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CONJECTURES ON THE FAILURE OF HENRY JAMES
AS A DRAMATIST

BY
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Henry James was a very complex personality. In consequence, his career shows many facets. Only a few of these facets, however, are familiar to the reading public; and among these brightly shining points of this literary star is one which glimmers but faintly--his attempt to write drama.

There were those who acclaimed Henry James in his own day; and in the present century ever-increasing numbers of admirers, though still not large, attest to the excellence of his fiction and critical essays. But at no time has he been recognized as a playwright, a distinction which he craved, because here failure visited him repeatedly.

The many intricate factors in Henry James's personality, upbringing and general environment which contributed to his artistic success also contributed to his dramatic failure. To understand, even superficially, this nonsuccess, we must first examine the interrelation of assets and liabilities in his personality growth, and subsequently analyze his merits and shortcomings as a writer of prose fiction. Then, and then only, can we prove the causes of his miscarriage in the theatre.

Even so, the most that any critic, howsoever shrewd
and skillful, can hope to attain is a series of conjectures. A search for these conjectures is the raison d'être of the following essay.
CHAPTER I

HENRY JAMES AS A PERSON

Henry James, Jr., son of Henry James, Sr., and brother of William James, was born an American, lived as a European, died a British subject, and returned as ashes to America--to lie beside his parents, his elder brother and sister.

All-encompassing as the foregoing succinct description may be, it is yet woefully inadequate in explaining the man. In his case, more than in that of most men, a set of peculiar characteristics add up to a singular and variegated genius. For the source of these characteristics we must search in his family background and in the unconventional directions of his personal history.

Henry James was the son of Henry James and Mary Walsh. The elder Henry had inherited from his father, a merchant of Albany, a sizable fortune. Thus, with no necessity to earn a living, added to the fact that he had suffered an accident which resulted in the amputation of a leg, the father had the time and the means to become somewhat of a philosopher and theologian. As a matter of fact, when plagued by his sons' questionings as to his occupation, he advised them to tell their playmates that he was "just a student."
One of the philosophical theories evolved by this professed "student" was that "children who were being trained to be citizens of the world should not be allowed to take root in any particular religion, political system, ethical code, or set of personal habits."¹ In fine, he "sought to prepare his boys just to be."²

In accordance with these theories, the sons of Henry James, Sr., were "exposed" to a series of tutors, a great deal of travel, and the sociableness of a leisure class which enjoyed a brief chapter in the history of American growth.

As stated before, it was the theory of Henry James, Sr., that his sons should not be allowed to grow up in any particular mold, and that they should not be allowed to take root in any bourgeois conception of emotional security. The grandfather James, who had been a merchant, knew what it was to earn a living. Henry James, Sr., because of his leg amputation, was incapacitated for any great physical undertaking. The fact that he was not compelled to provide a means of support for his family, no less than his physical disability, contributed toward a natural inclination toward meanderings of the mind. Consequently, he embraced

² Ibid.
a good deal of Swedenborgian philosophy, which, although steeped in piety and religious thought, denied the need for any kind of physical church. Swedenborg had conceived and taught a spiritual church.

According to the biographers of Henry James, Sr., whose influence on his son was marked, the Swedenborgian theory (that no need existed for concrete or material evidence of modern man's pattern of living) found expression in all he thought, and was evidently largely responsible for the manner or method used in the teaching of the four sons. Frederic Harold Young even accuses James, Sr., of being an unsystematic thinker, pointing out how he (James) would castigate a particular subject or phase of some study, which he later or sometimes formerly had praised lavishly. Young cites an example of James's particular brand of thought by recalling that a week before his death, James, Sr., left the following instructions:

Tell him (evidently the clergymen-to-be in charge of his funeral) to say only this: "Here lies a man, who has thought all his life that the ceremonies attending birth, marriage and death were all damned non-sense." Don't let him say a word more.3

Amid the tremendous intellectual revolt that the elder James sought looms his awareness of the cultural inadequacy of America. He was determined, therefore, that

his sons should reap the harvest of their grandfather's industry, by seeking cultural values elsewhere. In 1849, he wrote to Emerson, who was a friend of the family:

Considering with much pity our four stout boys, who have no playroom within doors and import shocking bad manners from the street, we gravely ponder whether it wouldn't be better to go abroad for a few years with them, allowing them to absorb French and German, and get such a sensuous education as they cannot get here.  

The letter to Emerson expressed no idle opinion. Because Henry James, Sr., considered the boys' playmates, whose families lived in Union Square of New York, as common "roughs," his idea was activated soon enough. It is ironic, therefore, that the material security which the grandfather James bequeathed to his progeny should contribute greatly to the emotional and intellectual instability which was to afflict one or more of the James family at various periods during their lifetimes.

Henry James, Sr., had no difficulty following the dictates of his mind, contradictory though they were. Even at a time when the physical aspect of travel was a chore as well as a bore, his wife, Mary Walsh, patiently managed the packing and unpacking of the family paraphernalia, which always included her husband's volumes of Swedenborg.

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Another influence of some consequence in the life of the boy Henry was that of his mother. She was a woman of strength, but, like her husband, of constant contradiction. Her heritage was one of strict Scotch Presbyterianism; and yet she let herself be persuaded to a civil marriage performed by the mayor of New York. Moreover, she exercised a great deal of patience and respect for her husband's strange and unorthodox religious beliefs. Although she never completely followed the philosophy, per se, according to James's memoirs, his mother "sat on the steps at least (of the father's religious temple) and caught reverberations of the inward mystic choir."\(^5\)

At times Mrs. James allowed herself to deliver little barbs at the elder James's voluminous writings, reminding her offspring with an amused tolerance, of "your father's ideas." However, she must have agreed basically with his theories, for no evidence can be found that she ever disagreed with the informal and erratic education of the children, or remonstrated about the interminable changes of schools and tutors. Nor did she oppose the constant uprooting of the entire household at a moment's notice.

In his autobiography, Henry James makes very few references to his mother. When he does speak of her, he

describes her as moving about the family soundlessly, but with such a force as to form the cornerstone of the family life. Her whole life was her family, and she was such a support to her husband, with "force" and "tenderness," that when she died the elder James simply refused to go on. By her availability to her husband and her interest in his work, she became part of him, and he became part of her. It was also the lot of Mary Walsh James to submerge herself in each of her children to such an extent that son Henry was later to say, "I think we almost contested her being separate enough to be proud of us—it was too like our being proud of ourselves."6

What must have appealed to the boy-mind as a delightful inseparableness of mother and child, an all-encompassing maternal solicitude and gratifying love and adoration, probably later signified to the man-mind a possessiveness that smothered, or tended to smother, the individual personalities of the entire family. Mrs. James completely possessed her husband, in a self-effacing, "iron-hand-in-silk-glove" manner; and it is entirely possible that, once Henry James, Jr., had created a life and definite personality of his own, he shied away from marriage in the abject fear he would inevitably and subconsciously follow in the footsteps of his father.

6Ibid., p. 343.
Thus, it was two definitive, yet vacillating, individuals who greeted the birth of their second son—whose legacy was to include the appendage "Junior"—in New York City on April 15, 1843. Although the parents' restlessness was already apparent, the baby's first exposure to Europe was hardly felt, since he was only six months old at the time. However, he always stoutly maintained recalling the Place Vendome in Paris when he was still "in long clothes."

In 1847 the James family moved back to New York, where the future novelist roamed between his fifth and twelfth years. A few years, immediately following the first European trip, had been spent with James's paternal grandmother, Catherine Barber. A home was purchased near Sixth Avenue, where the family settled down for a few years. During this time the boy Henry was impressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson, a friend of the family; and in like manner became acquainted with Thackeray and Washington Irving.

School, as such, had a peculiar connotation in the early life of the boy. First there was a tussle with the "educative ladies"—the long line that began with a Miss Bayou, or Bayhoo, James was not sure of the name. These ladies belonged to several nationalities—Russian, French, and German—probably chosen in accordance with the father's eclectic theories. When Henry was ten, the experimental tutelage expanded to a series of "establishments," private
schools of a sort, in various sections of the city. One of them, on Lower Broadway, literally overflowed with Cubans and Mexicans. This was followed by still others, never for any great length of time.

At twelve years of age, the future author was introduced to Europe for the second time. The family disembarked at Liverpool on July 8, 1855. They spent only a few days in England, during which time Henry was ill with malarial chills and fever. As soon as possible, the Jameses pressed on to Paris; and from there they went to Switzerland, Henry spending most of the time in bed, between recurring and subsiding sessions of illness. Early in October the elder Henry had already tired of the continent and packed his family back to London, via Paris, where they established a household for nine months. From London, back they went to Paris, with a brief sojourn at Boulogne, in the pattern of family life already begun in America and London.

From now on, the European education of young Henry James consisted of travel, tutors and private schools. In Geneva, Switzerland, when he was well enough after one of his sieges of malaria, Henry joined his brothers in a brief session in private schools. During the winter and summer spent in London, the boys were submitted to an endless succession of governesses and tutors, all of whom imparted to
the young minds something of themselves.

Early in the summer of 1858—after having been abroad three years—the family returned to New England. They made plans to settle in Newport, Rhode Island. However, the elder James had to leave twice more—both times to Switzerland and Germany (constantly using the guise of searching for adequate educational facilities)—before letting America prove the final temptress to his wandering spirit.

From the established residence at Newport, which now served as a base of operations, the boys continued to add to their vast store of impressions. Henry, Jr., and his brother William studied art for a time. The former’s education also included a session at the Harvard Law School, which seems to have done little harm to his growing awareness of life and to the desire to write about his observances.

