

HENRY JAMES'S REINVENTION OF STYLE

by

ROSEMARY K. LUTTRELL

(Under the Direction of Kristin Boudreau)

ABSTRACT

Using Richard Lanham's concept of a substance and style continuum and of the economics of attention, this thesis explores Henry James's tendency to collapse the continuum in his novels of the 1880's. The chapters explore James's treatment of invention and style in *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Bostonians*, and *The Princess Casamassima*, revealing James's tendency to dramatize moments of liberation for those of his characters who are able to pay attention, at the same time, to both substance and style.

INDEX WORDS: Henry James, Aestheticism, Invention, Style, Richard Lanham

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ROSEMARY K. LUTTRELL

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ROSEMARY K. LUTTRELL

Major Professor: Kristin Boudreau
Committee: Christy Desmet
Richard Menke

Electronic Version Approved:
Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout *The Wings of the Dove*, Henry James calls to our attention that what we are reading is a text and that the characters, who develop with so much seeming realism, are products of words, made up of typed characters. We hear, for example, that Aunt Maud's insistence that Milly "must stay" is "the end of the short parenthesis which had begun but the other day at Lancaster Gate with Lord Mark's informing her that she was a 'success'" (James, *Wings* 133). Even more striking and relevant to my study is the description of Susan Stringham's sense "that their relation," hers and Milly's, "might have been afloat, like some island of the south, in a great warm sea that represented, for every conceivable chance, a margin, an outer sphere, of general emotion; and the effect of the occurrence of anything in particular was to make the sea submerge the island, the margin flood the text" (128). It is as if James shows his pen-strokes where none are needed, calling our attention to the makeup up of the margins and the typography of the text. The framing margins not only embody the "sea" of "general emotion," but they also can spill into and drown the substance that they frame. James generates the image of the margin, or the frame, as being a vessel of emotional effusion.

Milly even seems to recognize herself as an artistic creation, a recognition that is reflected not only in her emotional reaction to her resemblance to the Bronzino portrait at Matcham, but also in the narrative comment that while visiting Sir Luke Strett's office she felt "she should be one of the circle of eminent contemporaries, photographed, engraved, signed, and in particular framed and glazed, who made up the rest of the decoration" (148). The peculiar

focus here, for Milly, is no more on the substance of the artwork she imagines herself becoming as it is on the surface touches: the framing, glazing, and artist's marking of his or her name.

Although Martha Nussbaum does not discuss this particular novel, her book *Love's Knowledge* demonstrates "that there is, with respect to any text carefully written and fully imagined, an organic connection between its form and its content. Certain thoughts and ideas, a certain sense of life, reach toward expression in writing that has a certain shape and form, that uses certain structures, certain terms" (Nussbaum 4). The following passage from Nussbaum's dense and important book helps to explain why she centers so much of her study of style and of the need to include literary texts in philosophical inquiries on James's novels:

In his preface to *The Golden Bowl*, Henry James describes the author's selection of appropriate terms and sentences, using two metaphors. One is a metaphor of plant growth. Focusing on his theme or idea, the author causes it "to flower before me as into the only terms that honorably expressed it." And elsewhere in the prefaces, James frequently compares the author's sense of life to soil, the literary text to a plant that grows out of the soil and expresses, in its form, the soil's character and composition.

Not only does James's writing demonstrate the complex relationship between form and content, but he also explicitly draws the reader's attention to his focus on style by, among other things, using words like "parenthesis," "margins," and "text." Style is not merely an important aspect of the text, but rather the style melts into the meaning, making itself indistinguishable from the substance. Style, moreover, is a container of heightened emotions and is, according to both Nussbaum and James, necessary for communicating the substance "honorably" (4). Style is not just meant to adorn the meaning, whether or not that meaning carries a moral message. Instead, as James's use of the word "honorably" suggests, appropriate style carries with it its own morality of correct or successful expression. These excerpts from *The Wings of the Dove* show James's interest in issues of invention and style in the period of his career that followed the

height of aestheticism in England and America. But James was actively and indeed urgently exploring the relation of style and invention at a far earlier stage in his career and at a much earlier point in the trajectory of aestheticism, as I aim to demonstrate in the following readings of *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Bostonians*, and *The Princess Casamassima*.

When James returns to *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1908 to write the preface for the New York Edition, he is interested in how the attention he spent on the beauty of the “historic and romantic sites” affected his ability to produce his story during the spring of 1879, when he began writing *The Portrait* in Florence, and as he continued it the following year in Venice. He writes that he was “constantly driven” to his window by the “the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice” (James, *Portrait* v). It was as if he had been looking to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist on my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn’t come into sight. But I recall vividly enough that the response most elicited, in general, to these restless appeals was the rather grim admonition that romantic and historic sites, such as the land Italy abounds in, offer the artist a questionable aid to concentration when they themselves are not to be the subject of it. They are too rich in their own life and too charged with their meanings merely to help him with a lame phrase; they draw him away from his small question to their own greater ones (v).

James looks to the beautiful sights and sounds of Venice, its style, to help him create his story, but recognizes that they are too “charged with their meanings” and draw his attention away from his work. Again using the metaphor of soil and flower that Nussbaum draws on, James continues, “strangely fertilizing, in the long run, does a wasted effort of attention often prove. It all depends on how the attention has been cheated, has been squandered. There are high-handed

insolent frauds, and there are insidious sneaking ones” (vi). The attention “wasted” on the Venetian style, then, has the potential to become “fertilizing,” feeding the substance (vi). James is aware that he is producing his art in what Richard Lanham terms an “attention economy,” and my argument about James’s treatment of form and content hinges on Lanham’s notion that when regarding anything, our attention must constantly oscillate between invention and style; we can either look “through” an object to its substance, a product of invention, or “at” the surface of an object, its style. The capital in Lanham’s “attention economy” is hard to quantify, but Lanham says we might locate it “in the literary and artistic imagination...in the cultural conversation” (Lanham 9). Productivity in this economy is fueled by “theatrical self-awareness” (10). Ralph Touchett recognizes Gilbert Osmond’s participation in the attention economy when realizes the paradox of Osmond’s monstrous egotism is that Osmond is also the world’s “humble servant” since “the degree of its attention was his only measure of success” (James, *Portrait* 346). Lanham cites Kenneth Burke, who was “fond of saying, ‘every way of seeing is a way of not seeing.’ He meant that paying attention in one way means you cannot pay attention in another. And the manner of attention changes the object” (Lanham 164). Lanham proposes a continuum, one end of which is invention and the other, style. While Lanham discusses invention and style in the digital age and addresses the ease with which attention moves back and forth along the continuum between the substance of an object and its surface, writers from the late nineteenth century may have been uncomfortable making such quick transitions.

Thomas Hardy’s writing, for example, is often preoccupied with the distinction between invention and style and the anxiety created by the apparent conflict between the two. The abundance of passages in Hardy that resonate with this tension makes him an excellent example of one widespread attitude towards style, an attitude in which style is subordinate to invention

and is even morally suspect. He treats the subject somewhat indirectly in some of the conversations that take place between Elfride Swancourt and Henry Knight in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, a book whose plot closely resembles Hardy's own life and courtship of his first wife, Emma. Elfride questions her moral value when Knight asks, "'which will you have of these two things of equal value—the well-chosen little library of the best music you spoke of—bound in morocco, walnut case, lock and key— or a pair of the very prettiest ear-rings in Bond Street windows'" (Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* 170). Knight describes the music in the most stylish and visually appealing terms, as if he is trying to tempt Elfride to choose the music, which, for him, has more intrinsic, substantial value. She, however, cannot resist saying that she would only want the music if she could "'for certain buy the ear-rings afterwards'" (171). After attempting to defend her condition by telling Knight that she lost her last pair of earrings, Elfride worries that "vanity is a mortal or venial sin" and asks Knight whether "the fact of a woman being fond of jewellery be likely to make her life, in its higher sense, a failure" (171). Elfride is concerned that her attention to style compromises her morality. Her desire to own both the music and the earrings points to her wish to recognize both ends of Lanham's continuum of substance and style.

Although clearly ironic, Hardy's poem "The Ruined Maid" echoes Elfride's concern about attention to style by illustrating the possible dangers that such attention could bring for a woman without the money to indulge her interest in surface beauty or fashion. After not having seen each other for some time, the two women in the poem meet in town, and below is part of their conversation:

—'You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!'—
'Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined,' said she.

