with her forgiveness – for Merton

eventually comes, as Kate had predicted. At the same time, Kate's attempted annexation of

Milly's spirit – with motives that are, as always, obscure – is merely temporary and in vain.

Instead, as A. Cutting explains, there is an enormous sense of Milly's presence "in some other,

magical space, corresponding to her absence from the material here–and–now." This is not the

otherworldly aftermath of "our dear dove" who "has folded her wonderful wings" in the overt

sentimentalization of Maud Lowder, but rather a continuation of James's pledge to portray the

intersections of consciousness and experience as a shared, unabating entity. Kate's calculated

endeavor to erase Milly's presence from the collective remembrance of Merton and herself

thereby becomes impossible, as Milly's life and death "is not her own; it is not anyone's, it is

everyone's."[306] The burning of the final letter and the permanent question of its contents only

intensify Milly's presence – including her newfound consciousness and her feelings following

learning of the scheme – in the space of her corporeal absence. For Kate and Merton, the

outward reach of her spirit forces a continued, unavoidable engagement with Milly's realized

consciousness, and leaves them perpetually opposed and compromised against one another, as

David Evans comments: "Their alliances have shaped them, and they cannot go back. What

Densher and Kate know, what they cannot deny, is that the knowledge they have of each other –

knowledge that leaves Densher with a 'strange consciousness of exposure,' knowledge that, even

buried in a blind embrace, they cannot 'undo' – flows forward with them and through them, and

alters their reality; alters the reality of everyone around them."[307] Via Milly, the incompatible

differences that have always subtly tainted Kate and Merton's relationship have now been

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[306] David Evans, *Understanding James, Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury Publishing: 2017), 137.
[307] Ibid.

irreversibly exploded. Still, while this overlapping of consciousnesses has gravely affected

Merton's own – his dissonance and acceptance of culpability taking precedence above all else,

embodied in his ultimatum to Kate – she remains consistent as the singularly dissimulative

variable, wary of Merton's desire to "escape everything" but at the same time responding to his

terms with what seems to be her only genuinely honest moment of retrospection: "We shall

never be again as we were!"

The literary scholar Peter Brooks, in his 1984 introduction to the Oxford reprinting of the

novel, places its site of praxis within the isolated layers of "dramatic consciousnesses" that

require "risky"[308] interpretation. Of central concern here is how, or even if, the exploitation of

Milly's dissonant consciousness has at all fractured Kate's hardened worldview; in Merton's

case, it very clearly has. The concluding scene featuring the pair offers some evidence that

Kate's tergiversations continue: she displays nervousness when it becomes apparent that

Merton's resolve is faltering; he becomes emotional, she remains unmoved; she is taken aback

by his conditions, retreating into self–preservation mode; she counters his ultimatum with one of

her own, accusing Merton of having "no other" love now apart from Milly's memory; she leaves

without being held accountable, still no less enigmatic. Kate's seemingly static nondissonant

consciousness depletes her self–conception in a way that is directly inverse to Milly's dynamic

post–dissonant evolution. In this sense, James's anthropocentric emphasis on identity as a

consciously structured creation primarily dictated by social necessity encompasses the moral

implications of normalized deception and pragmatic self–creation, but it concurrently supports

William James's declaration that "Whilst part of what we perceive comes through our senses

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[308] "Risky" in terms of accounting for the overlapping multifacetedness of each character's consciousness and the
resultant complications that arise.

from the object before us, another part always comes out of our own head."[309] Milly and Kate respectively exist at the opposing ends of this continuum. Milly resides within the confines of her unbridled imagination, grounded in virtue, for as long as she possibly can; she feels almost too deeply. Kate's functionalist consciousness is directed by a rigid internalization of stratified London's acquisitive culture and its associated Old World perfidiousness; she has become impassive and inaccessible.

The dualistic fin de siècle notions of New Womanhood – on one end, a progressive, independent, coequal variant of the Victorian "angel" without sole confinement to "the house," and on the other, the "inappropriate"[310] version of an overzealously ambitious, apathetically insolent, conspiratorial seductress – also manifest in the opposing centers of Milly and Kate. James's presentation of the dichotomy was tremendously effective, as the earliest analyses of Kate and Milly demonstrate. A side–by–side description in *The Edinburgh Review* (December, 1903) deifies Milly as "Faint and frail, with her light hold on life, her soft appeal to love, she is never more than an entrancing shadow which melts again into the air at the first chill breath upon its soul," while Kate is decried as "the woman of pitiless ambition ... the decline of womanly dignity to the level of hateful bargain, for the price of body and spirit ... that callousness, that shameless audacity that took hold upon her heart…" In *The Sewanee Review* (February, 1905), Milly is "the sweet blonde dupe" while Kate "assumes the role of avaricious vampire," and in *The Albany Review* (June, 1907) Milly represents "the spirit of the Dove, hovering in pity and tenderness over a world of penury and desire," whereas Kate is the incarnation of such a world: "the tissue of sordid hopes, ignoble schemes, and monstrous treacheries ... the dreariest product

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[309] William James, "The General Law of Perception." From *The Principles of Psychology, Volume II* (New York, Henry Holt & Company: 1890), 203.