Blessed with an imaginative mind, Henry experienced a peculiar reaction to the vicarious modes of thinking all about him. Instead of disciplining his mental faculty, they tended to stir his active imagination. He had already reached the tentative decision, partly because of his feeling of inferiority, as well as his shyness, that he was fated to be an observer and interpreter of life. When he was unable to take an active part in the Civil War, because
of an early injury of an obscure nature, coupled with his total inadequacy in law school, he became ever more introspective.

James began his literary career in 1864 by writing criticisms and stories for the *North American Review*, the *Nation*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Galaxy*, all of them important journals of thought and quality fiction. In these endeavors he was encouraged by William Dean Howells, who was on the staff of the *Atlantic Monthly*; and as a consequence Henry James continued to contribute stories, early settling on his favorite theme—that of the American in Europe.

Following his own chosen theme, Henry, Jr., resembling Henry, Sr., was drawn to Europe again and again. However, unlike his father, he left Cambridge in 1875 and succumbed completely to Europe's fatal attraction. He established residence, first in Paris, and then in London. Now he began writing in earnest, and finished many novellen and full-length novels.

Although his fiction commanded no great number of public admirers, James built up a modest following. Besides Howells, such men of intellectual stature as Hawthorne, Emerson, and Mark Twain acclaimed his works. Along with a prodigious number of short stories, the novels *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, *Washington Square*, and *Daisy Miller*
began to make their appearance.

However, a brief fling at play writing—begun as early as 1869 but concentrated during the last decade of the Nineteenth Century—failed dismally, and plunged the author into agony. Two plays which were actually produced, The American and Guy Domville, closed after very short runs. Other shorter plays, as well as a dramatization of Daisy Miller, never reached the footlights. After three unsuccessful attempts to conquer the stage, he abandoned that phase of creative work, and again concentrated on fiction and essays.

With a limited audience for his fiction, and none whatsoever for his drama, Henry James had to come to terms with himself. He was human enough to desire a measure of acclaim. He was criticized for adopting the European locale; his perceptions of subtle human relationships, critics charged, were too delicate for the average reading public. Finally, after many years of frustration with an unsympathetic public, James overcame his resentment enough to produce just for the sake of creating. Then, in Rye, England, he found a house which pleased him, and where he spent the last years of his life. Here he wrote as he wished, as became his nature, without trying measurably to please anyone.

When World War I threatened to smash the cosmos
which he had created for himself, and which was part of
the European and English picture as he saw and loved it,
he became very provoked with his native country, America,
for seemingly taking no interest. In exasperation, he
renounced his American citizenship, and became a British
However, as though to complete a circle, a codicil to his
will instructed that his ashes be returned to Cambridge,
Massachusetts, to lie beside those of his parents, his
elder brother, and his sister.

The foregoing paragraphs attempt in a small way to
bring into focus some of the predominant influences in the
life of Henry James. Surrounded as he was by emotionally
taut, intellectually adventurous extroverts, he fled into
his own make-believe world for refuge. Perhaps his family
hindered a great many latent qualities in him. However,
they unwittingly helped to mold a man of letters, who be­
came a studious commentator of human nature and human re­
lations, a master of observation and applied psychology--
a man whose legacy to the world was not children created
from his own flesh and blood, but those of his pen, born
with as much difficulty and pain.
Henry James, it was noted, began his career as critic and story writer for the *North American Review*, the *Nation*, the *Galaxy*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. The family allowance being adequate, he was able to exercise his creative ability in leisurely manner. As a result, he produced a number of well-wrought short stories and serials; and, although he also wrote novels, a favored form was the *novella*.

By nature, the *novella* concerns itself with incident rather than with character, and is remarkable for brevity and simplicity. Longer than the short story, it is shorter and less involved than the novel, which in addition to being lengthy has one or more subplots. Widely accepted though it was in Europe, this literary form never gained popularity in the United States.

Although James's novels, for the most part, qualify as novels by weight of their length, thematically they remain *novellen*. True, theirs is not the simplicity and brevity noted in the definition of the true *novella*; but their characters are carefully developed and explored, and their length is sufficient to make a fair-sized volume. However, rarely does James have an intricate plot in his
novels. Instead, he creates a single theme, and develops it to the full. Therefore, it can be said that James mixes an already mixed literary form, alien to and not acceptable in the America of his time.

In order better to understand James’s treatment of plot, three of his major works will be studied. A brief resume of each can help explain the incidents, chance remarks, or general attitude that set the novelist’s mind and pen to work.

There is no concrete evidence that any special incident was responsible for the theme of *The American*. It is, however, a favorite device of James’s--pitting a straightforward, candid American against the devious European. The central character, Christopher Newman, after a life of accumulating great wealth in America, comes to Europe to acquire culture and possibly a wife. He falls in love with Madame de Cintre, who is dominated by a tyrannical and aristocratic mother and brother. Although the family coffers are in a sad state of disrepair, which Newman’s financial circumstances could alleviate, the mother and brother object strenuously to the bourgeois American, and prevail upon Claire not to marry him. Once the decision has been made, Claire makes herself completely unavailable by entering the strict cloister of the Carmelites. Although Newman discovers a definite skeleton in
the de Bellegarde closet, he refrains from blackmail, proving himself the "noble" American.

In *Daisy Miller*, Mr. Winterbourne, an American by birth but transplanted to Europe at an early age, fails to understand the American ways of Miss Daisy Miller. Although the young people are obviously attracted to each other, with excellent prospects of falling in love, the cosmopolite is held back in his admiration by his aunt and his own European thinking. Plausibly, because of this very lack of understanding, Daisy visits the Roman Colosseum at midnight, contracts malaria, and dies.

In his own introduction to the tale, Henry James says that *Daisy Miller* originated in an anecdote about a young American girl which he had heard at Rome in the autumn of 1877. However, Viola Dunbar, in the *Philological Quarterly*, discovers other influences. James had read, and was impressed with *Paule Mere*, a novel by the noted Swiss author, Cherbuliez, which "expressly . . . prove[s] that frank nature is wofully out of favor there [Switzerland], and his heroine dies of a broken heart because her spontaneity passes for impropriety."¹ James begins *Daisy Miller* in Switzerland and ends it in Rome, where Daisy dies and is buried in a Protestant cemetery. Miss Dunbar

believes that some of the ending was suggested to James when he spent an afternoon at the little Protestant Cemetery, in Rome, where lie Shelley and Keats.

In Washington Square, Dr. Austin Sloper is widowed and left with a daughter, Catherine, who is neither pretty nor accomplished, much to the doctor's disappointment. The girl's mother had been all that the girl is not. When Catherine falls in love with Morris Townsend, the doctor perceives that her only attraction for the young man is her future wealth, and threatens to change his will if the love affair continues. The love affair does continue, even after a trip to Europe for the doctor and the girl. He does indeed change his will, and when Morris Townsend learns that Catherine has renounced all rights to her father's wealth, he flees. Years later, after the doctor's death, Morris returns to press his suit, but is rejected.

One of James's very good friends was Frances Ann Kemble, actress and writer. At the time that James knew her, she was well advanced in age, having lived a full and active life. James spent many evenings at the apartment of Mrs. Kemble, drawing upon her reminiscences for delightful conversational adventures, and it was from her that the idea of Washington Square found birth. In his notebooks, he made this entry:

February 21st. Mrs. Kemble told me last evening the history of her brother H.'s engagement to Miss T.
H.K. was a young ensign in a marching regiment, very handsome ("Beautiful") said Mrs. K., but very luxurious and selfish, and without a penny to his name. Miss T. was a dull, plain, commonplace girl, only daughter of the Master of King's Coll., Cambridge, who had a handsome private fortune (four thousand pounds a year). She was very much in love. . . . Her father disapproved. Miss T. reflected . . . and . . . determined to disobey her father and take the consequences. H.K. . . . shook himself free of the engagement. . . . K. lived about the world . . . at the end of ten years . . . came back . . . paid his addresses to Miss T. She refused. . . . H.K.'s selfishness had over-reached itself and this was the retribution of time. 2

In the three preceding examples of James's work, there is only the primary plot, only one drive toward the climax. In the modern novel, running parallel to, or in conjunction with, the main idea there will be at least one subplot and perhaps even two or more. The one incident brought to a satisfactory conclusion (speaking from the point of view of catharsis) is reserved for the short story or the novella.

As stated before, Americans never did become fond of the novella form of fiction. To the typical straightforward American mind the novella was a mixture of forms. Even more devastating, it was an alien form. Although such discerning readers as William Dean Howells and Ralph Waldo Emerson were enjoying the works of Henry James, 2

American readers in general rejected them for the obvious reason.

Another unrelenting criticism of James was his employment of the international scene. During the period that James was contributing to the literary magazines of the East Coast, the rest of the American continent was afflicted with "growing pains," with an overwhelming awareness of "self"; and the majority of Americans had little time or taste to explore the European picture. In consequence, James's own countrymen deplored the very quality which contributed to the richness of his works. According to Leon Edel, "Henry James achieved that rare thing—an international as well as a national identity." This critic further explains that in the chronicles of the Daisy Millers and Francis Dossons, the Roderick Hudsons and Christopher Newmans, "Henry James had placed himself on a superior plane of observation, a-wing over two worlds, the Old and the New."4

The international situation appears in the three works mentioned before. Although Washington Square begins and reaches its climax in New York, time is taken for a year's journey in Europe. Daisy Miller presents an


4Ibid.
American in Switzerland and Rome. The American deals with another American, this time in France. However, the international locale in itself does not serve as recommendation for the enjoyment of the foregoing.

Henry James was a master of psychological study and character delineation. He spent many hours, and the resultant many words, delving into the minds and motives of his characters.

He is happiest when analyzing moral truth in its several perspectives, as it affects, impinges upon, and subtly alters the lives of his major intelligences. The result is a moral view which is limited, but which in its very limitation gains an intensity into the human condition that no exhaustive documentation of human and social reality could provide. ⁵

The maturation of character that is James's forte is the very trait that endows his novels with intelligibility. Although his central theme more often than not is an incidental one, the growth of his central characters attains such a completeness during the progress of the story that the reader follows the tale to the very end with a deep sense of satisfaction.