—‘At home in the barton you said “thee” and “thou”,
And “thik oon”, and “theas oon”, and “t’other” but now
Your talking quite fits’ ee for high compa-ny!’—
‘A polish is gained with one’s ruin,’ said she. (5-12)

The woman takes up the ruined life to escape the degradation of peasant labor, but she also demonstrates the association of moral degradation with ornaments like “bracelets and bright feathers” (7). While these women are discussing sexual ruin, the connection drawn between a polished surface and moral depravity is mirrored in Elfride’s concern that her fondness for jewelry will make “her life, in its highest sense, a failure” (*Blue Eyes* 172). Knight later turns the body into a frame, representative of style, when he and Elfride descend into the tomb, saying

Occasions such as these seem to compel us to roam outside ourselves, far away from the fragile frame we live in, and to expand till our perception grows so vast that our physical reality bears no sort of proportion to it. We look back upon the weak and minute stem on which this luxuriant growth depends, and ask, Can it be possible that such a capacity has a foundation so small? Must I again return to my daily walks in that narrow cell, a human body, where worldly thoughts can torture me? (245)

For Knight, the effect of the frame made by his body is a depressing, limiting one. He complains that “one has a sense of wrong, too, that such an appreciative breadth as a sentient being possesses should be committed to the frail casket of a body. What weakens one’s intentions regarding the future like the thought of this” (245). Knight’s reference to the body as a “frail casket” drives home the connection Hardy makes in the novel between the body, clothes, and coffins, all of which trap or frame the substantive soul within. But Elfride’s attitude towards her body and clothes offers a perspective quite distinct from the one Knight expresses.

When Knight announces that he and Elfride are engaged, Elfride waits for Stephen’s “reply in breathless silence, if that could be called silence where Elfride’s dress, at each throb of her heart shook and indicated it like a pulse-glass, rustling also against the wall in reply to the same throbbing” (246). We are reminded that Elfride “was a girl whose emotions lay very near

the surface” (8). Elfride, unlike Knight, does not condemn her body and dream of an escape for her soul. Looking at her reflection in a pool of water to see the earrings Knight gave her, Elfride declares, ““really, try as religiously as I will, I cannot help admiring my appearance in them”” (258). Her comment reveals not only the pleasure she gets from looking at her surface appeal, but also the anxiety that she feels over it as she tries ““religiously”” not to admire herself (258). These same anxieties are echoed thirteen years later, from a completely different angle, in Henry James’s *The Bostonians*, when Olive Chancellor, believing that her attention to beauty compromises her political work, worries that she and Verena Tarrant are both demoralized after enjoying the music in Henry Burrage’s apartment. Olive fears that attention diverted to style cannot be spent on substance. Similarly, in *The Princess Casamassima*, Hyacinth Robinson writes to the princess that he fears that when he returns from Paris and Venice, where he has indulged his passion for art and beauty, he will find his work ““a terrible grind...that will mean, no doubt, that [he is] deeply demoralized”” (James, *Princess* 395). Although he fears his attention to style demoralizes him, Hyacinth, as I later argue, actually discovers a deeper sense of moral clarity when he collapses Lanham’s continuum to focus at the same time on substance and style. Elfride asks the same question posed by characters in James’s *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Bostonians*: is it possible to pay attention, at the same time, to both invention and style, to substance and surface, to the decorated body and the soul; or does attention paid to the non-substantial demoralize a person? Hardy and James, as can be imagined, answer this question in vastly different ways. Hardy, it would seem, agrees with Burke that style and substance are distinct categories, and that paying attention to style involves ignoring substance to some extent. At the end of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, despite all the fancy framing that surrounds her person, Elfride’s life slips away. Her coffin, as seen by two of her former lovers, is ““bright and

untarnished in the slightest degree,” fit for her as the newest wife of Lord Luxellian (Hardy, *Blue Eyes* 353). But near Elfride’s coffin is the first Lady Luxellian’s, which, though “rather new...had lost some of its lustre,” an ending that reads like a warning about the mortality of materialism (353). No answer is given to Elfride’s question of whether or not she should yearn for both the music and the earrings. But her desire to pay attention to both invention and style remains unsatisfied, and we are reminded, in the end, that surfaces fade, while her soul, as Knight imagines it, can “roam... and...expand till [her] perception grows so vast that [her] physical reality bears no sort of proportion to it” (245). Unlike Hardy, James, as I will argue, conflates Lanham’s continuum of invention and style, drawing the two ends together in order to pay attention to both at once. But both Hardy and James may have been reacting to the same tensions between invention and style that were playing out both in literature departments across Europe and America and in the non-institutional debates about aestheticism in both countries. I will touch on both the non-institutional and the related institutional conflict in the following brief description of the history of style as a rhetorical concept, which will provide a broader view of how style evolved from something helpful for the disclosure of invention to something seen by many as trivial, deceptive, impractical, and intemperate.

The Aristotelian canon includes the notions of invention and style that are central to my analysis of what I contend is a deep and significant concern of novelists and poets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Aristotle himself made style subordinate to invention, and Cicero imagined style as possibly hollow and deceptive.¹

1 Aristotle’s rhetorical canon includes invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The fact that Book Three of Rhetoric, which is devoted to the definition and discussion of style feels as though it is tacked onto the end as an afterthought, reflects styles complete

More than two millennia later, the literature of James's period is charged with a similar anxiety about the morality of style. For many of James's contemporaries, invention and style seem to be two clearly divided categories, invention being held as much more important, lasting, and valuable, as I have argued with my examples from Hardy. Often through his portrayal of the aesthete, James's writing reveals his ambivalent attitude towards style. Although, as Nussbaum points out, James grasped "the organic connection between [a text's] form and its content," James was leery of aestheticism, a movement that seemed to represent, particularly in its embodiment in some of its main players like Oscar Wilde, the ultimate privileging of style over substance (Nussbaum 4). Jonathan Freedman notes, for example, "James's heavily satirical portrayal of the aesthete in the 1880's and early 1890's, most notoriously, of course, that of *The Portrait of a Lady*," and he describes James's "responses to the phenomenon of aestheticism" as "alternately critical and celebratory, antagonistic and obsessed, and finally deeply, powerfully

subordination, at least since Aristotle, to invention and delivery. Style, for Aristotle, includes appropriateness and clarity and is therefore simply a means of transportation, moving information from invention to delivery. Metaphors, for example, are only to be used for epistemological purposes, never just as cloaks. Things without names can be described using metaphors, or metaphors can be used to aid memory or provide an element of surprise. Despite its subordination to invention and delivery in *Rhetoric*, style still had an important role to play. Cicero developed the three levels of style: grand, middle, and plain. In *Orator*, Cicero attributes the middle style, which is associated with epideictic rhetoric, the rhetoric of praise or blame, to women. According to Cicero, this middle, feminized style is ornamental and beautiful, but can also be deceptive and void of substance. For Cicero, then, style has the potential to be tricky and morally questionable.

assimilative” (Freedman xvii).

Between the years 1828 and 1904, under “pressure from both sides towards independent development, rhetoric and belles letters split” in both American and British universities, creating the false sense of a solid division between invention and style.² Rhetoric departments, such as the

2 As science and technology blossomed in the nineteenth century, classical studies, including rhetoric, began to disappear from all levels of education with the exception of schools for the upper classes and universities. What was considered a more “utilitarian curriculum” of “reading, writing, and arithmetic became the standard fare for the lower classes, along with lessons in religion, citizenship, and the pleasures of sobriety” (Bizzell, Herzberg 983). Rhetorical studies had to “respond to the changing nature of public education as much as to the internal economies of the discipline and related intellectual movements.” (Bizzell, Herzberg 983)

Richard Whately’s influential *Elements of Rhetoric*, published in 1828, “picks up the dominant trends of the day,” including “the epistemological focus on persuasion (as opposed to style),” and by the time Alexander Bain’s two psychology books, which became the standard rhetoric texts of the late nineteenth century, were published, Whatley “had already disengaged the belles letters from his rhetoric, and others were disengaging rhetoric from their belles letters” (984, 994). By the middle of the nineteenth century, education for written composition and oratory fell under the influence of scientific writer Herbert Spencer, whose “*Philosophy of Style*,” published in 1852, “proposes that successful communication is that which requires the least expenditure of mental energy to achieve successful reception” (993). Spencer’s work popularized “a rather mechanistic approach to efficiency or economy in style” that influenced American academic Henry Day, for whom “rhetoric has no content of its own” because it is “connective rather than creative” (993). In his American tour in 1882, published in 1885 in

one at Harvard chaired by Adams Sherman Hill, were supposed to teach elements of “style, usage, and editing” in isolation, with little attention given to invention. While some of the most familiar canons of Victorian criticism tend to regard rhetoric and literary aesthetics as basically opposed—for example, in 1832 J.S. Mill wrote “eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard”—this clearly was not the perspective classical rhetoricians understood (Mill 301). Most obviously, Aristotle’s *Poetics* demonstrates that classical Greeks believed poetic style to be an integral part of rhetoric. The late-Victorian institutional separation between rhetoric and literature departments may largely be an upshot of the Victorian attitude that rhetoric is opposed to literary aesthetics. Since the rhetoric departments took control of style and usage and the Victorian literature departments concentrated on philology, there was little room for an institutional discussion of the art and beauty of literature.³ Freedman notes that “aestheticism provided the impetus behind, or the rationale for, a number of new professions, most of which resisted full incorporation within academic structures,” and he goes on to point out that “Ruskin and Morris’s emphasis on the importance of handcrafts and a return to artisanal modes of production gave rise

Discourses in America, Matthew Arnold recognizes, laments, and confronts with his own oppositions the popular movement in American education to “pass from letters to science” to better “meet the needs of our modern life” (1547). It seems clear that the general move in education from letters to science contributed to the institutional split between rhetoric and literature departments.