[310] The antithesis of "the *real* New Woman," to recall the spirited insistence of Hulda Friederichs and her fellow fin de siècle feminist journalist peers.

of the human imagination." But within the fringes of these early interpretations of the good–evil Milly–Kate polarity are also inquiries regarding the more inapparent complexities of each woman – narrowly addressed, but nevertheless conspicuous. The summary in *The Edinburgh Review* mentions "a distance not adequately measured" between the "formerly charming Kate Croy" and her subsequent "desperate surrender" to willful corruption, a dilemma that requires from James "some further assistance to a problem of such provoking mystery." *The Sewanee Review*, in spite of its scathing view of Kate, also considers the quandaries of "particular people, each conditioned in a specific manner … where does one find the clearness of outline and the lucidity of vision?" Similarly, *The Albany Review* acknowledges the fallacious imperfection of cursory characterizations, particularly with regard to the nature of human relations and its "innumerable gradations and shades to be taken account of in the artistic solution."

The "artistic solution" James summons in reference to Milly and Kate requires an adaptation of successively contradictory perspectives, and for his readers, the active process of appraising and judging these antithetical points of view altogether parallels fin de siècle questions on cognitive dissonance and its bearings on morality, identity, ethical subjectivity, and still–developing explications of the New Woman. Although Milly and Kate, as divergent reflectors of antithetical consciousnesses, are in the end forever irreconcilable, they each project within their contradictory interiorities numerous shared facets of both Victorian and post–Victorian womanhood. If, as Albert Stone claims, James in his late–major phase meant to be "deliberately confusing"[311] in his presentation of characters and motives, then paramount among his intentions was to chronicle – via an exploration of New Womanhood that is both empirical and conjectural – the discrepant atmosphere of the time, when "the mood ... was both an attack

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[311] Albert E. Stone, *Henry James and Childhood: "The Turn of The Screw."* (Stetson University: 1961), 4.

on moralism and materialism."[312] A number of modernist critics subsequently understood Milly and Kate as traversing "two sides of the same coin … the possibility that energy and fallibility, mastery and dupery, or truth and lie are radically entwined."[313] To all those around her, especially Milly, Kate's likeness and that of the New Woman are one and the same. Her "perversely melodramatic evil,"[314] however, cannot be extricated from this designation, and thus to pronounce Kate as morally bankrupt, unscrupulous, and devoid of spirituality is to conflate these latent characteristics with the New Woman. Equally inescapable is Kate's fixed inability to reconfigure herself well beyond the parameters of Victorianism: she consciously subjugates herself to patriarchal oppression; her identity is not a product of self–developed individuality, but is artificially manufactured by her Aunt Maud's elitist dominance; and she carries out her plot against Milly not on her own accord, but through reliance upon a man. The obverse is true of Milly. "The dove" is synonymous with "the angel," and Milly is at first subsumed by a set of attributes that are reminiscent of Victorian codes of femininity and gentility. Her ignorance defines her innocence; she is compliant and unassuming; she is vulnerable and genuine; she is neither suspicious nor cynical; her "pure" imagination is seemingly boundless; she holds personal virtue above all else; she is, as James writes in his Preface, "the last fine flower … of an old New York stem." But Milly's malleability also facilitates a unique form of Europeanization, one that commences in London and concludes in Venice. From the start, she is determined to experience the liberation of life's "finer vibrations" on her own terms, having the means to do so freely; from her broadening perceptions of both Kate and London itself, she learns how to become a "performer" as opposed to mere observer; and she comes to realize that purposive

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[312] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press: 2009), 399.

[313] Sheila Teahan, "The Abyss of Language in *The Wings of The Dove*." *The Henry James Review*, Volume 14, Number 2, Spring 1993 (Johns Hopkins University Press: 1993), 204-214.

[314] Daniel T. O'Hara, *Empire Burlesque: The Fate of Critical Culture in Global America* (Duke University Press: 2003), 298.

appearances oftentimes belie interior realities, having no correspondence whatsoever with one's actual consciousness.

The fine–drawn convergences of Milly's and Kate's circumscribed categorizations reflect James's ambivalence in determining an unequivocal account of the New Woman, as well as the distinct emergence of a discrete modernist aesthetic that highlights this irresolution. Both Milly and Kate alternately affirm and reject a "revolt against formalism" by selectively perpetuating and avoiding predetermined conventions; both "realize personality" through life experience as a way of constructing self–identity, but also consciously ignore the darker implications of the performer's act; and both, either privately (Kate) or blatantly (Milly) signify Charlotte Perkins Gilman's timely description of an attempted, but perhaps failed, escape from Victorian femininity: "Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman."[315] The confusions and contradictions soon become overwhelming. Together, the binary consciousnesses of Milly and Kate problematize widely held 19th century Hegelian notions of an individual's "singular consciousness, opposed to the unchangeable,"[316] illustrating instead several potential complications of envisioning the direction of a post–

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[315] Charlotte Perkins Gilman penned "Is Feminism Really So Dreadful?" in 1914, "trying to throw trying to throw off Victorian shackles" by capturing "the ideal re-creation of a Victorian woman." Sally Ledger, *The New Woman*, 50.