It is interesting to note that some of James's well-turned phrases, purposefully pinpointed, can easily

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trace the fullness of development of his heroine or hero. The following classic examples are drawn from the three novels to be scrutinized.

In *Washington Square*, James depicts as heroine a plain, awkward, shy girl, who, although very much in love with the young man in her life, has been so inured to the demands of her own underlying passionate nature that she cannot escape the dictates of her customary filial submission. Even though the reading audience discovers, through the development of the novel, that the girl does not love her father, and possibly never did, modern psychologists would in all probability accuse her of having a father-fixation. In James's own very descriptive terms,

> The poor girl found her account so completely in the exercise of her affections that the little tremor of fear that mixed itself with her filial passion gave the thing an extra relish rather than blunted its edge.\(^6\)

Although her father had little patience with Catherine, the author recompenses with a world of patience in telling us exactly what was in her makeup, by adding:

> ... she was irreligious because she was shy, uncomfortably, painfully shy. This was not always understood, and she sometimes produced an impression of insensibility. In reality, she was the softest creature in the world.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 19-20.
Later, when Catherine has truly fallen in love, and fears that love lost, James depicts her reaction in the following manner:

"It was almost the last outbreak of passion of her life; at least, she never indulged in another that the world knew anything about. But this one was long and terrible."

When Catherine finally submits to the fact that her lover really is gone, she reacts with the latent strength of character that had been instilled in her from the first in her relations with her father:

Catherine, however, became an admirable old maid. She formed habits, regulated her days upon a system of her own, interested herself in charitable institutions, asylums, hospitals and aid societies; and went generally, with an even and noiseless step, about the rigid business of her life. . . . She developed a few harmless eccentricities.

Daisy Miller is almost the exact opposite of Catherine Sloper; and whereas Catherine, through passion, becomes strong and self-contained, conversely, Daisy destroys herself. Daisy is lively, vivacious, eager to be friendly and rather pretty; and in the words of her creator:

"She was very quiet, she sat in a charming tranquil attitude; but her lips and her eyes were constantly moving . . . she appeared to be in the best humour"

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8Ibid., p. 220.

9Ibid., pp. 244-45.
with everything.\textsuperscript{10}

He [Winterbourne] must on the whole take Miss Daisy Miller for a flirt—a pretty American flirt.\textsuperscript{11}

Daisy . . . continued . . . to present herself as an inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence.\textsuperscript{12}

Then, when in Rome, an awareness begins to dawn that her behavior is not entirely acceptable. When snubbed by Mrs. Walker,

Daisy turned very pale . . . turned away, looking with a small white prettiness, a blighted grace, at the circle near the door.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, when she is warned by Winterbourne of the dangers of walking about Rome at night, she unexpectedly cried out, "I don't care whether I have Roman fever or not!" Accordingly, this final act of defiance, and almost renunciation, is instrumental in causing the final tragedy of her death.

Christopher Newman's development as a person, in The American, is similar to that of Catherine Sloper. Both find strength through suffering, and show themselves to be the true heroes of the situation. James begins his delineation of Newman when he tells the reader that

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 58.
The gentleman on the divan was the superlative American . . . healthy . . . temperate . . . simple . . . full of contradictory suggestions. 14

Newman's cool judgment and systematic reasoning are expressed almost eloquently in his simple declaration, "When I find the woman who satisfies me I shall rise to the occasion." 15  When he begins to sense that he perhaps is to lose the woman he has chosen as his wife, James says of him, "He was excited, but excitement with him was only an intenser deliberateness; it was the plunger stripped." 16  When Newman decides, to his own surprise, not to expose the de Bellegarde secret to their closely knit world, "he felt a little dizzy; for the moment he was conscious of the high—or at least of the higher--air in which he performed gymnastic revolutions." 17

Unlike many modern novelists, whose grammar and sentence structure are terse, to the point, brutal and incisive, Henry James prided himself upon perfection, grammatically and structurally. His words, although exceptionally and satisfyingly graphic, never reverted to the use of the brutality that has become synonymous with the


15Ibid., p. 48.

16Ibid., p. 364.

17Ibid., p. 508.
literature of today. He evolved his style conscientiously, enjoying the play with words; and in his later years his style became ever more intricate and rhythmical, which Rebecca West, one of James's great admirers, describes thus:

The beauty of the writing is so great . . . that one would like to learn [it] by heart, so that one might turn the phrases over in the mind when one wants to hear the clinking of pure gold.  

Two devices which James employs frequently and advantageously are the parenthetical expression and abnormal word order. Appropriate examples can be found in practically any of his works; however, to remain with a few chosen works, the first example is taken from *Washington Square*:

Morris Townsend—the Name had already become very familiar to her, as if some one had been repeating it in her ear for the last half hour—Morris Townsend was giving his impression of the company to her aunt, as he had done to herself.

Also from *Daisy Miller*:

He had known here in Europe two or three women—persons older than Miss Daisy Miller and provided for respectability's sake, with husbands—who were great coquettes; dangerous terrible women with whom one's light commerce might indeed take a serious turn.

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20Ibid., p. 12.
... she opened fire on the special charmer in Geneva whom she appeared to have instantly taken it for granted that he was hurrying back to see.\textsuperscript{21}

As he grew older, and employed more and more the accoutrements of involved, masterfully designed sentences, his meanings at times became just as involved, and almost pedantic. However, the discerning and industrious reader who takes the time to look for James's implications is immensely rewarded, because he never loses sight of the effect James meant to produce. He was capable of stretching figures of speech, especially metaphors, to great lengths; and his subtlety of expression in both romantic and humorous situations remains superb. For instance, in \textit{The American}, James describes Madame de Bellegarde thus:

\begin{quote}
Her hands were folded in her lap and she considered his lordship's simple physiognomy as she might have studied some brief but baffling sentence in an obscure text.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

In describing Newman's friend, Mrs. Tristam, James gives the reader a complete word picture, delightfully presented:

\begin{quote}
The inconsistent little lady of the Avenue d'Iena had an insuperable need of intellectual movement of critical, of ironic exercise. She got tired of thinking right, but there was no serious harm in it, as she got equally tired of thinking wrong.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{22}James, \textit{The American}, p. 327.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 178.
Among James's truly superb metaphors are the following examples. The first is from *The American*, and the second, a good deal shorter but extremely effective, is from a short story, "The Jolly Corner."

He had little of the small change of conversation and rarely rose to reach down one of those ready-made forms and phrases that drape, whether fresh or frayed, the hooks and pegs of the general wardrobe of talk.24

The strange air of the streets was but the weak, the sullen flush of a dawn in which everything was still locked up.25

Great as was James's command of the English language, and his recourse to the refinements and nuances possible in that language, he was not above borrowing to pinpoint his meaning meticulously. R. W. Short explains, in *American Literature*, that James's characters are rarely differentiated by idioms of speech. True, as a rule, his people are on an even plane, educated, refined, analytical. He does, however, differentiate in a broad sense. For instance, in *The Turn of the Screw* he freely lets the English governess use such provincialisms as "it was plump, one afternoon, in the middle of my hours."26 Again, when

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24Ibid., p. 242.


depicting Americans, James's prototypes of his birthplace repeat certain expressions which are never found in the vocabularies of Europeans. James employs "Well, I guess" for both Daisy Miller and Christopher Newman, and makes the expression an integral part of their personalities. His great love, however, is for the French bon mot, liberally sprinkled throughout his novels, under the plausible guise of the perpetual European background. Not only does he appropriate a good deal of French for the conversation of his educated characters, but his narrative makes frequent use of expressions that more aptly express his meaning than his own native tongue.

Henry James's humor is subtle and sly, but never unkind. He thoroughly understands the people he creates, their motives and their weaknesses; and can josh about them with an open mind. His expressions of humor are a special delight to those readers of James who can look beyond his little touches of irony to observe the author himself, almost all of his life on the defensive, discovering and displaying for common view the foibles of those around him. After all, his masterly creations are but word pictures of the deep psychological studies he has made of the flesh and blood individuals he has known. His short stories, especially, abound in the sly characterizations that delight the reader, such as:
women have no faculty of imagination with regard to a man's work beyond a vague idea that it doesn't matter.\footnote{27}

There were no tips... to the relief of a palm not formed by nature as a scoop.\footnote{28}

That, of course, is what most women are forced to do for their men—to cover up their weaknesses and inarticulances and content themselves merely with helping them to pass for a man like another.\footnote{29}

It was all mere surface sound, this murmur of their welcome, the popping of their corks.\footnote{30}

Here, then, are the ingredients for a man of literary means—a man who has managed to overcome some of his own timorousness in relation to life about him by transferring it to paper. Foremost among these ingredients is a lively imagination (ready to pounce upon any small crumb as an idea for a story) fortified by an inquisitive mind—a mind that probes into the reactions of a certain class of people under certain circumstances. Once the skeleton of his story was established, and the tone set for the development of his central character, James applied his own embellishments—the well-turned phrase, the figure of speech, the pointed but muted humor, and a supreme,

\footnote{27}{Fadiman, \emph{op. cit.}, p. 160.}
\footnote{28}{Ibid., p. 514.}
\footnote{29}{Ibid., p. 602.}
\footnote{30}{Ibid., p. 617.}
sensitive manner of description.