3 Ian Small argues that when rhetoric and literature departments in British and American universities split, the the study of literature was really philology. Literature was not examined for beauty and style; rather, the focus was on the origins of language. Nineteenth century English professors would belong in linguistics departments today.

to a whole series of new vocations: careers for the makers of fine books, furniture, wallpaper, andirons, and other domestic goods,” in addition to, of course, the artists and writers (Freedman 54). James demonstrates his awareness of and interest in these new, non-institutional artistic professions when he creates Hyacinth Robinson, a bookbinder obsessed with beauty. The terms invention and style, as they are defined by their roles in the rhetorical canon, are particularly useful in discussing James because their use makes salient the connection James draws between aestheticism, morality, form, and content.

While James does not openly embrace aestheticism in a Wildean fashion, his struggles against the clear division between invention and style often engage him in the aesthetic discussion. His tendency is to dramatize moments of emotional liberation for those of his characters who allow for extreme overlap between substance and surface, as I argue Hyacinth Robinson is able to do, or, contrastingly, to show how an inability to allow for that overlap can lead to a character’s ruin, as we see happening to Verena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor. Each of these character’s happiness seems to depend on his or her ability, or lack thereof, either to smoothly oscillate between the opposite ends of Lanham’s style and substance continuum, or as Hyacinth does in Venice and Paris, to draw the two ends of the continuum together so that style combines with and leads to substance. While, as Freedman noted, *The Portrait’s* Gilbert Osmond is a prime example of James’s “satirical portrayal of the aesthete,” I suggest that Isabel Archer’s struggles with invention and style more fully illustrate James’s attitude towards aestheticism in the early 1880s (Freedman xvii). I further propose that we can trace a progression of James’s evolving philosophy of invention and style through a close reading of their treatment in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* (both 1886), and also, of course, in the treatment of Miriam Ruth, Nick Dormer, and the Wildean Gabriel Nash in *The*

Tragic Muse (1889)—a progression that, though the latter novel lies beyond the scope of the present study, suggests that James’s preoccupation with the matter of invention and style spanned the entire decade of the 1880s.

In his preface to *The Portrait*, as James is “trying to recover, for recognition, the germ of [his] idea,” he muses that it came “in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a ‘subject,’ certainly of a setting, were to need to be superadded” (James, *The Portrait* vi). He remembers Ivan Turgenieff saying that his “fictive picture” almost always began

with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him...he saw them, in that fashion, as disponibles, saw them subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications they would be most likely to produce and feel. (vii)

If we use James’s inclusion of Turgenieff’s method as a way of reading Gilbert Osmond, Osmond becomes one of the main “complications of existence” that Isabel must face as she sorts out her emotional connection to her tastes and her desire to be deep and just; Isabel’s plight, then, represents one of the dilemmas of aestheticism: that is, to reconcile the conflict between invention and style that troubled so many of James’s contemporaries (vii). And it would be a mistake to read Osmond’s role as an immoral aesthete as being fully representative of James’s view of aestheticism. When the novel is read in this mistaken way, the novel also participates in aestheticism’s plight, for the movement itself is too often completely confused with its most flamboyant aesthetes. Isabel strives to satisfy both her attraction to beauty and style and her desire to be deep and just. When Isabel arrives at Gardencourt, we hear that its “rich perfection...at once revealed a world and gratified a need” (45). Gardencourt’s “brown ceilings

and dusky corners, the deep embrasures and curious casements, the quiet light on dark, polished panels” appeal to “the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions” (45). The image of Isabel holding a book which she is not reading is repeated throughout the novel, and when she is “guided in the selection” of one book “chiefly by the frontispiece” we are given further proof of her attention to style (18). Yet Isabel also is “stoutly determined not to be hollow,” and she has a highly developed sense of justice (43).⁴ In fact, she sacrifices her sense of taste to her loyalty and sense of friendship when she allows Madame Merle to go with her to visit Pansy. For though “she had prefigured her small pilgrimage as made in solitude...she was nevertheless prepared to sacrifice this mystic sentiment to her great

4 Adam Parkes’s important essay, “A Sense of Justice: Whistler, Ruskin, James, Impressionism” clearly demonstrates James’s interest in justice in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Using the Whistler-Ruskin trial to discuss James’s ideas about Justice, Parkes writes “For James, impressionism’s internal conflicts, as displayed in the 1878 trial, generated a particularly vexatious question: How does one arrive at a ‘sense of justice’? As I suggest below, this issue has a special, though barely recognized, importance in the crowning achievement of James’s early fiction, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880-81), which was written in the wake of the Whistler trial, and in which the characters themselves speak explicitly about their desire for justice. ‘Justice is all I want,’ Madame Merle declares to James’s heroine, Isabel Archer, in a telling phrase (173). As we shall see, James’s use of the term ‘justice’ in *Portrait* reactivates some of the key ambiguities in his response to the Whistler trial. In both contexts, Jamesian justice denotes both a personal sense of fidelity (as in ‘doing justice to’ something) and the apparently more public, or social, idea of judgment, which depends on some norm or set of conventions (legal, moral, cognitive, or aesthetic)” (Parkes 595).

consideration to her friend” (274). It is perhaps this sense of loyalty Isabel further reveals in the same conversation (when she says “I think a great deal of my promises”) that leads Madame Merle to embrace the idea of Isabel as Pansy’s stepmother (275). It is, after all, after this remark that Madame Merle’s tone changes from mockery to thoughtful sincerity when she says, “I really think you wish to be kind to the child” (275). Madame Merle believes that while Isabel’s attraction to style will help Osmond trap Isabel and her fortune, Isabel’s sense of loyalty and justice will make her stay.

Edward Rosier remembers “perfectly the walk at Neufchatel” that he once took with Isabel, “when she would persist in going so near the edge,” and he makes this a metaphor for Isabel’s behavior when he imagines “this same tendency” in her “subversive” manner while questioning him (187). We have the image, then, of Isabel hovering near an edge, possibly preparing to jump into something deep, just as she perches with unopened books preparing to jump into the texts. Yet we are also reminded of Madame Merle’s lesson to Isabel during the first days of their intimacy, that a woman “has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl” (170). Isabel’s position is precarious; as she attempts to satisfy both her attention to style and her commitment to substance and justice, she is confronted with the reality that she may have to pick one. Furthermore, if she takes Madame Merle’s word for truth, she can do little more than hover near the “edge,” unable to jump into the deep (187).

Isabel, however, clearly is deep, and her depth is often revealed through her artistic sensibility and attention to style. In these cases, invention and style become confused because James collapses Lanham’s continuum. We get a sense of this collapse when Isabel explores

Rome, where there was “history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine.” Her experience is Paterian, as the narrator does “not attempt to report in its fulness our young woman’s response to the deep appeal of Rome, to analyse her feelings as she trod the pavement of the Forum or to number her pulsations as she crossed the threshold of St. Peter’s.” But we do hear that as she explores Rome the sense of the terrible human past was heavy to her, but that of something altogether contemporary would suddenly give it wings that it could wave in the blue. Her consciousness was so mixed that she scarcely knew where the different parts of it would lead her, and she went about in a repressed ecstasy of contemplation, seeing often in the things she looked at a great deal more than was there, and yet not seeing many of the items enumerated in her Murray.