[316] Hegel, "The Truth of Certainty of Oneself," from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). As Henry Sussman notes, "there was an essential link between Hegelian philosophy and the Victorian idea of progress," namely that conscious "freedom" should not be defined as freedom from constraints; rather, conformity to what has been declared as "reason" is the basis of "true freedom." Beverly Clark elaborates on the connection interspersing Hegelian philosophy and Victorian conventions on gender roles and separate spheres: "Hegel's understanding of the subordinate place of women within such a society is hardly surprising given the hierarchical structure he proposes. Man is defined as 'the one,' woman as 'the other.' Man is 'powerful and active,' woman 'passive and subjective.' Moreover, reason is equated with the male, who is said to embody the ideal, whilst woman is equated with nature, most notably with feeling and intuitive responses." Sussman further contends that "The influence of Hegel — direct or oblique, positive or negative — upon such writers as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Henry James, and Kafka is unmistakable." Finally, Rowe observes that although James was, undoubtedly, "a pioneer among 19th century writers in examining the psychological effects of women's subordination in a patriarchal culture, exposing power structures that both subordinate women and entrap them within representational roles," valid opposing arguments have subsequently challenged this widely accepted conventional perspective by instead questioning whether James's novels actually tend to romanticize female suffering in precedence over viably challenging such oppressive structures.

Victorian mentality. As numerous cultural and literary historians have observed,[317] the focality of

catastrophe – as a depicted historical experience, concept, or narrative trope – became pivotal in

understanding this era that was coming to an end. Accounting for the role of individual

dissonance as an unpredictable element of realism during this transitional phase recapitulates

late–Jamesian theoretical dimensions on fin de siècle influence as a progressively critical social–

and culturally–driven component of this newfangled disunified, subversive consciousness that

had by now taken root. E.C. Curtsinger, in his discussion on the interwovenness between English

and American societies and James's later novels, explains this emergent collective awareness as

a harbinger of modernism: "Gaze–shifting provided a new consciousness that required a new art,

and it suggested ways of writing, of binding characters together, that classical writers could

scarcely conceive."[318] The concentric "gaze–shifting" in *The Wings of the Dove* personifies an

increasingly malignant world that is almost impossible to decode or foresee: even though the one

whose beauty of spirit overshadows the other's "talent for life" – "the power of the dove

overshadows that of the panther" – both are still doomed to suffer in the end, with fates that are

more similar than different. There is truly no solace in Milly's postmortem transcendency; no

comfort in her forgiveness for Kate and Merton; and no final reward for a scheme designed in

and confirmed by deceit. The "thorny experience" the novel presents, in the phrasing of David

Evans, with all its dissonance–induced fragmentation, disillusionment, dislocation,

circumvention, opposition, and obsession over rehearsing and reliving, amounts to James's

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[317] For instance, Frances Knight, Sally Ledger, Scott McCracken, Gail Marshall, and Robbie McLaughlan, among others, have cited the 20th century literary turn as a "collision between the old and the new," "an excitingly volatile transitional period," "a time when British cultural politics were caught between two ages, the Victorian and the modern," "a time fraught both with anxiety and with an exhilarating sense of possibility," and "born out of a volatile mixture of optimism and pessimism, fueled by anxieties about moral and social exhaustion and decline, counterbalanced by energy and optimism."

[318] E.C. Curtsinger, *The Muse of Henry James* (Latitude Press: 1987), 3.

deepest engagement with – and imprint on – the turn toward modernism.

Chapter V

Legacy: Henry James as "The Architect of Modernism"

The earliest volumes of posthumous Jamesian criticism were rife with initial predictions regarding his eventual place within literary history. William Dean Howells wrote that James was "a chief exemplar" of a new form of realism, "not after any fashion but his own." F.R. Leavis declared him to be a writer of "established pre–eminence" and cited *The Portrait of a Lady* as one of "the most brilliant novels in the language" on account of James's illustration of "the drama of consciousness." Percy Lubbock, in his landmark study *The Craft of Fiction*, frequently invoked James's process and technique – particularly his "method by which the picture of a mind is fully dramatized" – in his discussion on the quintessential characteristics of fictional narration. By the mid–20th century, James's lasting influence on an entirely new generation of authors had become clear. "For virtually all modernist writers," Haralson contends, "even those who resisted his example, James's was the dominant precursor of modernism owing to his unique mix of epistemological passion, moral subtlety, societal critique and stylistic ingenuity." Haralson goes on to define "modernism" based on the notion that English fin de siècle society was caught in an unpredictable flux:

> Modernism is a deceptively simple name for the diversity of cultural responses, mainly in Western Europe and the United States, to the complex process of historical change encapsulated in the term modernity. 'Modernity,' in turn, indicates an array of innovations as well as major shifts in the experience of life – that we may conveniently date from the late Renaissance ... it connotes leaps and bounds in knowledge, material progress, and social harmony ('a higher civilization'), but also encompasses a growing sense, especially among western elites, that the enterprise of humanity threatens to exceed human control and lead instead into chaos, exploitation, mass brutality, and

destruction of an unprecedented scope ... the image of humankind stripped of its melioristic hopes and caught in the throes of degeneration, atavism, crises of individual subjectivity and collective faith ... confronting persons from all walks of life.[319]

James had the advantage, Haralson also notes, of having "lived through the Victorian march of civilization only to watch the wreck of belief in that ideal."[320] His portraits of the dissonant consciousness and its traumatic consequences are thus rendered as a metaphor for the collapse of unsustainable 19th century aspirations. Subsequent modernist authors sought new premises for cultural and social restoration by way of imbuing their narratives, both structurally and connotatively, with disorder, calamity, and fragmentation in an attempt to record, as well as come to terms with, the "new normal."