It seems strange, even to the informed devotee of literature, that a man of Henry James's stature, who had come to terms with himself in the pursuit of the art in which he excelled, should fail so miserably in another field—the drama. He had learned to live with himself and his eccentricities. He had achieved a measure of success with his essays and fiction. Yet when he chose to digress into the theatrical world, his mastery of the written word and his innate knowledge of other people's hidden problems, failed him. A study of some of James's dramatic attempts in the succeeding chapter should provide a partial answer.
CHAPTER III

HENRY JAMES AS A DRAMATIST

Henry James, the novelist, was in a class of his own. Such a distinction is possible, and sometimes coveted, in the republic of letters. Hence, to bring a mind or talent like that of James out of its self-imposed cloister into the stark reality of the theatre with any degree of success would indeed be a master-stroke.

James was aware of what comprised a good play. He had formerly written criticisms of plays, and was a frequent attendant at theatres. He knew that drama was a term applied to those productions of art "which imitate . . . or 'represent' action." It can be supposed he recognized that the appeal of a play "is visual rather than auditory." However, even with sufficient technical understanding at his fingertips, and an intense desire to make use of his personal knowledge, he found it impossible to apply what he knew to the drama.

Jamesian fiction, although excellent in design, is contemplative and philosophical. The author spends a great


deal more time probing into the motives of a character's actions than he does in having that action performed. Rebecca West pin-pointed this trait when, in comparing the brothers William and Henry, she wrote one of them "grew up to write fiction as though it were philosophy and the other to write philosophy as though it were fiction."³ As already stated, "writing fiction as though it were philosophy" is acceptable in Jamesian art, and enjoyed by discerning readers. However, it loses the very essence of the literal definition of drama—"to act or do."⁴ James's characters, to be sure, do a certain amount of acting; but their major battles are won in the mind or heart, never on a physical plane.

A little more than thirty years ago—in 1925, to be precise—Barrett H. Clark observed that "American audiences are not yet ready for the sort of 'ingoing' studies of life which Henry James has, for example, effected in his finest stories."⁵ For that matter, sixty-five years ago English audiences were also not ready for the type of "ingoing" drama that James wrote but could not make

³West, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴"Drama," Encyclopedia Britannica, VIII, 475.

successful on the stage. At the time of the dismal failure of Guy Domville, Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, a play consisting of platitudes and farcical situations, was enjoying immense success. A broad look at the general circumstances of these two productions reveals an interesting contrast.

All of James's literary career had been pointed to the educated mind, to the social classes then evident in both Europe and America. His magazine contributions had been to quality journals, like the *Nation* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. His critical essays were composed on a plane suitable for artistic and literary minds. He had lived in the tightly protected circle—created largely by and for himself—of a social level that felt neither compulsion nor desire to consort with "commerce" or the "working classes."

A devoted patron of the theatre, he enjoyed himself immensely at the plays he attended in Paris. In his memoirs he treats as a situation of great moment the very first time when as a boy he was allowed to attend the theatre; and, in later years, he included the art of drama in his critical essays. However, in the role of spectator, he emerged directly from one world of make-believe (created by the dramatic artists) into that of another (created by James himself). He would likely join a group of
acquaintances for a social supper after the play, or would spend a quiet evening with some cherished friend, discussing the merits of the evening’s theatrical offering.

When James entered the working part of the theatre, however, an entirely new realm unfolded before him. Here he was exposed to crass business men, who needed to realize a profit on every dramatic enterprise; he was confronted by temperamental actors and actresses, who would refuse to speak some pet phrase of his, or acted a part in such a manner that it was barely recognizable to the author; he was surrounded by an audience that cared little for philosophic reflections or for the novelist Henry James, an audience whose prime interest was entertainment. No artist was ever less prepared to meet such critical and uncompromising demands. In this respect James was thin-skinned, and he had no armor for the inevitable shafts.

Moreover, all his life James had suffered intensely from personal criticism. Even when he recognized criticism as constructive, it never failed to wound him deeply. Because of this vulnerability, his early literary attempts were very secretive, so much so that he refused to show them to his ever-critical brothers. In fact, in 1860 one of Henry’s younger brothers, Garth Wilkinson, reported from Geneva, "Harry has become an author I believe for he
keeps his door locked all day long." Especially involved emotionally were Henry's feelings toward his older brother, William. In 1913 Henry James began a work which was to record some of the differences between him and his brother William under the guise of familial devotion and jocularity. Modern psychologists undoubtedly would define as a guilt complex Henry's determination to write a memento to William after he died. However, what began as a tribute to the memory of his brother turned into a mammoth autobiography in three parts, A Small Boy and Others, Notes of a Son and Brother, and the unfinished The Middle Years. In these Henry reiterates the devotion that was part of the family picture. True, he was fond of his family, especially in the later lonely years. However, there was always an undercurrent of envy and even jealousy between the two eminent brothers.

Henry appeared as something of a dolt in early disciplined school matters. He was not a great deal impressed by any of the various tutors who crossed his path, and Harvard Law School definitely failed to arouse his interest. On the other hand, William seemingly was quite the more brilliant of the two, doing well in whatever he attempted.

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6 Edel, James, The Untried Years, p. 68.
Part of the unchangeable, natural picture happened to be that William was the older; and so it appeared to Henry that no matter what he had finally mastered, William was already at the next signpost in their quest for maturity. He himself expresses it thus:

One of these [preceptions] . . . was that of my brother’s occupying a place in the world to which I couldn’t at all aspire. . . . It glimmers back to me that I quite definitely and resignedly thought of him as in the most exemplary manner already beforehand with me, already seated at his task when the attempt to drag me crying and kicking to the first hour of my education failed. . . . He was always round the corner and out of sight, coming back into view but at his hours of extremest ease. 7

Although William was only sixteen months older than Henry, this difference disturbed the younger boy considerably.

When the time came to pursue their education on a college level, once again Henry was the backward one. No matter what William attempted, he succeeded at it. He dabbled in art, he tried chemistry, comparative anatomy and physiology, and he went on a zoological expedition in the basin of the Amazon River. All these things he did exceptionally well. He received a degree in medicine, finally turning to teaching and philosophy. Henry never completed any formal educational course.

Henry also tried his hand at art, mostly because

"William did it," but found that he lacked the talent possessed by his brother. Mathematics and sciences, with their rigid rules of execution, completely frustrated him. Although Henry was active in his youth, the "obscure hurt," which he suffered as the result of fighting a fire, kept him from any strenuous physical undertaking afterward.

Even in the field of writing there was competition between the brothers. But here, fortunately, Henry struck out in his own direction, that is, into fiction, where brother William, also a writer, did not compete with him. The latter remained in the realm of science and philosophy, and did considerable writing on these subjects.

In addition to the constant intellectual struggle between the two brothers, there seems even to have been a brief romantic interlude. The only woman with whom Henry James ever associated passionate love was his cousin, Mary (Minny) Temple, who died as a young girl. Henry was genuinely fond of her, very possibly truly in love, but there again William entered the picture, and Henry was assailed by doubts. According to an exchange of letters edited by R. C. LeClair, Minny indicated that she was in love with Henry. However, in letters to his mother from Europe about Minny, Henry questioned whether it was truly he or his brother William who was beloved by the ailing girl. Also to William, Henry denied his true feeling,
saying, "Everyone was supposed, I believe, to be more or less in love with her; . . . I never was."

Henry's intense personal aversion to criticism and comparison found no abatement in his adult life. He always remained exceptionally sensitive. William continued to give well-meant, kindly advice and constructive criticism after the two brothers were each established in their own field, but this interest and proffered guidance by the older brother never failed to wound Henry. Having never conquered his agony at the hands of friends and members of the family, he suffered in this respect even more intensely when he was at the mercy of strangers.

Henry James's plays, which met with dismal failure at the time he wrote them, have since that time found published form and proved interesting and entertaining reading. Clearly, there must be reasons for this turn-about in public opinion. If an alert newspaper man had accosted the jeering crowds, or even the courteous audience who merely would not bother coming again, and asked them just why Henry James as a dramatist did not appeal to them, they probably would not have found a ready answer. Yet a reason can be found in a pertinent observation by

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Harold R. Walley:

In order to accomplish this exacting feat [produce a successful play], a play must be adept in mass psychology. For a dramatist the beginning of wisdom is study of the audience. Because a play can communicate no more than an audience can understand, and can accomplish no more than an audience will accept, the character of all drama is to a large extent conditioned by the prevailing interests and tastes of the audience for which it was originally created.  

Personal psychology had always been Henry James's forte. Mass psychology was an alien field. In a world that was fast losing sight of the leisure class, a world occupied by the *nouveau riche*, where the democratic idea prevailed, and the self-made man was becoming the hero, James's finely drawn situations of drawing-room melodrama or comedy found little understanding or sympathy.

**Guy Domville** left a raw wound which never fully healed and was never forgotten. The play had been written during the summer of 1893 for George Alexander, the popular actor and highly successful young manager of the St. James Theatre, under the impression that here was one man who would consent to do a serious play for the embryonic dramatist. Evidently, playwright and actor had agreed on terms, and so James completed the play. However, when he brought the finished script to Alexander, the latter was

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already committed to do another play.

After a year had passed, Alexander finally came back to the James play. Before rehearsals started, however, he requested certain changes and eliminations, which James executed with characteristic anguish. As the rehearsals began to shape the play into a recognizable form, James became more and more nervous and agitated, until he was advised by Edmund Gosse not to attend his first-night performance. He took this kind advice; and, in the attempt to distract his mind, he attended the performance of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* at the Haymarket. As the Wilde play moved to a successful conclusion, amid bursts of laughter and applause, Henry James met with no success in his attempt at diversion, and became more and more nervous, until he was practically in a state of panic.

In the meantime, an unanticipated side-drama had taken place at the St. James Theatre. Carriage after carriage of celebrities, literary friends of James, and wealthy theatre patrons, had drawn up to the theatre with their distinguished passengers. However, there had been another element of society waiting to see the play that contained their idol—-theatre-goers who had never heard of the author, Henry James. Their conception of the theatre was that whatever Alexander appeared in was worth paying for and viewing, with little interest displayed in
either the play or its author.