It is to the beauty of Rome that she is attracted as much as can be expected of “a person of her freshness and eagerness,” but her attention to the beauty leads her into moral contemplation of “the terrible human past.” “Her consciousness was so mixed” because she pays attention both to her present happiness amidst so much beauty and to the “terrible past,” which allows her to give the history “wings that it could wave in the blue.” This passage is an example of James’s ability to collapse Lanham’s continuum of invention and style; Isabel does not oscillate back and forth between Rome’s surface and its substance; rather, she pays attention to both at once, causing her to feel both incredibly “mixed” and ecstatic. Isabel’s efforts to develop both her attention to style and her sense of her own depth, however, are thwarted by her attraction to Gilbert Osmond and his manipulation of her attraction to style. (251)

Osmond seduces Isabel through her attraction to style and uses her as a tool to “publish” his own style to the world (268). Like Pansy Osmond, Isabel often is described as so much stuff that Osmond can pattern, mold, and fashion. She is “ivory to the palm,” a very “superior

material,” and, of course, a composition, painted and framed by “the hand of the master” (345). Osmond, in a manner clearly reminiscent of Robert Browning’s Duke, “thought Miss Archer sometimes of too precipitate a readiness. It was a pity she had that fault, because if she had not had it she really would have had none; she would have been as smooth to his general need of her as handled ivory to the palm” (267). Earlier, Osmond complains to Madame Merle that Isabel “had only one fault,” which is that she has “too many ideas,” and he goes on to acknowledge that her ideas “must be sacrificed” (250-51). Thus, his problem is with her substance, while he feels that he will benefit by her surface, as well as, of course, by her money. Osmond is aware that he is using Isabel’s attraction to style to capture her; James writes

if an anonymous drawing on a museum wall had been conscious and watchful, it might have known this peculiar pleasure of being at last identified—as from the hand of a great master—by the so high and so unnoticed fact of style. His ‘style’ was what the girl discovered with a little help; and by now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble. (268)

Isabel becomes a vehicle for Osmond to present his ideas in a beautiful light. He imagines Isabel’s “fanciful mind” will reflect his “thought on a polished elegant surface” (307). Although Osmond tells Madame Merle that Isabel’s ideas must be sacrificed, he also treasures her intelligence insofar as it is able to repeat and reflect him beautifully. For “Osmond hated to see his thought reproduced literally—that made it look stale and stupid; he preferred it to be freshened in the reproduction even as ‘words’ by music” (307). He imagines her intelligence will be a “silver plate, not an earthen one—a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which he would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served desert” (307). Osmond represents Isabel’s intelligence, then, as a lovely but flat surface, and the “ripe fruit” which he will heap on her are his own, shallow ideas. He carries out his intentions for Isabel by skillfully manipulating her attraction to his style and by beautifully framing himself and his life.

Osmond demonstrates his use of style in his seduction of Isabel right after he alludes to her family's disapproval of her engagement. After defending himself against his suspicion that Ralph and Mrs. Touchett think he is "in love" with Isabel's money, he prepares her to view their life together as an artistic production by comparing his life to a book. Osmond tells Isabel, "I have been putting my eyes over the book of life and finding nothing to reward me for my pains; but now that I can read it properly I see it's a delightful story" (308). Yet, as he proceeds, he tells her nothing of what the story of her life will be, none of the plot or the substance. Instead, he only describes what it will look like; it is "all soft and mellow—it has the Italian colouring" (308). He describes their story as a "long summer afternoon that awaits" them, and continues, "it's the latter half of an Italian day—with a golden haze, and the shadows just lengthening, and that divine delicacy in the light, the air, the landscape, which I have loved all my life and which you love today" (308-9). Osmond seems not to be describing the contents of a book, as he implied he would, but a painting, or perhaps the frontispiece of the book.

Isabel denies to Ralph that she is attracted to Osmond's beautiful possessions and collections of art, but Ralph believes that "she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honors" (305). Thus, though she may not be attracted to Osmond for his art, she is attracted to the effect of his style, how he dresses his poverties. Yet Ralph acknowledges, although only to himself, that "she was wrong...she was deluded" because her "fine theory about Gilbert Osmond" was designed by Osmond himself and by his own manipulation of her artistic imagination (305). When Isabel finally realizes that, as Ralph imagines, Osmond does not have a "superior morality," but that she, like Pansy, is merely the "superior material" with which he has decided to work, it is too late; she has already made her promise to them both (346). In the end, Isabel sacrifices her sense of taste to her commitment to

morality. When she thinks of the “magnitude of his deception,” she “lost herself in infinite dismay” (376). She remembers that Osmond “said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them...he had really meant it—he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance” (376). Isabel comes to see that Osmond “took as a personal offence” her “way of looking at life,” and she recognizes how different she and Osmond are. We get the sense that Isabel feels she has deceived herself and Osmond with her attention to style when she remembers that Osmond “told her he loved the conventional; but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration. In that sense, that of the love of harmony and order and decency and all of the stately offices of life, she went with him freely, and his warning had contained nothing ominous” (377).

Her attraction to beauty, her “love of harmony and order,” prevents her from heeding what she now sees as a “warning” (377). Yet she also implicates Osmond in her deception, for he “had led her into the mansion of his own habitation,” and it is only after he leads her farther in that “she had seen where she really was” (377). What she discovers inside is “something appalling”: Osmond’s egotism (377). And his house becomes “the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation” (377). The “four walls that are to surround her for the rest of her life,” because of their content, become completely distasteful and oppressive to Isabel (377). The substance of Osmond’s house destroys Isabel’s attraction to its beauty and style.

When Isabel goes to Gardencourt to be with the dying Ralph, he tells her, “you wanted to look at life for yourself—but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional” (509). And though he makes it clear that he wants Isabel to stay at Gardencourt, that away from Osmond she will “grow young again,” she remains aware that “certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage and were quite

independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it” (509, 512). Isabel returns to Rome even though she thought of it “with a kind of spiritual shudder” (512). Because of her commitment to her moral sense and her loyalty to Pansy, she goes back to a life that has become appalling to her. Isabel is practically absent from the end of the novel, and we only hear from Henrietta Stackpole, who tells Caspar Goodwood, that “she started for Rome” (522). But I am reminded of the “immediate horror” Isabel feels much earlier in the novel when she considers that without Madame Merle’s influence she would not have fallen into Osmond’s trap and of her supplication afterwards that “whatever happens to me let me not be unjust...let me bear my burdens myself and not shift them upon others” (355). Although Isabel is both attracted to style and determined to be just throughout the novel, in the end James’s focus is not on her love of beauty or her ability to assimilate that love into her moral sense.

Instead, we are left with the impression that Isabel must sacrifice her youth and her desire to see the world for herself in order to uphold her own moral code. Isabel’s character, far more than Osmond’s, reflects James’s ambivalent and changing attitude toward style and its role in British aestheticism. Her struggles represent James’s interest in a mind that yearns to pay attention both to surface beauty and to a deep morality. In the next two chapters, one devoted to *The Bostonians* and one to *The Princess Casamassima*, I will explore how this interest develops. James’s treatment of invention and style in these two novels, I will argue, reveals his developing

belief that one might collapse the continuum, later described by Lanham, and pay attention at once to substance and surface.

CHAPTER TWO

OLIVE'S ENVELOPE: THE RHETORIC OF BEAUTY AND JUSTICE IN *THE BOSTONIANS*

From the time of its first publication, *The Bostonians*, has been criticized as being anti-feminist. Leslie Petty cites Lucia T. Ames, who wrote a review of the novel published “on March 13, 1886, in the *Woman’s Journal*, the official organ of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA),” and Petty shows that Ames’s attitude “is representative of the way most [women’s rights activists contemporary with James] received his novel” (Petty 169). Quoting Ames’s review, Petty writes “although Ames claims that ‘[I]t seems hardly worth while to take the trouble to protest against this caricature’ she issues a rather lengthy one,” calling “*The Bostonians* ‘inartistic’” and claiming that Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant belong to a “fictional ‘world of abnormal women’” (169). Petty argues that by concerning ourselves “not with James’s agenda, but with his insights,” we can recuperate James and *The Bostonians* from these charges; she sees his “insights” about the personal and political spheres as offering valuable lessons for feminist activists (170). I wish to offer a very different argument that, nevertheless, like Petty’s, reframes James’s stance toward feminism, focusing on the author’s preoccupation with invention and style, a thematic that richly complicates our understanding of a text that is all too susceptible, otherwise, to simplification as a satire of the New England reform spirit embodied in the women’s movement. James engages himself in the dialogue of British and American aestheticism when he creates Olive Chancellor, who is both attracted to beauty and style and terrified by the moral implications of her attraction. Olive’s anxious attitude towards justice and beauty represents a classic Victorian dilemma: that is, the anxiety one feels when

attracted to opposite ends of Lanham's proposed continuum. Pulling the aesthetic dialogue into the field of an American social movement, James generates insights about the intricately involved and dependent relationship between art and morality and turns the aesthetic discussion into an American problem that must be resolved. These insights should be included in the lessons that Petty says both past and present readers have missed.