In his seminal analysis of the modernist turn, Michael Saler describes three distinctively successive "waves" comprising the movement, which initially became apparent within artistic and literary realms and eventually permeated a number of social, cultural, and political establishments across the world.[321] The first commenced in 1880s England and Western Europe, with an anterior view to memorialize the anticipated beginnings of the new century, and was predominantly defined by pre–World War I aesthetic movements across the continent and America that sought to subvert traditional Victorianism and disrupt its practice. The revitalized "spirit of this time emphasized both cultural decline and spiritual rebirth,"[322] forcing a paradoxical overlapping of themes – such as oppression versus liberation, compliance versus

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[319] Eric Haralson, "Modernism." From *Henry James in Context*, 214-223.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Saler explains with regard to France and Italy, the two countries that are most often cited in fin de siècle studies along with England: "As the 19th century drew to a close, France and Italy experienced an explosion of crime, vagrancy, insanity, neurosis and sexual deviance," leading to widespread disarray and tensions that accelerated the modernist turn in those societies. Western Europe is usually most commonly referenced in discussions of the fin de siècle in terms of culture and community, but most of the continent and beyond experienced varying forms of unrest and anxiety.
[322] Saler, *The Fin de Siècle World* (Routledge: 2014), 1.

nonconformity, and the hold of the past versus the inevitable draw of progression – as a means of rejecting definitive 19th century standards while simultaneously embracing new social, cultural, and artistic potential. The second crystallized as a result of the first wave's cultivation of "the hothouse environment" of Europe's evolving epicenters of modernity, namely London, Vienna, Paris, and Florence, thereby expanding and accelerating the socio–cultural aspects of intellectual and philosophical innovation across the world at large. This recreated juncture became a concentric point where "the fertile ground of cultural elements, and the basis of their cohesion, was a shared social experience in the broadest sense … the broadening of cultural movements such as Aestheticism, Impressionism, Decadence, Symbolism, Realism, and Naturalism ... which both expressed and fostered wider changes in the political, social, intellectual, economic, religious, and scientific milieus of turn–of–the–century Europe and North America."[323] These convergent currents each embodied unique strands of what would become an altogether variegated period of increasingly daring artistic experimentation, "in terms of intersecting kaleidoscopic patterns, wherein social and cultural facets of the modern West might collide, collude, or simply co–exist, depending on the circumstances. ... The overarching themes of decline and rebirth remained constant." Finally, the third wave encompasses the movement's expansion beyond the boundaries of Europe and North America, as the scope of modernity grew into a collectively multifarious transnational phenomena that incorporated both global exchanges as well as "local challenges to traditional political, social, and cultural norms ... the cultural movement was global in nature, fostered by broad forces of modernization," and in many

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[323] Ibid., 5.

societies across continents, "specific ideas, artifacts, and practices were diffused through cosmopolitan networks and reconfigured to suit local needs."[324]

Modernism as the dawn of a new period is thus outlined by an unprecedented, revolutionary recasting, upheaval, and unconventionality across all disciplines and domains. The erosion of Anglocentric conformity in favor of a new reciprocity beyond western borders was also informed by the hybridization of ideas, "a product of the process of modernization during the late nineteenth century, which brought more individuals and cultures into contact than ever before. ... Incessant exposure to new ways of being could challenge habitual assumptions and provoke more integrative modes of understanding."[325] With this broadening of perspectives came a renewed focus on traditional religious dictates, resulting in "a more general questioning of all previous certainties, including that of human subjectivity and the nature of being ... a period in which traditional, hierarchical oppositions – rational and irrational, masculine and feminine, fiction and nonfiction, disenchantment and enchantment, and so on ... existed in tense equilibrium within a broader field."[326] Under the scope of the literary shift that began during the final stages of the Victorian era, the momentum of successive fin de siècle waves is reflected in an increased narrative exploration of the center of consciousness, its nature, and its internal and external tensions. As an explanatory lens, dissonance theory, with its emphasis on the individual's experience with psychological discord and the mind's attempted return to equilibrium, deciphers the effects of cognitive inconsistency at any given time; it thus provides a more pronounced understanding of consciousness in terms of observable behaviors rather than supposition and assumption, in line with Northrop Frye's belief that the early 20th century

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[324] The phenomenon of simultaneously progressive movements across Europe, Asia, and the Americas at the turn of the century underscores the notion that heightened self-reflexivity and awareness was a global occurrence.
[325] Ibid., 4.
[326] Ibid., 11.

mindset "can be seen from the outside as a rushing current of thoughts and associations and

memories and worries and images suggested by desire, pulsating automatically and with all the

habit of energy behind it."[327] The link between Victorian cultural disintegration and a newfound

recognition of cognitive dissonance becomes fully apparent with James's literary revitalization

of individuality and the mind, notions that would form the definitive core of the modernist turn.