The first act of Guy Domville captured the entire audience, and many compliments could be heard during the intermission. However, the second act suffered a change of tempo, from delicate romance to garish farce, and then the audience rebelled. Although the third act somewhat mollified the aroused spectators, it failed to rescue the play from its doom.

The author returned to the St. James Theatre just as the closing lines of Guy Domville were being spoken. There was considerable applause for Alexander on the strength of his being Alexander, rather than Guy. However, when cries of "Author! Author!" were heard, Alexander brought Henry James on stage, which courtesy was a tragic mistake. As hard as James's friends tried to applaud, they could not drown out the jeers and catcalls from the gallery. James was stunned, and suffered an eternity of agony before he could gather his wits and flee into the wings.

The play ran five weeks altogether. During this time, considerable lineage was devoted to it in the local press. James had more than a few sympathizers among the critics, although most of them decried the weakness of the second act. After the play had closed, the distraught author wrote to Elizabeth Robins: "It has been a great
relief to feel that one of the most detestable incidents of my life has closed.\textsuperscript{10}

In fact, so painful was the entire episode that he delved into the past to recount an equal affront. Nearly twenty years before, from November of 1875 to the autumn of 1876, Henry James had attempted a stint as newspaper correspondent. Before going to Europe on one of his extended journeys, he made arrangements to write his impressions for the New York \textit{Tribune}. This interlude ended on an unhappy note. After considerable beating about the bush, the editor finally informed James that his columns were not "folksy" enough for the average reader of the \textit{Tribune}.

The tone he had assumed had been his most simple and colloquial. . . . He had been stilted when he thought he was natural; he had been subtle when he thought he was obvious.\textsuperscript{11}

It is significant and interesting that a man who had attained literary stature should harbor each slight in such a manner that, twenty years after the episode, he should recall it in the light of a different venture.

James regarded his journalistic and dramatic ventures as failures of equal intensity; he saw each


\textsuperscript{11}J. D. Lind, "Inadequate Vulgarity of Henry James," \textit{PMLA}, LXVI (1951), 901.
as part of a persistent literary problem, his inability to achieve "adequate vulgarity."\footnote{Ibid., p. 887.}

The plot of \textit{Guy Domville} concerns a young man, destined for the priesthood, who is persuaded to forsake his calling in order to marry and to perpetuate the noble name of Domville, since there is no other eligible heir to perform that task. He does leave the cloth for a while (in the second act) and follows the lusts and desires of a young dandy; however, his original choice proves the stronger, and in the climax he once again renounces the worldly life.

During the furor in the press about the unfortunate play, George Bernard Shaw, who was at that time a drama critic, made the observation that a man who could write a first act as beautiful as the one in \textit{Guy Domville} would overcome his inherent difficulties and rise to heights in other works. Unfortunately, his prediction fell short of realization; however, Shaw made a point in James's favor which was not after all really in his favor. A good deal of the beauty of the first act was the elevated conversation. This very conversation proved the stumbling block for the "mass," since it was hard to convince the average commoner that the well-created speeches occurred in simple "country places" and drawing rooms.
What probably would have been accepted in Elizabethan England, but was spurned at the turn of the century, were such well-turned phrases as James gives to Guy when, in the second act, he has him say:

'It was an hour, Madam, I admit, that left us no choice of conclusions. The bright star that commands my attendance had long since sunk to obscurity; that luminary, indeed, to find a single fault with it, shines all too fitfully and sets all too soon.'

The play is a study of Guy's character. Had James delineated this admirable young man in a novel, with adequate explanation in typical Jamesian prose of the struggles that go on in the young man's mind and heart before he made his irrevocable decision, the reader would have felt in complete sympathy with those tribulations. On the stage, however, Guy's lapse into the ways of the world makes him appear as an essentially weak character, not worthy of entering the priesthood, and altogether fickle when he once more changes his mind in the last act.

James makes an honest attempt to present the central character as clearly as he would have done in a novel. He has Mrs. Peverel say of him: "I don't know if he'll be one of its 'Catholic Church's' 'Princes'-- but he may very well be one of its Saints." Later in

14Ibid., p. 487.
the third act, he has Frank say of him: "He was heroic."\textsuperscript{15} However, the audience has no way of really judging Guy except by his actions, which, as stated before, are inconsistent and seem out of character for a consecrated young man.

Another attempt of the author's at making the audience understand his characters was the use of copious stage directions. For someone who is reading the play, these directions serve as a guide to what is being attempted. Unfortunately, many of them are more descriptive than directive. For instance, in The Album, as in other plays, James cannot seem to confine himself to mere stage instructions. The very directions show the author probing into the minds of the characters as though he wills the audience to do the same. For example:

\begin{verbatim}
Sir Ralph. Not enough. A hundred? (Then at a loss as she only stands looking at him.) It's not money? (As with a fuller vision of the real question and his inevitable fate.) It's that other thing?\textsuperscript{16}

Sir Ralph. (Aghast, fatalistic, to himself, as Bernal comes in.) Marriage!\textsuperscript{17}

Bernal. (Struck, arrested by Sir Ralph's appearance and discomposure; speaking with the note
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{15}ibid., p. 512.
\textsuperscript{16}ibid., p. 385.
\textsuperscript{17}ibid.
of real anxiety.) She has proposed.\textsuperscript{18}

The authors of \textit{Understanding Drama} explain comedy as "that form of drama which has its orientation in 'the way of the world' rather than in ultimate moral problems; a form of drama which is concerned with man's relation to society rather than to immutable truths; situations which deal with experience at a level where expediency and compromise are suitable rather than questionable; and where the best judgment of society rather than one's conscience provides the criterion of conduct."\textsuperscript{19} The problems are those of an external world, the world where situations can be managed and arranged, where compromises can be made and agreeable solutions reached.

Here again Henry James tried to conform, but failed.

For instance, the play \textit{Disengaged}, which James describes as his first attempt at a "comedy, pure and simple," met with a much less than humorous early demise. Under the title, \textit{Mrs. Jasper}, James was led to believe that it would be produced, since a producer, Augustin Daly, showed enough interest in it for a time to begin preparations for its presentation. However, disappointment

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

followed disappointment, amid seemingly insurmountable difficulties. First Daly had James rearrange and cut the play; then one after another delay arose until, completely unhappy, James withdrew it from Daly's possession, evidently to the relief of the latter. The play did eventually reach the footlights. In 1902 an amateur group presented it, and one professional performance followed, in 1909, both of which were flayed unmercifully by the critics.

A situation comedy like Disengaged is entirely out of character with what James readers have learned to expect. Obviously, in an attempt to write the play in "the way of the world," James revolves it around complicated triangles. Lady Brisket apparently trifles with the affections of a young single man. Her husband, Sir Montague, in retaliation, pursues a widowed charmer, Mrs. Jasper. Mrs. Jasper falls in love with Captain Prime, whom a doting mother has been trying to push into matrimony with her insipid daughter. It is only after considerable anguish on the part of the captain, which is evidently to pass for humor, that he is "let off the hook," so to speak. Perhaps a modern theatre audience would accept these extra-marital activities which lead to intra-marital difficulties, but a reader of James definitely feels embarrassed at the idea of this dramatist playing with something unnatural
and out of keeping with what the novelist knows.

In the preceding definition of comedy, quoted from Brooks and Heilman, the second part, i.e., the importance of man's relation to society rather than to immutable truths, is attempted by James in this play. Accordingly, he makes it more important that Captain Prime's relation to society be upheld than the true fact of his loving someone else. The ruse employed to intimidate the poor captain into marriage is a photograph taken at such an angle as to create the impression that he has his head upon the breast of the young lady in question. This, coupled with a walk alone with the girl, presumably to view some "ruins," constitute the major part of the early plot.

Expedience and compromise come to a climax in the third act, in Mrs. Jasper's drawing room. The entire act consists of a great hurrying in and out of the characters, of being surreptitiously hidden in the various rooms ("under the bed" humor), and finally having Mrs. Jasper solve the whole riddle by pairing off the right people, to everyone's relief, including that of the audience.

The problems of *Disengaged* are definitely those of an external world. The audience really knows very little about any of the people involved. The main characters appear to be thoroughly mixed up as to what they want out of life; and, for the most part, they can be pushed about as
pawns on a chessboard. Mrs. Wigmore, the young girl's mother, would pass for the knight in her erratic jumping about to achieve her purpose—that of providing a husband for Blandina—and it does not perturb her in the least to change young men for prospective sons-in-law. Mrs. Jasper, as the queen, seems to control the entire board—all the men jump at her bidding—and she achieves her goal in a self-effacing way so that she actually is the most likable of the entire case.

Along with his general concurrence in the definition of humor, James tries a few of his own additions. One implement, which definitely grates on the nerves, is the use of repetitive phrases. This is especially evident in the character of the domineering mother and her spineless daughter. The following excerpt of their intercourse is an example of the pattern James follows for them:

Mrs. Wigmore. Blandina, come here!
Blandina. Yes, mamma.
Mrs. Wigmore. Try not to look dreadful!
Blandina. Yes, mamma.
Mrs. Wigmore. Stick in that hairpin; you're going to be taken [a picture].
Blandina. Yes, mamma.
Mrs. Wigmore. Keep down your hands.
Blandina. Yes, mamma.