It is easy enough simply to read Verena Tarrant as the clichéd female battlefield over which opposing forces wage war. From Matthias Pardon, the young journalist who whispers “there’s money for some one” in Verena to her own mother, who wants Verena to “remodel [their] visiting-list which bulged and contracted in the wrong places,” James gives us character after character who takes Verena to be the dazzlingly brilliant pathway to his or her ideal of success (James, *Bostonians* 51, 56). While James has been criticized for casting his feminist characters in a ridiculous light, it would be a mistake to read the novel’s cultural critique of the feminist movement as a flat gauge of James’s sympathy— or lack thereof—with the emerging New Woman. Rather, the characters’ preoccupation with matters of invention and style suggests that James’s edgy, ambivalent, and completely nuanced treatment of the woman’s movement will be illuminated by placing it in the context of the contemporary anxieties and debates about the status of style and by recognizing James’s own belief that “form and content are intricately related” (Boudreau 19). Furthermore, James’s focus on Verena as an artist of oratory makes salient the connection between aesthetics and the rhetorical convention of style.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, education for written composition and oratory fell under the influence of scientific writer Herbert Spencer, whose “Philosophy of Style,” published in 1852, “proposes that successful communication is that which requires the least expenditure of mental energy to achieve successful reception.” Spencer’s work popularized a

“rather mechanistic approach to efficiency or economy in style” that influenced American academic Henry Day, for whom “rhetoric has no content of its own” because it is “connective rather than creative” (Bizzell, Herzberg 993).

Barred from the professions that demanded an education in rhetoric, women were not trained in the art of public address until the end of the nineteenth century, when those who had access to higher education “could study rhetoric devoted in the classical spirit to public address on issues of civic importance.” But because women were “not supposed to speak in public,” their “practices were non-traditional by definition.” Rhetoric for women was not based on “culturally dominant values and well-established occasions for oratory” because it was often these very values that the women had to overcome or subvert in order to speak publicly. Many of the first female public speakers were “itinerant preachers who exhorted crowds extemporaneously, using deliberately colloquial, earthy, moving language.” Women were able to play around with style more than men, but the limited options for women’s political speech, perhaps, further undermined the political possibilities of style. Olive’s terror about the moral implications of style in *The Bostonians* may be traced back to Cicero, for whom style was often hollow and trivialized. It makes sense that James would be interested in the feminist rhetoricians’ attempts to spread justice while perhaps avoiding the slant towards mechanistic efficiency that ruled most political speech.⁵ He creates, in Verena Tarrant, a model of a female, American public speaker, whose unique style adds to her immense appeal and rhetorical artistry. (987)

5 James demonstrates his interest in women and justice in both “The Manners of American Women” and “The Speech of American Women.” The former article originally appeared in *Harpers Bazaar* in 1907 and seems to have sparked a certain amount of editorial or public comment.

Olive is drawn to style and beautiful surfaces, including Verena's, but she is filled with anxiety about her attention to style and denies and conceals her tendency. She realizes at one point that "it was not of importance that Verena should be just like herself; she was all of one piece, and Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together, little capricious chinks, through which mocking inner lights seemed sometimes to gleam." Verena's "many pieces" cause a "want of continuity," of which "Olive was conscious enough," for she had seen how Verena "could be passionately serious at times, and the perversely, even if innocently, trivial." Olive perceives Verena as being "serious" when she is working for the movement and "trivial" when she is attracted to the pleasures of men and beauty. Verena, on one hand, is made of so many pieces because she allows herself to oscillate freely on Laham's continuum, paying attention to both substance and style. Olive, on the other hand, sees herself as "one piece" because she does not allow herself the same freedom of oscillation; thus, if she pays attention to what she regards as "trivial," she will be unable to pay attention to the women's movement. (James, *Bostonians* 114) Basil almost immediately feels an ambiguous awkwardness in his relationship with his cousin, who, at least initially, is attracted to his exoticism before she is disgusted by his misogyny; Olive's lack of comfort with her own attraction to style colors her reactions to Basil and causes him to question both why she invites him to her house and why she brings him to the gathering at Miss Birdseye's house. Olive's initial reactions to Basil reveal her precarious relationship with style and substance. Olive "had never yet encountered a personage so exotic, and she always felt more at her ease in the presence of anything strange. It was the usual things of life that filled her with silent rage" (11). This observation reinforces and explains the earlier one that Olive "never went through any forms"; she does not force herself to be polite to Basil when he eventually makes her uncomfortable (8). Basil's exoticism is attributed partly to

his accent by a strange aside in which the narrator addresses “the reader who likes a complete image, who desires to read with the senses as well as with the reason” (6). This reader, who James privileges with a direct address, is “entreated not to forget that [Basil] prolonged his consonants and swallowed his vowels, that he was guilty of elisions and interpolations which were equally unexpected, and that his discourse was pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its rich, basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the cotton-field” (6). Although Basil’s presence first throws Olive into one of her “fits of tragic shyness,” we soon hear that “the effect of his tone was to dispel her shyness” (10, 11). Olive was “reassured at finding that her visitor was peculiar,” and her initial attraction to Basil is a product of her attention to style.

Olive’s romantic dream of herself as a hero further compels her to feel sympathy for Basil, who she imagines is “much bereaved,” and she envies the fact that “he had fought and offered his own life, even if it had not been taken” in the Civil War (12). Despite her conscience telling her that she should not invite “an offshoot of the old slave-holding oligarchy” to her house, “she could not defend herself against a rich admiration—a kind of tenderness of envy—of any one who had been so happy as to have that opportunity. The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something” (12). Olive endows Basil’s southern style and manners with her own romantically imagined content, perhaps to justify or explain her initial comfort and attraction to a Southerner.

Yet Basil’s presence in Olive’s house quickly sends her into an “unreasoned terror” (20). In fact, she challenges him to debate with her about her beliefs “as a punishment” for the anxiety he causes her (20). All Basil admits to at this point is that he hasn’t the “least idea” what the “new

truths” are (18). But Olive knows that Basil is not being sincere, and “she observed to him that she was sure he knew what she meant; he was only pretending he didn’t” (19). Basil continues to belittle and condescend, referring to the gathering at Miss Birdseye’s as “this little reunion” and claiming that his attendance will give him a chance to “fix” the problems of humanity. Olive’s fear of Basil, who subtly mocks her while upholding his gentlemanly façade, can be attributed to her reaction both to his tone, style, and manner, and to the substantively misogynistic views, which Olive correctly assumes underlie his style (18). The opposition between Olive’s animosity to form and Basil’s almost extreme embrace of the chivalric code sets the stage for their ongoing battle over Verena, and the contest is complicated by Olive’s tumultuous and anxiety-charged relationship to style.

Olive’s private spaces reflect her interest in style, and her insistence that the spaces remain private further demonstrates her anxiety about what her own attention to taste may mean about her moral substance. Basil is struck by her “cushioned feminine nest,” and he feels, on exploring her drawing room, that “he had never seen an interior that was so much an interior...never felt himself in the presence of so much organised privacy or of so many objects that spoke of habits and tastes” (14). Unlike the habits and tastes of Basil’s other acquaintances, Olive’s require “much upholstery,” which softens her interior much as Basil’s sultry tones soften his words (14). Basil is similarly struck by the inside of Olive’s house in Maine. Although the furniture that comes with the rental house is so sparse that “the paucity of chairs and tables and bedsteads was such that their little party used almost to sit down, to lie down, in turn,” the rooms are “garnished” with photographs, a piano and other “embellishments” of style and taste (279). But Olive is only comfortable if the evidence of her attention to style and comfort is kept private, and she allows few visitors, both in the house in Boston and the “cottage-fortress” in Maine (305).

We have a deep sense of the tension Olive feels when Basil, Mr. Tarrant, and Matthias Pardon invade her private spaces, which hold evidence of her sense of taste. Olive confines the clues that point to her attraction to beauty to private areas because she feels that they take away from how she will be perceived as a moral, political activist. Olive becomes annoyed with Basil for teasing her about her comfortable position, and he can see that “she disliked to be reminded of certain things which, for her, were mitigations of the hard feminine lot” (21). Olive hides from Basil that she “mortally disliked” the interior of Miss Birdseye’s house, and that “in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offence and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste. She had tried to kill that nerve, to persuade herself that taste was only frivolity in the disguise of knowledge” (25).

Despite her attempts to hide and kill her attraction to style, “her susceptibility was constantly blooming afresh and making her wonder whether the absence of nice arrangements were a necessary part of the enthusiasm of humanity” (25). Here, Olive asks the same question posed by Elfride Swancourt in Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes* when she worries that her desire for a pair of earrings will make her life a failure. Olive fears, like Cicero, that style is only “frivolity in the disguise of knowledge,” a perspective which recognizes the possibility of style as a form of deception (25). Yet while Olive attempts to hide her aesthetic tastes and expresses concern about the moral implications of having an aesthetic sensibility, she cannot purge herself of her attraction to style.