As such, mainstream critical consensus has consistently cited James as either a forerunner or

"full–fledged member of the [modernist] order."[328]

    As case studies in cognitive dissonance, Isabel, Fleda, Kate, and Milly are collectively

recognizable as a primary link between fin de siècle anxieties, emergent authorial innovation in

modernist narrative practices, and epistemological synthesis as a central element of literary

structure. While studies of early modernist canon often concentrate on James's major novels of

his later phase,[329] his shorter works from this period also underscore the fraught end–era

transition. *The Turn of The Screw* (1898), for example, anticipates modernist formal conventions

of an unreliable narrator – the movement's hallmark of irreducible, interpretative uncertainty. One

result of this indeterminate confusion is an inability to distinguish the authenticity of the story's

events, which are further obscured by conventions of multilayered narrative framing and

distancing. On its surface as a gothic ghost story, many of the plot elements of *The Turn of The*

Screw are replicated from a shared past,[330] but the axes of horror and suspense have notably

shifted. Whereas an early Victorian reading of the novella would primarily locate apprehensions

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[327] Northrop Frye, "The Nightmare Life in Death." From *Northrop Frye on Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. Glen Robert Gill (University of Toronto Press: 2010), 165.
[328] Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (University Press of Kentucky: 1992), 93.
[329] *The Wings of The Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* are most often critically reviewed in connection with the beginnings of modernist narrative practices and methodology.
[330] Aspects of the gothic atmosphere in *The Turn of the Screw* allude to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre*, and James borrows conventions from both (namely the mysteries that underlie superstition and how they can incessantly grow one's imagination) to build the narrative as a psychological ghost story, centered around constructs of ambiguity.

and agitations externally – amongst the foreboding visuals of the old house, with its dark

atmosphere and remote setting – the psychological unease unquestionably takes precedence in the

fin de siècle realm; James's emphasis on fear originates from within the narrator's perception of

reality (or lack thereof), and it is overpowering. As an instance of exploration into the

convolutions of the human mind, the story represents how "one is continually called on to deal

with the problems and losses that have been generated out of one's knowable life world" via

maladaptive, repressive coping strategies that can include delusion and self–deception. In the end,

this internal degeneration "leaves us especially vulnerable to whatever institutions and discourses

may come along offering to find us."[331] Likewise, the unreliable narrator of *The Sacred Fount*

(1901) reflects a perverse erraticism in creating his own "perfect palace of thought" as he

obsessively seeks to analyze and interpret those around him based solely on provisional

appearance and momentary behavior. The product of what becomes an increasingly disjointed

interiority of the narrator represents James's desire to project "the blankness and deathliness

beneath the masks we design for our appearances in the world … the split between our public and

private selves," as John Carlos Rowe contends. By deliberately tracing "the split," James brings to

the fore the fearful possibility that within the depths of one's mind, there exists the evolutionary

potential of an increasingly dissonant, unpredictable, and ultimately dangerous mindset, masked

"beneath the niceties of social manners at the end of the 19th century."[332]

These repeated parallels among James's late–phase works mirror one another with a

distinctive emphasis that foresees an inevitable disruption of, and rebellion against, the

meticulous forms of control that had governed Victorianism. In this sense, James's more drawn

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[331] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Harvard University Press: 2009), 91.

[332] Rowe, "The Sacred Fount." From *The Critical Companion to Henry James: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, eds. Eric L. Haralson and Kendall Johnson (Infobase Publishing: 2009), 143.

and deliberate attention to certain narrative structures and motifs interwoven throughout his late–

phase works amount to what some critics have viewed as a "sociological project,"[333] one which

precedes the specific techniques, themes, alternating perspectives, and open–ended interpretation

that would shape and sustain the "make it new"[334] approach of the modernist movement. It also

ties into Festinger's assessment of a type of psychological upheaval that results from the final

exposure of social and cultural double standards: "The need to preserve a morally good sense of

self, to self–consistently make one's actions agree with one's beliefs, is one of the key aims of an

individual … when social acclimatization can no longer be upheld en masse, a growing number

of individuals will engage in impulsive actions, rebel against authority, and reject any cognitions

contrary to their ongoing behavioral restructuring."[335] Additionally, in terms of modernism

instigating experimental literary and artistic modes of deconstructing the human thought process

beyond the more simplified confines of realism, the Jamesian notions of unfiltered metacognition

and dissonance of the mind are rooted in subsequent trends of the avant–garde.[336] A concise

survey of several of the most prominent, instrumental literary figures at the turn of the century

and in the nascent course of its first three decades – Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, James

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[333] Christopher Nissen and Marja Härmänmaa, eds., *Decadence, Degeneration, and The End: Studies in the European Fin de Siècle* (Springer: 2014), 130.

[334] Ezra Pound, one of the driving forces behind literary modernism, argued that the modern artist must innovatively and consistently rupture historical precedent in order to escape its confines. His call to "Make it new!" became a maxim for modernist and postmodernist thought.

[335] Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails* (Simon and Schuster: 2013), 153.

[336] Dietmar Schloss explains the dualistic traditionalist-modernist bridge James became synonymous with: "The works of Henry James provided a feast for the critical avant-garde ... All schools of contemporary thought claimed James as one of their own. James has been called a pragmatist, a Nietzschean, and a phenomenologist; he has been allied with contemporary philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Adorno; and he has found recognition among psychoanalytic critics, feminists, and even neo-Marxists. Different as the tenets of the individual critical schools may be, they all share one common goal: they want to cleanse James of the 'stigma' of being Victorian or merely 'protomodern' and make him a full-fledged modern, or even postmodern, writer."

Joyce, and Virginia Woolf[337] – demonstrates the extent of Jamesian influence within the "crucible" that Ledger describes and Saler expounds upon.