While James's humor is subtle, sly and thoroughly enjoyable in his fiction, in his plays it becomes gross

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and embarrassing. He resorts to cliches; he pokes fun at people, places and ideals. In *The Album*, actually a delightful little drama concerning the proper division of an estate between two remaining cousins, James could not resist a few disparaging remarks about his native country. In discussing the cousin who supposedly is dead, whose name is Mark Bernal, James has Lady Bassett say: "They have trusted him, but always in vain. He was wild, he was worthless—good for nothing but America, to which he went."21 Later, in the words of the "noble" cousin, Sir Ralph: "I'm convinced he was wicked. His tastes were vulgar; his abilities mean. He went to the bottom—he went to America."22

James makes another attempt to ridicule the marital situation in *Disengaged*, in the following conversation about Sir Montague:

**Coverley.** You never told me he makes love to you!

**Mrs. Jasper.** I don't betray you to each other.

**Coverley.** What's the matter with him?

**Mrs. Jasper.** His wife worries him.

**Coverley.** More than you worry me?

**Mrs. Jasper.** Naturally: I'm not your wife.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

**Coverley.** ... Marry me therefore to get rid of me.

**Mrs. Jasper.** It's a great temptation; but I can't quite want to kill you.23


The preceding quotation brings to mind an almost grisly attempt at humor which is also out of character for James. The discussion is about the attractive young widow, still in *Disengaged*, who is causing a disturbance. In explaining her standing in the community, James employs the following conversation:

**Prime.** She's so enviable, in her freedom.  
**Lady Brisket.** Her freedom is the freedom of a woman who has lost her husband early.  
**Prime.** Better late than never.24

James is preoccupied with the subject of death in many of his works of fiction. In "The Great Good Place," he flirts with death; in "The Altar of the Dead," he venerates and enshrines death (the dead); in *Turn of the Screw*, he grapples with the grisly grotesqueness that death can manifest; in *Daisy Miller*, he beatifies and beautifies death in its use as a catharsis. Consequently, in his awkward and lonely attempt to lampoon the idea of death, he fails miserably.

One cannot help feeling intensely sorry for Henry James in his venture as a dramatist. He wished very much to succeed; he tried hard to conform; he licked his raw wounds and attempted again and again to scale the impenetrable wall of dramatic acclaim—but to no avail. As a playwright, with all his good intentions, and in spite of

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24Ibid., p. 304.
all the great effort put forth, he was not himself; hence he was bound to fail, and fail he did, completely and disgracefully. Leon Edel sums up the would-be playwright's dilemma in these words:

Mr. Tout-le-Monde confronts every dramatist with his rigorous attitude: be like me—or be damned. Mr. James, failing to offer the required resemblance, has been--more or less--damned.25

At his best, and in his element, Henry James was a man to be admired, and even to be emulated. He had a small personal income; after considerable struggle he had come to terms with himself as to his purpose in life; he had achieved a moderate success as a man of letters. However, an ambition that was dear to his heart, as well as to his vanity, was not yet realized; he never produced a successful play.

James must have realized that he had created a peculiar insularity which prevented him from comprehending the average middle-class mind. In his unsuccessful attempt to contribute to the columns of the New York Tribune, the fact was brought home forcibly to him when the editor informed him that his descriptions of Europe were not "folksy" enough. Many years later, on May 12, 1889, he made an entry in his notebook referring to his agreement to dramatize The American, in which he commented, "Oh how it must not be too good and how very bad it must be!"  

It is of peculiar and pertinent interest that others succeeded where James had failed dismally to convert

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1Matthiessen and Murdock, op. cit., p. 100.
some of his best fiction into drama. In 1952, for example, his short story, "The Liar," was worked into a dramatic script which followed the original story rather closely. Presented on television, it received favorable comment in Life Magazine. One of the most successful plays on Broadway during the 1947-1948 theatrical season was The Heiress, an adaptation by Augustus and Ruth Goetz of James's novel, Washington Square. When The Heiress was subsequently released as a motion picture, it received good notices. The stage play has since been presented by amateur and small theatre groups.

In his obsession to bring the level of his dramas to the mind of the average theatre-goer, James defeated his own purpose. A study of several of his adaptations will reveal how he weakened his own plots and characters, while a reversal of that very technique achieved dramatic success.

James wrote The American as a novel in 1876. It was considered a success, and had one of James's favorite themes—the simple, noble American pitted against the intricacies of the Old World. Twelve years later, in May, 1889, James agreed to convert The American into a play for Edward Compton of the Compton Comedy Company. The company had toured provincial Britain, presenting classic comedies and "costume pieces." Compton wished to capture London;
and he assumed that, if he would present a play by an emi-
inent author of James’s stature, his plan would be greatly
simplified.

Henry James made an entry in his notebook concern-
ing his agreement with Compton, and went on to say that he
“must extract the simplest, baldest, most rudimentary, at
once most humorous and most touching [play].” He changed
the name, briefly, to The Californian, but later changed
it back to The American. After considerable work—one
great task was teaching the very British Compton how to
act and talk like a rich American— the play was presented
January 3, 1891, in Southport.

It met with considerable success in Southport.
For the first time in his long career as an artist, James
heard his work applauded. He responded enthusiastically,
as evidenced in his letters to his friends and family.
Compton then included The American in his repertory, and
performed it on an average of once a week while on tour
in Ireland, Scotland, and provincial England. However,
London proved to be no simple conquest. What had been
thoroughly enjoyed and applauded by outlying areas proved
of little interest to the cosmopolitan London audience.
Quite a few patrons of social prestige attended the

2Ibid., p. 99.
opening night; and one evening the Prince of Wales gave the play an unexpected boost with his presence. On the whole, however, it was not enthusiastically received; and the critics did not give it encouraging notices.

The play closed on December 3, 1871, after its seventieth performance. Henry James now felt that his honor was saved. However, the play made no money; so it was still far from the success that the author had envisioned and sincerely hoped for. Moreover, especially difficult for James during this despondent period was the loss of a dear friend, Wolcott Balestier, and of his sister, Alice.

The greatest single criticism of James's dramatic attempts is an essential weakening of his characters, because of his zeal to bring the play to the level of the audience.

In The American, for example, Christopher Newman suffers from the dramatic portrayal, but so do the European characters. In presenting the de Bellegardes as openly grasping and conniving, within earshot of the audience, James destroys their real aristocracy. The audience cannot approve morally of the horrible secret unearthed about the family; yet to have them portrayed no better than mere opportunists, willing to sacrifice their iphi- genia to the god whose altar has more gold wrought into
its base, is to deprive them of that very strength of character which was responsible for the perpetration of the terrible deed. In having Madame de Cintre change her mind several times about whether to marry Newman or to return to the convent, the author makes her too familiar to the audience; and the aura of mystery and intrigue which surrounds her all through the novel, which enchants the reader, is destroyed.

James tried hopefully to present a masterful central character. However, while Newman influences the other characters more, he produces a good deal less effect on the audience. The Newman of the play becomes a caricature of the "noble American" presented in the novel, who wins the sympathy and ready response of the reader. He prances a good deal more; and his words and actions ridicule Americans in general, instead of upholding them. In depicting Newman, James employs a device that he uses in other "comedies," namely, repetitious phrases. Evidently, in an effort to identify the "American," James has him use, under every circumstance, and in response to every changing emotion and tension, the phrase, "That's just what I want to see!" Such an expression, in the light of the American in the novel, seems asinine and superfluous.

James tries to create a happy ending by having Newman win Madame de Cintre after all. This is commendable
for the taste of the average audience. However, James’s
dramatic denouement is accomplished after a struggle be-
tween Newman and his beloved, while the "noble American"
of the novel needs no outward coercion—his struggle is
with himself. Act IV of the play shows Newman and Claire
struggling over the scrap of paper that will declare to
the world her family’s infamy. Although she supposedly
does not know the contents of the paper, Claire, on her
knees, begs Newman to destroy it or to give it up. Newman
finally relents at her pleading. Hence, in a sense, New-
man’s love scenes are strengthened in the play; however,
his one essential characteristic is weakened by the fact
that someone other than himself persuaded him from his re-
venge.

In accordance with his intention, James completed
a play that was "simple, bald, rudimentary"; but he failed
to make it "strong" enough to carry its own weight. Very
likely, a capable script writer, with a vivid sense of
imagination, could take the core of The American, parallel
a play along James’s novel, and produce a successful play.
Such a feat was accomplished with another novel.

James wrote Washington Square in 1880. It met
with moderate success. F. W. Dupee calls it a "family
story rather than a love story."³ This comparison is

readily accepted when one recalls the main theme. It concerns the disappointment of a prominent physician, Dr. Austin Sloper, in his orphaned child, Catherine, who has none of the admirable personality traits that his wife had possessed. Although the girl's love affair with the good-for-nothing Morris Townsend, her relation to her father and to her addlepated aunt, are the three essential ingredients of the story, the novel reveals, as is usual with James, a deep psychological study of a woman in love. Catherine Sloper has been brought up, above all, to be obedient. It is with great difficulty that the man-woman love which assails her being surmounts her filial affection and duty. When at last the poor girl allows the "grand passion" to overrule her duty to her father, including relinquishing her inheritance from him, the lover forsakes her.

Although Catherine, in the beginning of the story, seems without character, she achieves growth and maturity of character later. James effectively shows her development by having her refuse Morris, when he returns that is, after the initial obstacles to the marriage are removed.