Olive’s attraction to and passion for Verena Tarrant represent her attraction to style, and Olive’s discomfort with her own artistic tastes underlies her murky relationship with Verena. Olive, like all of the characters who are drawn to Verena, is captivated by her charismatic and brilliant style, not by the substance of her speeches or her commitment to feminism. While we

are not given much of the substance of Verena's talk at Miss Birdseye's house, we hear that she "had far more colour than any one there," and Basil, who imagines she is "like a moving statue," realizes that her "effect was not in what she said, but in the picture and figure...the visible freshness and purity of the little effort" (47, 48). While the narrative voice distances itself from Basil's perspective by saying "I know not whether Ransom was aware of the bearings of this interpretation, which attributed to Miss Tarrant a singular hollowness of character," Basil isn't the only person in the audience who attributes Verena's appeal to her style (49). It is "affirmed within [his] hearing" by supporters of the women's movement that if there were more people like Verena, "the matter would soon be fixed; and it was rejoined that they couldn't expect to have a great many—the style was so peculiar. It was generally admitted that the style was peculiar, but Miss Tarrant's peculiarity was the explanation of her success" (51). Olive's desire to possess Verena forms almost immediately after Verena's first performance at Miss Birdseye's, when Olive invites Verena to visit her on Beacon Street.

Olive and Verena both recognize that Olive's attraction to Verena is at least partly, if not primarily, based on Verena's visual appeal and eloquent style. Verena's "gilt buttons," "bright, vulgar clothes," and "salient appearance" make her seem, to Olive, to "belong to the 'people,'" and conjure up, for Olive, romantically artistic images of "the social dusk of the mysterious democracy which Miss Chancellor held that the fortunate classes knew so little about" (63). It is worth noting that Olive seems to assign a certain content, populism, to Verena's style, as if she is uncomfortable appreciating her for her style alone. In fact, when Olive feels that "Miss Tarrant might wear gilt buttons from her head to foot, her soul could not be vulgar," we understand that, for Olive, Verena's "gilt buttons" are only attractive to Olive, are only not vulgar, because they are transformed by the substance of Verena's "soul" (63). While telling her mother that Olive

“doesn’t care a speck what she wears—only to have an elegant parlour,” Verena reveals that Olive is “going to have a tree in, next week; she says she wants to see [Verena] sitting under a tree” (78). Olive has the ability to “take possession of Verena” with a “quick survey,” which she does on Verena’s first visit to her house, and the importance Olive places on her gaze and visual stimulation is highlighted by her wish to further frame Verena, not only inside her cushioned and upholstered interior, but also by the branches of a tree. Even the narrative voice focuses on Verena’s surface as the seat of her talent, saying that Mrs. Tarrant was “proud of Verena’s brightness, of her special talent; but the commonness of her own surface was a non-conductor of the girl’s quality” (84). Olive is attracted to Verena’s surface or style, but her anxiety about her own attention to style may jeopardize her moral sense complicates her relationship with Verena.

Olive worries that Verena will forsake her and the cause if she gets swept away by the world of beauty and pleasure which Mr. Burrage represents. Although she recognizes Verena’s composition is of “many pieces,” she worries that if Verena pays too much attention to beauty she will not have enough attention to spend on substance, which is what Olive sees herself as providing. Olive tells Verena that “taste and art” are only “good when they enlarged the mind, not when they narrowed it,” yet Olive gives in to her own attraction to beauty completely, if only briefly, when they visit Mr. Burrage’s rooms at Cambridge to see his collections and hear him play piano (117). Olive, who is “extremely susceptible to music,” allows herself to be “soothed and beguiled by the young man’s charming art” (119). She can “for half an hour...surrender herself” amidst the “faint fragrance from the burning logs, which mingled with the perfume of Schubert and Mendelssohn” (119). In fact, so much does she feel that “harmony ruled the scene” and that “human life ceased to battle” that she asks “herself why one should have a quarrel with it” (119). But she repents her lapse of control, and “even before it was time to go, Olive felt that

they were both (Verena and she) quite demoralized” (120). It is as if Olive believes that because she becomes wrapped up in the music for a moment, and for a moment feels that she need not “quarrel” with life, that she will never again be able to devote herself to her cause (119).

Olive’s statement that taste and art ought to enlarge the mind is very Jamesian, indicating as it does that beauty—what we might call “style”—has a place in the world of substantive things. But because Olive is usually uncomfortable with any settlement between style and invention, she is more likely to exaggerate her disdain for style than to find a way to accommodate her political views to it. When Verena later breaks out “into a reflection very similar to the whimsical falterings of which [Olive] herself had been conscious while they sat in Mr. Burrage’s pretty rooms,” asking if Olive felt “the want of a vote” while listening to the music, Olive feels it is so “necessary to give her a very firm answer” that she lies, telling Verena “I always feel it—everywhere—night and day” (121). Olive cannot admit to Verena that she loses herself in the music even for a moment. Although, at first glance, Olive’s lie is only a minor misrepresentation of her feelings about music, her compulsion to lie is more meaningful than the lie itself because Olive has such a strong moral sense and high standard for her friendship with Verena. But her fear that the effects of style will demoralize them both overrides that moral sense when she lies.

Once she has lied to Verena, Olive clearly articulates her impression of their relationship, setting herself up as the provider of substance and Verena as the provider of style. After Verena confesses that Olive is her “conscience,” Olive replies that she would like to call Verena her “form—[her] envelope. But [Verena is] too beautiful for that” (121). Olive is flattered and feels a sense of security that Verena thinks Olive provides her with substance, and Olive admits that she sees Verena as the “form” that frames and carries the substance she gives. And even though Olive is highly anxious about her own attraction to style, she feels that a “partnership” of her

mind with Verena's, "each of them, by itself, lacking an important group of facets—made an organic whole"; Olive recognizes that her lack of style, or rather her repression of her attraction to style, prevents her from being a success without Verena's help (122). In this moment, Olive and Verena become the two ends of Lanham's continuum. Because Olive is uncomfortable collapsing the continuum within herself, she clings to the end that represents substance and externalizes the other end, style, in the form of Verena. What Olive fails to recognize is that while intellectualizing herself to society, she also "figures" herself within society. She refuses to see how she engages physically and stylistically with the world, ignoring her own form, and, instead, she demands that the world take her only for her content.

Olive's anxiety about the attention she pays to style plays out in these attempts to efface her own form and style. Her sister, Mrs. Luna, touches on Olive's fear of style when Olive comes down to meet Basil for the first time. Mrs. Luna tells Olive that she looks like she is dressed for a "sea voyage," and goes on to happily proclaim, "I am glad I haven't opinions that prevent my dressing in the evening...The amount of thought they give to their clothing, the people afraid of looking frivolous" (9). Not only does Mrs. Luna directly recognize the conflict Olive feels between substance and style, noting that her opinions are directly related to her fear of frivolity, she also indirectly points to the irony of Olive's dilemma; Olive has to pay attention to her style in order to appear as though she doesn't care about it. Later, when Verena declares that Olive is "quite a speaker," and tells Olive "you would far surpass me if you would let yourself go," Olive denies that she has any such talent. Although she has just delivered a beautiful speech to Verena, Olive implies that she only speaks well because Verena is her audience. Yet even though Olive declares to Verena "the very stones of the street—all the dumb things of nature—might find a voice to talk to you. I have no facility; I am awkward and

embarrassed and dry,” completely ignoring the effect her style has on Verena, the narrator continues with a description of Olive that focuses, almost completely, on her style. James writes

When this young lady, after a struggle with the winds and waves of emotion, emerged into the quiet stream of a certain high reasonableness, she presented her most graceful aspect; she had a tone of softness and sympathy, a gentle dignity, a serenity of wisdom, which sealed the appreciation of those who knew her well enough to like her, and which always impressed Verena as something almost august. Such moods, however, were not often revealed to the public at large; they belonged to Miss Chancellor’s very private life. (107)

Thus, just as Olive hides away her soft upholstery and beautiful interiors, as if she is ashamed of her attention to taste, she also keeps her impressive rhetorical style private. Even the distance created by the use of “Miss Chancellor” in this passage, instead of Olive, suggests that her display might be too private even for the narrative voice to intrude more than necessary (107).