F.R. Leavis states that Joseph Conrad "found a fortifying stimulus in James," despite Conrad's more open admiration of Flaubert; it is his emphasis on disjointed narration, coupled with a "greater range and depth of his interest in humanity and the greater intensity of his moral preoccupation"[338] that places Conrad's concern with the dissonant mind in nearer proximity to James. In his discussion on "The Informer," a short story that examines the intersections between human motivation, duplicity, and contradictory appearances, Theodore Billy extends this comparison: "Taking his hint from Henry James, Conrad establishes a dual frame of reference in the tale, overtly burlesquing the anarchist but also satirizing the shallow affectations of the aesthetic movement in the late nineteenth century," while also implicating the pitfalls of "a fin de siècle cult of self–indulgence"[339] in a semi–comic narrative style. *The Secret Agent* (1907), in both structure and theme, highlights the darkly splintered nature of existence via a disorganized, disordered retelling of deadly events, set against the combined political hegemony of imperialism and capitalism. Martin Haliwell refers to the novel as an example of how Conrad "borrowed" from Jamesian dynamics by "relying on nineteenth century realism and melodrama but also foreshadows the more deliberate experimentation of high modernism ... a literary work that combines the mode of conventional realism with modest innovations of form."[340] Conrad's most famous novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), similarly incorporates a Jamesian approach to "express the difficulties that beset us when we try to understand others … leading to reflections

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[337] Other canonical modernist authors who were shaped by James's influence with regard to both technique and perspectives on the interior consciousness include Dorothy Richardson, E.M. Forster, and D.H. Lawrence.
[338] Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York University Press: 1961), 130.
[339] Theodore Billy, *A Wilderness of Words: Closure and Disclosure in Conrad's Short Fiction* (Texas Tech University Press: 1997), 108.
[340] Martin Haliwell, "Transatlantic Modernism." In *High Modernism: Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s*, ed. Joshua Kavaloski (Boydell & Brewer: 2014), 202.

on the solitariness of every human soul." The extremes of evil and hypocrisy within the Belgian imperial enterprise are framed against a juxtaposition of grotesqueness and absurdity as Marlowe navigates his way through the Congo, but his story is given to and retold by an unnamed, unknown narrator. This "shadowy figure," who operates as a simple yet powerful entity on account of his dubious origins and purpose, "helps create an inward mood of disruption, confusion, and isolation"[341] that subsequently permeates the tale. In Conrad's own words, James was "the historian of fine consciousnesses," and he sought to emulate "the truthfulness of his art" in his own work:

> His mind is steeped in the waters flowing from the fountain of intellect ... the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness ... this snatching of vanishing phrases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon … Nobody has rendered better, perhaps, the tenacity of temper, or known how to drape the robe of spiritual honour about the drooping form of a victor in a barren strife. The earth itself has grown smaller in the course of ages, and the struggles Mr. James chronicles with such subtle and direct insight are, though only personal contests, desperate in their silence, nonetheless heroic in the modern sense for the absence of shouted watchwords, clash of arms and sound of trumpets. James's vision denies the desire for finality, for which our hearts yearn. That a sacrifice must be made, that something has to be given up, is the truth engraved in the innermost recesses of the fair temple built for our edification by the masters of fiction. There is no other secret behind the curtain. All adventure, all love, every success is resumed in the supreme energy of an act of renunciation.[342]

As with James, Conrad's fundamental directive, as he further explains, is "to make you hear, to make you feel … before all, to make you see."[343] He contends, however, that what we are able and unable to "see" is never clearly defined in life, and fiction must replicate this truth. Thus, the

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[341] Marlowe A. Miller, *Masterpieces of British Modernism* (Greenwood Publishing Group: 2006), 22.
[342] Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (London, JM Dent: 1921), 16.
[343] Analogous to James's insistence that the novelist "Show, not tell."

dissonance between the protagonist's ideal and his actual experience with reality is a relentless source of interference for the reader attempting to gauge reliability. The resulting inconsistent "fragments of life" typify Conrad's essential argument: that "the permanence of memory is the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values." The early post–Victorian world, in Conrad's view, is a place where conflict between the forces of good and evil have finally been fully exposed, leaving in its wake a dualistic society and inevitable chaos on account of the incompatible binaries that have emerged. While Jamesian characters are just beginning to confront the psychological fissures that are part and parcel of this new reality, Conrad's protagonists are fully immersed within the modernist quandary of a progressive yet meaningless world, one that is now wholly defined by its lack of a concrete moral center.

Like Conrad, Ford Madox Ford cultivated a close friendship with James during the mid–1890s. Ford provided for James a firsthand glimpse into the complexities of English social life; he was also a founding editor of *The English Review* for several years since the journal's inception in 1908, with issues regularly featuring James's works over the next two decades. Their mutual exchanges – and occasional clash – of ideas on self–consciousness and cognition (where James mainly focuses on how irresolvable dissonance of the mind comes about, Ford concentrates on how those tensions subsist one another yet remain dualistic) encouraged Ford's further development of the paradox of interiority, and his later novels explore how "dialogue and description blend with consciousness, memory, and reverie into an ever–dissolving and reforming kaleidoscope of precision and indefiniteness."[344] Eventually, according to Paul Skinner, "Ford saw himself as a kind of suture between the late nineteenth–century cultural world of Henry James and Joseph Conrad and the avant–garde of early British modernism." Combining the innovations of both James and Conrad allowed Ford to convey a unique sensory

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[344] Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life: Volume II: The After-War World* (OUP Oxford: 2012) 259.