The style and construction of this novel, although not so intricate as James's later works, flow easily into the main plot. His descriptions are typically pithy, picturesque, and altogether delightful. For instance, he
describes Mrs. Penniman as,

. . . a tall, thin, fair, rather faded woman, with a perfectly amiable disposition, a high standard of gentility, a taste for light literature, and a certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character. She was romantic; she was sentimental; she had a passion for little secrets and mysteries—a very innocent passion, for her secrets had hitherto always been as unpractical as addled eggs. She was not absolutely veracious; but this defect was of no great consequence, for she had never had anything to conceal.4

James inserts his peculiar brand of humor easily into his description of the doctor, including America, when he says of them:

In a country in which, to play a social part, you must either earn your income or make believe that you earn it, the healing art has appeared in a high degree to combine two recognized sources of credit.5

He also includes his witty humor in the conversations, when he has Dr. Sloper advise Mrs. Penniman on how to bring up Catherine:

"Try and make a clever woman of her, Lavinia; I should like her to be a clever woman." Mrs. Penniman . . . inquired, "Do you think it is better to be clever than to be good?"
"Good for what?" asked the doctor. "You are good for nothing unless you are clever."6

Augustus and Ruth Goetz took Washington Square,

4James, Washington Square, pp. 15-16.
5Ibid., pp. 7,8.
6Ibid., p. 15.
an "exquisitely written and delicate story," and dramatized it into a play called *The Heiress*. When it went the rounds of producers the first time, no one liked the unhappy ending; so the Goetzes changed the last act, allowing Catherine and Morris to marry. The play failed miserably. However, when it was given a second chance, and produced with the Jamesian ending during the 1947-48 season, it met with tremendous success. Although necessarily pinpointing and condensing the action, the Goetzes retained the essential plot of the novel, including the dramatically "tragic" ending. They also employed a good deal of Jamesian conversation, one excellent example of which comes almost exactly from the novel. The intercourse is between Dr. Sloper and Mrs. Penniman (Lavinia):

> Dr. Sloper. Help her to be clever, Lavinia. I should like her to be a clever woman.
> Lavinia. But she is so gentle and good!
> Dr. Sloper. You are good for nothing unless you are clever!

The interview between the doctor and Morris, concerning the engagement of the young people, is another example of excellent conversation. James reports it as:

> "Did you really expect I would say I was delighted, and throw my daughter into your arms?"

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8 Ibid., p. 167.
"Oh no; I had an idea you didn't like me."
"What gave you that idea?"
"The fact that I am poor."
"That has a harsh sound," said the Doctor, "but it is about the truth--speaking of you strictly as a son-in-law . . ." 9

Wisely enough, the Goetzes saw the intrinsic worth of the conversation and used it practically verbatim in the play:

Dr. Sloper. Did you really expect that I would throw my daughter into your arms?
Morris. No, I had an idea you didn't like me.
Dr. Sloper. What gave you that idea?
Morris. The fact that I am poor.
Dr. Sloper. That has a harsh sound, but it's about the truth. 10

Although James's forte was not love scenes, he was, as a general rule, capable of presenting by inference some of the deepest emotional crises in a woman's heart and mind. However, he presents several such excellent scenes in Washington Square, one of which is between the two young people:

"... You can tell when a person speaks to you as if-- as if--"
"As if what?"
"As if they despised you!" said Catherine passionately. "We must be very happy together, and we must not seem to depend upon his forgiveness. And Morris, Morris, you must never despise me!" 11

Although the Goetzes cut this scene a bit, they retained

9 James, Washington Square, pp. 88, 89.
10 Burns Mantle, p. 181.
11 James, Washington Square, pp. 197, 198.
the pith of it:

Catherine. You can tell when a person speaks
to you as if—as if—
Morris. As if what?
Catherine. As if they despised you!
Morris. Despised!
Catherine. We must be very happy together... and you must never despise me, Morris.12

Many similar parallels are evident throughout a comparison of the novel and the play. A subtle difference stands out: In James's novel, although Catherine matures and becomes a great deal more self-reliant, her pliant personality remains gentle, although firm, in her refusal of Morris. Not so in the play. She leads Morris to think he has a second chance, and then jilts him. Along with the maturity, Catherine has developed a streak of cruelty, for, as she observes to her aunt, "Yes, I can be very cruel. I have been taught by masters!"13

Daisy Miller, a delightful novella, was published in the English magazine Cornhill, in the summer of 1878. It met with great success, but not exactly the type of success James had envisioned. Instead of being accepted as a delicate story, defending and explaining the simple, straightforward American girl—which is what James intended and what discerning critics recognized—it was pounced upon

12Burns Mantle, p. 187.
13Ibid., p. 199.
with entirely different conceptions. The story was de-
scribed in American newspapers as "an outrage on American
girlhood." The American colonies in European cities, es-
pecially in Italy, denounced the story much as Winter-
bourne and his aunt denounced Daisy herself. While the
American "social" ladies were busy denouncing Daisy, and
upholding their own code of conduct and morals, European
and English women envied the charming young American girls
their freedom, and their spirit of pioneering in the field
of etiquette.

A year after the novella had been published and
become a subject for controversy, James adapted it into
play form, evidently with the hope of having it presented
in the Madison Square Theatre in New York, because he was
living in America at the time. He wrote it in Boston dur-
ing the three months following his mother's death, and,
from all indications, enjoyed the task. However, he was
doomed to sharp disappointment. There is no clear evi-
dence as to the actual transactions between James and the
management of the theatre, but his letters of the period
talk about a "falling-out"; and his journal later records
a deep sense of bitterness about the theatre in general.
He returned to England, with the "comedy in his pocket,"
and met with equal failure there in his attempts to have
it produced. Eventually, he had copies of the play
printed, at first privately. Later it was published by
James R. Osgood.

James erred in the same way with *Daisy Miller* as
he had with *The American*. In his attempt to make the
situations plausible to a theatre audience, he weakened
his main characters, and destroyed their very essence.
Moreover, some of his other changes do not ring true.

In the book the author plunges directly into the
problem of an engaging young American lady against the
background of the Old World. This directness sustains
immediate reader interest. In the dramatic version,
James circumvents the problem. In the book, he depicts
Eugenio, the Millers' courier, as being merely too
friendly; while in the play he lets Eugenio indulge in
active blackmail. Furthermore, while James originally
hints at a love affair of Winterbourne's other than his
attachment for Miss Miller, in his later version he gives
entirely too much importance to the affair between Winter-
bourne and Mme. de Katkoff, weakening Winterbourne in his
fatuous pursuit of that lady.

Actually, James's dramatic Winterbourne leaves
a great deal to be desired. He never seems to know his
own mind. In the book, although he is indeed "stiff," as
*Daisy Miller* describes him, he is at least considerate,
especially of his aunt. In the play he is characterized
immediately as inconsiderate (he neither keeps his appointment with his aunt nor lets her know why). He needs someone else to tell him his own mind. For instance, in the novella, he observes that he "must on the whole take Miss Daisy for a flirt—a pretty American flirt." However, James complicates this observation in the play thus:

Winterbourne. Upon my word, I don't know what she is, and should be very glad if you could tell me.

Mrs. Costello. That's very easily done: she's a little American flirt.

Winterbourne. Ah! She's a little American flirt!

The original Winterbourne rises to the occasion of accompanying Daisy to the Castle of Chillon because the idea itself is enchanting. In the watered-down version presented in the play, he gives the impression that he is going merely to defy Eugenio, and because Mme. de Katkoff is no longer available, by saying: "Back out? I shan't be happy till we are off! (aside) I'll go anywhere—with anyone—now; and if the poor girl is injured by it, it isn't my fault!" The final sarcasm that James allows himself is truly ironic. He gives to Mme. Katkoff, a truly wicked, improper woman of the world, the task of

14Edel, Selected Fiction, p. 12.


16Ibid., p. 140.
explaining to Winterbourne the fact that Daisy Miller is not what hesuspects her to be. At least in the other story James allows Winterbourne to defend Daisy to his aunt; in the play he has Mme. de Katkoff defending the poor girl to her future husband.

James's pen even sacrifices what little personality Mrs. Miller possessed. He allows her a final tribute at the end of the tragic novella, when he describes her actions during Daisy's illness:

Mrs. Miller, who, sharply alarmed, struck him [Winterbourne] as thereby more happily inspired than he could have conceived and indeed was the most noiseless and light-handed of nurses.17

In an obvious attempt to add some humor in order to lighten the melodramatic sense of the final scene of the play, James adds to her timidity and weakness an unnatural pose of an unfeeling mother, in direct contrast to Mme. de Katkoff, who seems greatly concerned about the girl's illness. When Daisy is carried in from the carnival still in a swoon, Randolph, the little brother, is dispatched to bring Mrs. Miller from her bed. Later, however, after Daisy has regained consciousness, James inserts the following conversation:

Daisy. I don't want the Consul; I want my mother.
Mrs. Walker. I went to her room as well. Randolph had told her you were better and so--and so--

17Edel, Selected Fiction, p. 71.
Daisy. She isn't coming?
Mrs. Walker. She has gone back to bed.

The dramatist does not tamper very much with the character of Daisy herself. However, the entire play suffers from the sense of melodrama that he conveys. For instance, the last scene in which Daisy has swooned and all the others merely flutter about, is entirely melodrama—which feat is out of character for James. In the novella James treats the dramatic situation with a certain detachment—that of the observer. When he attempts to inject himself into the dramatic version, the result is embarrassing.

James remains consistent in his tampering with the central characters of Daisy Miller. On one hand, he loses Winterbourne, Daisy's mother, and the true sense of the original novella; while, on the other hand, he gives too much latitude to persons who are not important to the situation. Eugenio controls the next strongest and most plausible character, Mme. de Katkoff—who in turn controls the hero (supposedly)—Winterbourne. This leaves a great deal to be desired in the true relation between Winterbourne and Daisy.

The preceding analyses point up one important fact: James's fiction contains dramatic situations.

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However, it was not within his ability to bring about the successful transformation. In his intense effort to please others, he not only displeased himself but also the very ones he was trying to meet. In his quest for the light touch, he practically defamed his central characters, who were originally strong. Conversely, the Goetzes did just what James was afraid to do. They strengthened an already maturing person, and found the elusive quality for which the audience was looking. Hence, never finding his true medium of expression in the drama as he had in his fiction, it is no small wonder that Henry James always looked back on that portion of his life with supreme bitterness.
CHAPTER V

HENRY JAMES AS AN AMERICAN

Henry James died in Rye, England, on February 28, 1916, during World War I, and before the entry of his native country into that holocaust. The crowning blow to his sensitive nature, after a long life of frustration and deep disappointment, was America's initial refusal to become embroiled in the war. Since he had relinquished his birthright, in a final passionate act of renunciation, it follows that the America on which he had turned his back should for a time relinquish her claim on him.