Although Olive only unveils her use of style when she is in private, she is clearly rhetorically skilled, and her tone and style play a large part in her ability to convince Verena to commit herself further to the cause. After revoking her first demand that Verena promise she will never marry, Olive explains to Verena that she “must be saved; but your safety must not come from your having tied your hands.” She goes on to insist to Verena that safety must come from “the growth of your perception; from your seeing things, of yourself, sincerely and with conviction, in the light in which I see them; from your feeling that for your work your freedom is essential, and there is no freedom for you and me save in religiously not doing what you will often be asked to do.” While Olive claims to be concerned with Verena’s safety, her speech also reveals her belief in her complete dependence on Verena. She manages to unite the image of Verena’s liberation with the idea that she and Verena are two parts of a whole. Not only does Olive state that when Verena grows enough to see herself sincerely, she will see things “in the light in which” Olive sees them, but she also implies that her own liberty, that is Olive’s,

depends on Verena not marrying. She ends the speech with the strange, interrupted “and I never,” followed by an exclamation point and the observation by the narrator, again focused on her style, that she “brought out these last words with a profound jerk which was not without its pathos.” Olive does not finish saying what she never will do, but instead pleads “don’t promise, don’t promise...I would far rather you didn’t. But don’t fail me— don’t fail me, or I shall die.”

The narrator yet again addresses Olive’s style and its effect on Verena, saying “the manner of her inconsistency was altogether feminine,” and “the girl was now completely under her influence; she had latent curiosities and distractions— left to herself, she was not always thinking of the unhappiness of women; but the touch of Olive’s tone worked a spell.” Not only do we hear that Verena is enchanted by “Olive’s tone,” but the narrator also touches on Olive’s vision of Verena being made of many pieces; James writes that in Olive’s tone Verena “found something to which at least a portion of her nature turned with eagerness.” Verena’s multifaceted nature allows her to pay attention to both ends of Lanham’s continuum, and what Olive perceives as the resulting inconsistency in Verena’s behavior terrifies her. Olive pulls out all of her rhetorical weapons, including her highly developed manipulation of style, to try to prevent Verena from leaving her. (108)

Despite Olive’s insistence that she wants Verena to realize true freedom, Olive really “would have been delighted to put Verena into the enjoyment of that freedom...by preventing her exercising it in a particular direction” (108). Olive, therefore, will allow herself to restrict Verena’s enjoyment of life and freedom if that restriction leads to what Olive feels is a higher good. Olive is passionate about Verena and her style, believing that she is dependent on Verena, and hopes that she can use her own knowledge, or substance, to make Verena just as dependent

on her. While visiting Verena at her parents' house, Olive notes that Verena's "qualities... were like some brilliant birthday-present, left at the door by an unknown messenger, to be delightful for ever as an inexhaustible legacy, and amusing for ever from the obscurity of its source" (90). The narrator's remark that Verena's qualities are "superabundantly crude" is noted as being a happy thing "for Olive, who promised herself...to train and polish them" (90). But Olive's intentions for educating Verena and filling her with the substance of history and German philosophy are just as much about keeping Verena from being involved with men as they are about improving her contribution to the women's movement. We can see evidence of Olive's success in convincing Verena that they are each half of one whole, each of them one end of Lanham's continuum, when Verena, who often avoids taking credit for her ability to command a crowd, admits to Basil that Olive makes her speeches, "or the best part of them. She tells me what to say—the real things, the strong things. It's Miss Chancellor as much as me" (175). Verena feels that Miss Chancellor also is commanding the audience. Her use of the pronoun, "it," is unclear; Verena may be telling Basil that the speeches, as they are written on a sheet of paper, are just as much Olive's as they are hers, but perhaps the "it" is the actual speech as it is performed. After all, Verena is responding to Basil's question, "do you still make speeches" (175). Basil gives the impression that he is asking Verena whether or not she still gets on stage and speaks, not if she sits with a pad of paper and writes. Before she met Olive, in fact, Verena did not prepare her speeches by writing them, but rather she improvised, or the knowledge would "pass into her" with her father's help (42). If, then, the "it" in Verena's statement, "it's Miss Chancellor as much as me," is the performance of the speech, then Verena imagines herself, at least when she is on stage, as Olive imagines her; Verena becomes only half of a whole, and Olive makes up the other half (175). Verena's habit of allowing herself to be seen as a stylish but

hollow container, a mere envelope for someone else's substance, developed before she met Olive, but this habit makes her more susceptible to Olive's suggestions that she sacrifice certain pleasures in order to fight for justice.

Olive's insistence that one must choose between a sense of justice and an appreciation for art, beauty, and even pleasure prevents her from being sincere with Verena about the depth of her passion and her full intentions for keeping Verena involved in the movement. Verena is much more to Olive than a partner in fighting for social justice; Olive wants "to keep [Verena] quite to herself" (83). Olive even admits to Verena "that she was jealous, that she didn't wish to think of the girl's belonging to anyone but herself" (85). But when Olive says that losing Verena would kill her, she implies that it would be Verena's absence from the movement, from the fight for female liberation, that would strike the blow. When Olive imagines that Verena may be lost or dead after a boat ride with Basil, she felt "above all...how she had understood friendship, and how never to see the face of the creature she had taken to her soul would be for her as the stroke of blindness" (320). Yet she never seems to fully express to Verena exactly how she understands their friendship, but instead, Olive's "most passionate protest was summed up in her saying that if Verena were to forsake them it would put back the emancipation of women a hundred years"; Olive masks her fear of losing a partner in life with her fear of losing her partner in a social movement (295). In other words, Olive pretends she is merely concerned that when Verena pays attention to pleasure and beauty she fails to pay attention to morality, but equally as disturbing to Olive is the idea that Verena will fail to pay attention to her.

Lanham might say that Verena's attention becomes the currency during much of *The Bostonians* and certainly during the final chapters, and Olive and Basil battle each other to possess more of Verena's attention than the other. Verena must negotiate with Olive, using the

very gift of speech that Olive helps her develop, to spend time with Basil, who has followed Verena to Maine. Yet her rhetorical skills, her “artlessly artful facilities, were not a part of her essence, an expression of her innermost preferences. What was a part of her essence was the extraordinary generosity with which she could expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her” (296). Olive recognizes again, that Verena “was very deficient in the desire to be consistent with herself,” and would rather keep her hidden away where she will not be tempted by outside influences (296). Basil also recognizes and uses her generosity in Maine when he determines “to show her how much he loved her, and then to press, to press, always to press” (301). Basil and Olive are both relentless in their pursuit of Verena’s attention, but their manners of pursuit are quite different. Olive’s attempts to efface her own style and possess Verena often lead her to act immorally; she not only often lies to Verena, as she does after hearing Mr. Burrage play piano, she also has hidden intentions for keeping Verena involved in the movement and allows herself to restrict Verena’s freedom. Yet the complexity of Basil’s psyche and of his intentions for pursuing Verena make him, of the two, a far more sinister seducer.

Basil is not afraid, as Olive is, to appeal to Verena’s sense of style to make her believe that “the idea of giving herself to a man” is “more agreeable to her than that of giving herself to a movement,” and he intensifies his hold on her by finding “the means to deepen this illumination, to drag her former standard in the dust” (301). Reflecting on a response he has written to Verena’s letter, in which she asks him to leave the town where they are vacationing, Basil “liked to think that he had great tact with women,” and he feels that “to go away proved how secure he felt, what a conviction he had that however she might turn and twist in his grasp he held her fast” (313). James’s layering, here, of chivalry (Basil’s “great tact”) over violence (his tight “grasp”)

furthering Basil's earlier feeling that he need not be chivalrous with Olive because "chivalry had to do with one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved" (305). This revelation, of the hate beneath chivalry, leads me to question Basil's real feelings for Verena, with whom he is almost always a gentleman. Basil seems to want to "quiet" or erase Verena's substance (313). While at Miss Birdseye's side, Verena "cried, with a sudden violence of emotion" that Miss Birdseye is their "heroine," their "saint," and it was as if "a wave of contrition, of shame, had swept over her—a quick desire to atone for her secret swerving" (310). Thinking about this incident later, Basil recognizes that Verena's effusion was genuine, for he feels that "the emotion she had expressed...was only one of her instinctive contortions," yet he plans on wiping out parts of Verena; he takes "due note" of these "instinctive contortions" and "said to himself that a good many more would probably occur before she would be quiet" (313). While Olive frequently hides from Verena her personal attraction to Verena's style, Basil is more open about his tastes. He admits to Verena that he becomes more hopeful about winning her when an editor accepts a paper he wrote because he had "before him a vision of distinction, of influence, of fortune"; Basil lacks the strong moral sense that drives Olive, and he does not pretend that morality motivates him (294). Verena seems to feel a sense of satisfaction that she "pleased him more than any one," even though she knows that he is disgusted by her beliefs (295). Basil also realizes that "the situation between [Basil and Olive] was too grim; it was a war to the knife, it was a question of who should pull the hardest," and they are pulling, of course, on Verena's attention (298). Although Olive allows herself to restrict Verena's enjoyment of life, Basil is willing to pull even harder. At one point, when he feels "simply sickened" by the idea that Verena will "become widely popular," he feels that he is "almost capable of kidnapping her" (306). We get the sense that Verena's surface, "her light, bright texture, her complacent

responsiveness, her genial, graceful, ornamental cast” contribute to her “desire to keep on pleasing others” (300). And in the final scenes of the novel, Basil’s almost violent removal of Verena from the Boston Music Hall almost does seem like a kidnapping; “by muscular force” he “wrenched her away” as she cries out for Olive (349). He wins “his victory” by brute force, ignoring Verena’s plea to let her give the speech and save Olive from humiliation (349).