brand of literary impressionism. In establishing his encompassing contention that while "we may contemplate life steadily enough" in one given moment, "it is impossible to ever see it whole,"[345] unreliable narrators, repeated time–shifts, nonlinear recollections, and unsettling flashbacks all feature in his novels. *The Good Soldier* (1915), arguably Ford's most famous novel, addresses the problems between perception and representation within the opposing forces of a dual personality, its disunited textual structure providing a type of metacommentary on its equally ambiguous conclusions. The tetralogy of *Parade's End* (1924–1928) traverses a narrative path from omniscient to singularly limited perspectives as a means of tracing the "shattering experience" of the first world war. The distress of the divided mind takes center stage, both in terms of content – with characters whose psychological states have been shocked, diminished, or damaged irreversibly by the war – and in terms of style, with an abrupt transitional form that recurrently enacts both mental and structural fragmentation. Shortly before his death, Ford published a series of literary portraits; the third of these essays, "Temperaments," is a mixture of criticism and tribute to James's contributions in transforming the exploration of consciousness and interiority within the literary realm:

> He has looked at life with its treacheries, its banalities, and its shirkings and its charlatanries, all of them founded on the essential dirtiness of human nature. … [James] showed society just as it is: averagely sensual, averagely kindly, averagely cruel, averagely honest, averagely imbecile … and that most people have not got souls – are in the end just the stuff with which to fill graveyards. He gives you an immense – and an increasingly tragic – picture of a leisured society that is unavailing, materialist, emasculated – and doomed. No one was more aware of this.[346]

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[345] Paul Skinner, ed., *Ford Madox Ford's Literary Contacts* (Brill: 2007), 166.
[346] Ford Madox Ford, "The Master." From *Henry James, A Critical Study* (New York: 1915), 137.

If James was responsible for a twofold (both structuralist and textual) anticipation of modernism and its variegated forms, Ford completed the turn away from the external world and into subjective individual consciousness. By raising questions on the oftentimes faulty relationship between the mind and experience in an increasingly unpredictable society, Ford defines the post–war continuation of the movement by underscoring the absence of certainty and clarity in a world that is ultimately self–destructive and undecipherable: "We know so many little things that we are beginning to realize how much there is in the world to know, and how little of all that there is, is the much that we know."[347]

The modernist movement began a more radical shift following the devastating aftermath of World War I, heralded by James Joyce and the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922. Several years earlier, Joyce's experimentation with an eclectic merging of theme and form had drawn attention to his first widely received novel, *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* was the culmination of an even greater depth of innovation. Set over the course of a single day, its centrality is divided in equal parts between the interiority of its protagonists and the disconnected convolution of the text itself. In this way, *Ulysses* functions as Joyce's extended inquiry into individual self–awareness within the scope of multilayered language: interior monologue, which unveils both the steadfastness of the human spirit as well as the superficial nature of everyday life; and the language from external sources (in both speech and print) that subjectively affects both self–awareness and any given individual's view of the world at large. The extreme degree of fragmentation and disorder in *Ulysses* was unprecedented, leading T.S. Eliot to declare it the singular text that dismantled all notions of novelic form, moving beyond all previously held

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[347] Ford, "Modern Poetry." From *The Living Age, Volume 264* (Living Age Company, Incorporated: 1910), 178.

structural restrictions: "It is simply an expression of the age … a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy."[348]

The process of finding truth, as James established with pronounced emphasis in his late–phase novels, requires confrontation with cognitive dissonance and its role in the articulation of paradox; this conflict is unveiled via the stream of consciousness. James's influence on Joyce is most palpable within this consciousness–dissonance–truth triangle, as Francis Constantine puts it: "Interior language becomes a type of complicated thought model for such a reality where cause and effect become interlaced, defamiliarized, and confused, and *Ulysses* above else is about this language – a language which is presented as both real and imagined."[349] C.H. Rickword likewise suggests that Joyce reaffirmed James's insistence that "interior drama might be rendered immediately by language ... he was the first to show the word was as capable of embodying mental and physical movements."[350] Joyce's deepening reinforcement of this notion is most apparent when comparing his earlier and later works, such as his collection of short stories in Dubliners (1914) to Ulysses. Whereas the stories in *Dubliners* reflect alignment with formal narrative conventions, Ulysses is where Joyce begins to "practice a Jamesian exclusiveness of focus on – and within – a single mind."[351] On account of Joyce's drastic and ambitious engagement with interiority, mainstream critical agreement of his stance as the "genius" of modernism, "the first writer, after Henry James had started the exposition of mental

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[348] T.S. Eliot, *Ulysses, Order, and Myth* (Dial Publishing Company: 1923), 383.
[349] Francis Constantine Manista, *Voice, Boundary, and Identity in the Works of James Joyce* (Edwin Mellen Press: 2006), 195.
[350] C.H. Rickword, "A Note on Fiction." From *The English Modernist Reader, 1910-1930*, ed. Peter Faulkner (University of Iowa Press: 1986), 160.
[351] This ties to James's statement in the Preface of *The Portrait of a Lady* regarding his intention to "Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness," thereby ensuring an interior account of Isabel's journey.

life, in whose work the trend from objective to subjective received its most comprehensive and sophisticated embodiment."[352]