When the James family was beginning to grow up, America also was in the midst of finding herself. She was a brawling, sweating, toiling country—virile but crude, progressive but immature, in constant flux toward the goal of self-realization. There was a definite vein of ore to strike for the literary artist who knew how to find it; and there were those who definitely knew where to look, and how best to exploit what they found. However, men like Mark Twain, Bret Harte and Walt Whitman had spent their youth in the very environment that contributed to their later works. Henry James was "spared" the realities and growing pains of a nation like America. His early childhood, as planned by his erratic father, had weaned
him away from his natural birthright. He learned to know, instead, the comparative calm of an established, centuries-old Europe. He was, therefore, destined to become a European in his thinking long before he became an Englishman in fact.

The boy Henry James was by nature a contemplative child. While the other children were actively taking part in family affairs, especially in spirited debates and joshing, Henry alone resisted the general family atmosphere, and spent his time in reading. Quite appropriately, therefore, his father observed that at fourteen Henry was "a devourer of libraries, and an immense writer of novels and dramas." He also resisted attempts to interest him in science, mathematics and other subjects taught by the various tutors to whom he was exposed. Then it was that the elder James decided to remove his growing family from the influence of the "common roughs" who were sons of neighbors in New York. The boy, who never had been as boisterous as the others in his family, responded eagerly to that which was more in keeping with his temperament—the comparative calm and studiousness of Europe.

Another contributing factor in the personality of Henry James was the "inconsequential injury" which befell him when he was helping fight a fire during his youth, and

1 Dupee, Henry James, His Life and Writings, p. 18.
which plagued him for a long period of time. Biographers differ in their description of the injury. James himself remains purposely vague, referring to it as a back injury. In trying to find a reason for his not ever marrying, however, scholars have attempted to prove that the injury not only caused him great pain, supposedly in the back, but also rendered him sexually impotent.

Having been weaned from America in his extreme youth, and being unable to serve in the Civil War because of the aforesaid injury, James found it much more to his liking, and compatible with his personality, to cling to things European.

Although James early in life learned to live with himself and his shortcomings—physical, mental and especially emotional—it took a lifetime of frustration and honest effort for him to learn where he stood artistically. He desperately wanted three very elusive distinctions—fame, art and fortune. He managed to attain true artistry in his works, after serving a lengthy self-imposed apprenticeship. Part of his dreams and ambitions concerning this distinction are expressed in a Notebook entry in which he says he must "try everything, do everything—be an artist, be distinguished to the last."\(^2\)

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\(^2\)James, *Notebooks*, p. 106.
Fame, however, although modestly attained during his lifetime, actually came later in the century, when discerning readers and students of the "ingoing" or psychological type of realism in literature began to seek out a true master of that form of literary expression. Fortune, too, was not to be realized. Although he fared well financially with the stories he had sold to literary magazines, especially the serials which at the time were popular in America, as a general rule his published works commanded only a limited audience. How his dramatic efforts were greeted has already been explained. Even when James had come to terms with himself and his art, he still was not able to comprehend what he knew. His heart would not accept what his mind could not reject. "In spite of all appearances he always clung to the fairy tale of success; it was unthinkable that genius should go unrewarded, even though its audience was often incurably dense."  

Henry James himself recognized some of the shortcomings of his artistic genius. In an entry in his Notebooks, dated July 15, 1891, he tells himself:

The upshot of all such reflections is that I have only to let myself go! So I have said to myself all my life--so I said to myself in the far-off

days of my fermenting and passionate youth. Yet I have never fully done it.  

Such an admission to himself points a general finger at the contention by some of his biographers that his "inconsequential" injury, which they feel very likely was responsible for his refusal of the married state and therefore sexual relations, reflected indirectly on the lack of virility in most of his literary output. By that we mean that James's best character delineations were always of women, and that his treatment of them was strictly feminine and conventional, even when they were involved in a love affair. His biographers argue that as a result of James's lack of experience in passionate love, he was unable to create truly virile male characters. As Henry Bamford Parkes points out, "Henry was lacking in the capacity for sensuous awareness and participation and unable to deal successfully with physical passion or with strongly masculine characters of any kind."  

Everything, therefore, that James already was, or later experienced, contributed to his type of literature, which was artistic, refined, feminine, psychological, and

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4James, Notebooks, p. 106.

above all geared to the intellectual approach. The few attempts he made to digress from his own peculiar style and subject matter are, historically speaking, failures. However, another generation in a later century has learned to enjoy that which those of his time rejected.

The first really intense rebuff was his attempt to write travel sketches for a newspaper. Try as he might, James could not naturally adopt newspaper style; he could not speak "in the journalistic voice: it was a distinct falsetto which he could not cultivate." Arthuristically, he recognized his failures for what they were, especially the stint with the Tribune. He wrote to his father of "the vulgarity of the Tribune," and complained to Whitelaw Reid, the editor, in a letter dated August 30, 1876: "If my letters have been 'too good' I am honestly afraid they are the poorest I can do, especially for the money!" Personally, however, he never forgot the rebuff, and referred to it many years later in his Notebooks when he catalogued the failure of Guy Domville.

Although he met with a fair share of recognizance


7Ibid., p. xvi.

8Ibid., p. 219.
through his sales to the literary magazines of America, he was read only by the educated, leisurely class of people, of whom there were very few. America was fast becoming a force in her own right; her masses of people were a driving force needed to open the new horizons in a country that was not very many years removed from a wilderness. It was a class of people, however, who had neither the time nor the inclination to develop a parallel culture, which would have contributed to the world at large, as did its material growth in later years. It is not difficult to understand, then, that the young man who had been irresistibly attracted to an effete, culturally alive, leisurely Europe should hold no attraction for the country which he had rejected.

The works of Henry James very definitely reflect his personality. Just as the man enjoyed the drawing rooms of European society, his fiction takes place in country houses, artists' studios, or European resorts. Even as James's friends were from the artistic, intellectual, leisurely class of people, his depicted characters usually fell into that category. His one exception was the attempt to defend with his pen the very people whom he had shunned in his social life—the typical American, the *nouveau riche*, the blunt, gay, partially educated, unthinking American. Even here he was misunderstood.
Daisy Miller was pounced upon by Americans as an outrageous portrayal. Although the novel The American met with a moderate amount of success, the play's Christopher Newman was depicted as much less of a man than the author had intended.

The world in which Henry James lived was dominated by ladies. Little wonder, then, that his stories are superb delineations of the feminine mind and heart, of the feminine mode of thinking and doing. This characteristic, likewise, appealed little to an America that was aware of its virility, masculinity and general aggressiveness, with little or no place for the woman except as homemaker and mother.

James was aware that his literary contributions did not appeal to the masses. Insofar as his fiction and essays were concerned, he had managed to forget the latitude between him and the reading public. However, when he attempted to create for the stage, he conscientiously tried to write down to the mass audience. Once more, this was against his lifelong habits and tastes, and his "worst was not good enough." In a preceding section of this paper it was pointed out in detail how James weakened his plays by attempting to reach the non-intellectual level of the theatre audience. In describing The American, the point was made that not only did James caricature
Christopher Newman, but that he definitely lost the power of the de Bellegardes by having them appear as mere opportunists, as well as losing the true sense of the love story by creating a happy ending. This opinion is shared by Henry Popkin, who made the further point that "Henry James wrote for two theatres: for the commercial stage and for the theatre of his mind's eye." Mr. Popkin further explains that after his failure in writing for the commercial stage, Henry James nevertheless wrote stories and novels filled with dramatic situations which he was totally incapable of presenting to a playhouse audience.

And so it went. When Henry James was his natural self, and wrote accordingly, he commanded only a limited audience. When he attempted to be other than his natural literary self, he had even less of a public. Finally, recognizing the cubicle to which his talent was destined to retreat, he spent the last years in letting his pen work freely in accordance with its own tempo and tone.

Because of his final renunciation of America, as before mentioned, it was inevitable that that rough-and-ready nation should forget about James, at least for awhile. The time came, however, when America had achieved its measure of material progress, when a semblance of

culture was beginning to accompany the other strides she was making. Finally, Henry James was being read, recognized and accredited. In due time his name appeared not only in literary journals but also in "popular" magazines. As recently as 1956, Newsweek carried a complimentary appraisal by one of this magazine's editors, who, in reviewing James's autobiography, said of him:

If there ever was one, the momentous American novelist, Henry James, was a literary man in full dress. His last novels . . . are monuments of great literary filigree. . . . And in the autobiographical trilogy . . . he gives among other things a powerful picture of his own growth into what deserves to be called a priestlike dedication to the art of letters.10

Thus two interesting cycles have been completed. The body of Henry James, reduced to ashes, was by his own request returned to its place of origin in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The talent of Henry James, rejected by a young, ebullient America, is finding its niche in a nation more able, in its own struggle for cultural maturity, to appreciate that artistic maturity which James proved himself capable of attaining.

One question remains. Will a third cycle reach completion? Shall the plays of Henry James be brought forth from comparative oblivion and be greeted with all

the enthusiastic acclaim that was denied them at the time of their inception? It is the opinion of this writer that such a proposition will hardly come to pass.

It is true that Henry James was a literary artist. Modern writers may find it feasible and profitable to adapt a good deal of James's fiction to the play, since, as Mr. Popkin points out, the dramatic situation is prominent in much of his works. The fact remains, however, that as a dramatist James fell far short of his other talents. His plays, as he wrote them, are not adaptable to the stage. However, in published form they can be read and enjoyed, especially in the light of their historical background. They can be appraised from a literary point of view for what they are—an honest, but faulty, attempt of a truly great artist to venture into a field which he was never able to conquer.
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