In her 1919 essay, "Modern Fiction," Virginia Woolf considered the methodology of the "modern" author's revived interest in representations of consciousness: "[the novelist] has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer 'this' but 'that': out of 'that' alone must he construct his work. For the moderns 'that,' the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology."[353] The "dark places" Woolf refers to originate within the continuously–shifting interior of a conflicted mind. Drawing upon James's declaration that "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere,"[354] Woolf, who had been acquainted with James since her childhood, wrote prolifically on both his place at the fore of modernist tradition and his primary role in the early 20th century shift away from standard motifs of "monks and monsters" toward, instead, the more proximate tangled treacheries that belie human nature:

> Henry James has only to take the smallest of steps and he is over the border. His characters with their extreme fineness of perception are already half–way out of the body. There is nothing violent in their release. They seem rather to have achieved at last what they have long been attempting – communication without obstacle. … Can it be that we are afraid? But it is not a man with red hair and a white face whom we fear. We are afraid of something, perhaps, in ourselves. In short, we turn on the light. If by its beams we examine the story in safety, note how masterly the telling is, how each sentence is stretched, each image filled, how the inner world gains from the robustness of the outer, how beauty and obscenity twined together worm their way to the depths – still we must own that something remains unaccounted for. We must admit that Henry James has conquered. That courtly, worldly, sentimental old gentleman can still make us afraid of the dark.[355]

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[352] Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (University Press of Kentucky: 1992), 45.
[353] Woolf, "Modern Fiction" (The Common Reader: 1919), 153.
[354] James, Preface, *Roderick Hudson*.
[355] Andrew McNeillie, ed., *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1919-1924* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1986), 325.

James, in Woolf's assessment, effectively prompted this focus on the interior psyche – replete with dissonance from the "outer" world, prompting "fear … in ourselves" – by remaining closely attuned to contemporary events (at the end of his life, this preoccupation was reflected in his despair over World War I) and how changing circumstances affected fin de siècle social atmosphere and rational order. In "On Re–Reading Novels" (1922), Woolf ranks James among Dickens, Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Meredith as one of the most influential novelists of recent times, whose impact would always loom large across the concentric intersections of literature and culture. She develops this thought further in "Phases of Fiction" (1929), referring to James as "far more infectious than other writers …. The young can hardly read Henry James … without copying him." In Woolf's own stories and novels, which form a major component of modernist canon, characters are drawn with Jamesian echoes of the internal fight between harmony and dissonance. Taking this dynamic a step further, Woolf constantly embodies certain aspects of metacognition within her character portraits, underscoring certain moments when they are aware of the disequilibrium in their own consciousnesses. In *To The Lighthouse* (1927), Lily Briscoe, a brilliant, struggling young artist, ponders the contours of her painting – but also implicitly alludes to the soul's constant search for at least one connective element of consistency: "In the midst of chaos there was shape." In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the tensions between time, characters, and the narrative structure in which their world is contained (pivoting on Woolf's belief that all intricacies of a single day can accurately reflect the entirety of human experience and flaws in cognition) represents Woolf's "search for harmony … within the characters, between the characters, between the characters and their circumambient universe, and above all, for her, in the form of the novel: sought, explored, achieved, questioned, disrupted."[356]

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[356] Rosemary Sumner, *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf* (Springer: 2001), 150.

Characters oscillate from the intensity of emotion to automated self–repression. Woolf implies that as the mind seeks a return to consonance, the memory undergoes a process of conscious revision to shield itself from the volatility of dissonance; otherwise, the "contradictory impulse to express and rein in" individuality is likened to a debilitating "death of the soul."[357]

Each of these authors pioneered literary modernism, and their works epitomize its defining trends. From James, they understood that deliberately confusing perception and actual experience via the dissonant consciousness requires a methodology that demonstrates how truth lies outside the net of language alone.[358] As his portraits of Isabel, Fleda, Milly, and Kate prove, genuine truths can only be obtained in the aftermath of the mind's confrontation with internal dissonance, without the deceptive covers of visual and vocal stratagems. It is realized via Isabel's solitary, extended fireside contemplation; through Fleda's eventual inability to withdraw from the jumble of external forces that finally drive her to simultaneously acknowledge first her feelings, and then her defeat on account of them; amongst the deceptive silences and affectations that Milly can no longer dismiss; and in the permanent disruption of Kate's former mastery at self–defensive compartmentalization. In anticipating the psychological trauma of the fin de siècle, the departure from Victorianism, and the inevitable approach of modernism, these characters set a precedent: as unfiltered representations of the divided self, of the conflicted interior, and of the genuine highs and lows of human experience. By emphasizing the "craft of fiction," – structure and style over narrative subjectivity – James exemplified for the modernist generation of authors how the novel itself must be transformed into a drama that develops within

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[357] Tuzyline Jita Allan, "The Inverted World of Mrs. Dalloway." In *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, eds. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer (NYU Press: 1997), 95-115.

[358] James consistently illustrates how traditional language — dialogue, characters' perceptions of each other, unreliable narrators — more often captures the flaws and faults of human experience rather than its truths. Silence, behavioral interactions, and "showing" all become crucial alternate modes of communication that both lift the veil of language and reveal truths it previously camouflaged.

the protagonist's stream of consciousness, as it simultaneously unfolds in the mind of the reader. The return to "showing, not telling" removes authorial omnipotence completely, leaving in its stead the depiction of individual interiority as a narrative technique. This, of course, embodies the core of modernism: The notion that, as James wrote to his brother William, "The quality of our individual consciousness – how we know – is more important than any inventory of what is out there to be known."

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