Yet James leaves it ambiguous whether or not Olive is actually humiliated when she walks onto stage in Verena’s place. For although Olive tells Mrs. Farinder that she is going on stage “to be hissed and hooted and insulted,” when she does walk out, “the hush was respectful” (349). The audience is already furious about Verena’s delay; we hear that “the combined effort of Mr. Filer,” Verena’s agent, and of “Selah Tarrant to pacify the public had not, apparently, the success it deserved; the house continued in uproar and the volume of sound increased” (345). But the audience wants to hear Olive speak, and I am left wondering whether, in the end, Olive reclaims for herself a sense of her own style, which she has tried to efface throughout the novel. She appears and speaks in front of a large audience, something she insists to Verena she would never do, and since Basil has wrenched away Verena, who represents the style end of Lanham’s continuum for Olive, she loses the platform on which she imagines her substance will be presented. Olive, therefore, out of a sense of duty and moral obligation to the crowd and despite her utter terror, allows herself to be the platform, or should I say form, for her own content. Olive’s struggles first to repress and erase her own form and style and then, perhaps finally, to incorporate that attention to style into her commitment to justice, represent James’s exploration of the possibility of having a flexible identity not restricted by essentialized concepts of self. Olive worries that if she honors her sense of taste by paying attention to style she jeopardizes her moral sense and ability to fight for women’s equality. Although the idea of an essentialized self

is typically used when speaking about issues of race, gender, class, or sexuality, as James shows in *The Bostonians* and again, as I will now argue, in *The Princess Casamassima*, artistic and moral sensibility also play a role in defining, sometimes rigidly, a person's identity.

CHAPTER THREE

HYACINTH ROBINSON'S SUICIDE AND SUCCESS

*Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude
in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts
some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this
short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. (Pater 152)*

Only from the vantage point of autobiographical hindsight, or for a biographer or commentator on a life, from the even more distanced hindsight looking over the expanse of a life that has been completed, do the patterns and coherent meaning of the life fully emerge. Henry James provides very little commentary within *The Princess Casamassima* about Hyacinth Robinson's suicide other than Shinkel's remark that it would have been better if it had been the duke, and one is left wondering what meaningful patterns can be found in the life of a hero who destroys himself. While many readers feel that Hyacinth has utterly despaired of being able to reconcile the conflicting claims of sensibility and justice and that he kills himself to escape the pressure he feels to choose, this reading may be too simple.

Hyacinth's suicide, though perhaps inevitably viewed in conventional terms as a failure, follows a period in his life of philosophical and emotional resolution on terms and in a key that James's narrator regards as nothing short of heroic. Just as James creates characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* who struggle with what they perceive to be an incompatibility between invention and style, *The Princess Casamassima* is about Hyacinth's bewilderment with a world that seems to set up art and justice on opposite sides of a wall that cannot be crossed; yet he finds a way to bring the two sides together. While Hyacinth often takes pleasure in the incoherence that allows for this reconciliation, it also bewilders him and causes

him anxiety. Hyacinth both fears and feels external pressures pushing him to have a more consistently coherent identity, the same pressures that prompt Olive Chancellor to lie to Verena about her constant political commitment and her aesthetic sense, and it is this fear, and not a failure to reconcile the conflicts between art and morality, that may cause him to feel that suicide is the answer.

Lanham's continuum of invention and style may help clarify the threat Hyacinth feels his attention to beautiful surfaces poses to his sense of morality. Hyacinth fears that the attention he pays to the surface of the world is attention that cannot be paid to substance and that his love of style and art will lead to his demoralization. His fears reflect what I have argued is a common Victorian belief, that one cannot easily oscillate along Lanham's continuum, and that choosing to focus on style may mean ignoring substance. Paul Armstrong indirectly addresses Hyacinth's bewilderment when he states that Henry James's writing represented a breakthrough because of James's "portrayal of the vicissitudes of consciousness in their own right" (Armstrong 6). Armstrong explains, "James did not invent the hermeneutic circle, obviously, but he did discover that its movements could themselves form the action of the novel—and not just serve as the means to other ends in the development of a plot or a character" (6). Armstrong explains, "James abandons monism and embraces pluralism when he declares that 'the measure of reality is very difficult to fix...Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad of forms'" (8). The naturalistic settings in the novel, such as Millbank prison, where Hyacinth visits his mother, and the Sun and Moon, a bar where Hyacinth meets with his revolutionary friends, are among the "myriad of forms" that engage Hyacinth's attention. But Hyacinth's struggle with these different forms (and not the forms themselves) is the real focus of the novel. Hyacinth's suicide forces readers to focus on his attempts to interpret the various realities of his conflicting loyalties—loyalties to the

values of the established order, especially its achievement in art and aesthetics, on the one hand, and to the revolutionary action that would overthrow that order, on the other hand—and not on the political unrest and revolutionary forms or settings like the Sun and Moon and Millbank prison, which at first seem to make this novel decidedly different from the rest of James’s work. In his discussion of *The Ambassadors* Armstrong states, “this is not a case where reality exists in the middle between opposing extremes. Instead, James reopens the plurality of interpretations,” something James also frequently does in *The Princess Casamassima* as Hyacinth negotiates his conflicting loyalties (8). Hyacinth’s sensitive, indeed, highly perceptive, temperament allows him to travel among his different interpretations of the world, sometimes making him feel he is inconsistent.

The distinction Emerson draws between consistency of deeds and a coherent temperament shows that while Hyacinth, unlike Olive in *The Bostonians*, allows himself to be somewhat inconsistent, his feelings and deeds are all strung along a coherent temperament. In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson writes that consistency is a “terror that scares us from self-trust,” and he seems to define consistency as “a reverence for our past act or word, because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them” (Emerson 265). Although Hyacinth fears that his simultaneous promises to help the revolution and adoration of beauty will cause his friends to reject him for being inconsistent, it is Hyacinth’s perceptive temperament—the “iron wire” on which the beads of his sensations are strung—that both draws his attention to beauty and shapes his divided loyalties to the members of his surrogate family (474).

While Emerson celebrates inconsistency in “Self-Reliance,” he almost seems to continue his discussion of it in “Experience” when he writes “if I have described life as a flux of moods, I

must now add, that there is that in us which changes not, and which ranks all sensations and states of mind” (485). When Hyacinth first visits Paul Muniment and his sister, Rosy, for example, he is as interested in the way Rosy, surrounded by a “counterpane of gaudy patchwork... had the air of having gone to bed in a picture gallery” as he is in hearing about Paul’s revolutionary beliefs (James, *Princess* 133). Furthermore, his loyalties to Paul, who draws him into the scene of revolutionary action, on the one hand, and to Mr. Vetch, who hopes to help Hyacinth appreciate the beauty of his brief life, on the other hand, and even to the Princess, who draws him both to beauty and revolution, are a product of his perceptive temperament because these attachments involve his affection for them as members of his constructed family and not his belief or disbelief in their ideology or politics. Hyacinth’s trust in his perceptive temperament, which draws him to both artistic beauty and social action, allows him to form connections with the diverse group of individuals who make up his surrogate family despite the seemingly irreconcilable differences in the ideology of the members. His movement among the members of such a diverse group is led by this temperament, not by logic, and constitutes an inquiry out of which Hyacinth attempts to develop his own flexible philosophy about art and morality. While Olive held herself to a high standard of consistency, Hyacinth is more like Olive’s conception of Verena; he too, is made of “many pieces,” and his refusal to adopt completely the philosophy either of the revolutionaries or of the aristocrats can be seen as an independent act of self-definition and also as an attempt not to leave anything out of his experience of life (James, *Bostonians* 114). Similarly, Hyacinth’s reactions to the beautiful surfaces of the world such as the art of bookbinding, the “high polish and great floors” of the Louvre, and even the physical beauty of the Princess and Millicent are responses of his sensibility more than they are analytic (James, *Princess* 382).

Hyacinth's almost obsessive love for Paul in the only scene that actually takes place in the Sun and Moon, the scene that immediately precedes and precipitates Hyacinth's vows to serve the revolution, points to the role Hyacinth's temperament, both affectionate and artistic, plays in Hyacinth's decision-making; "when [Paul] talked Hyacinth listened, almost holding his breath; and when he said nothing Hyacinth watched him fixedly, listening to the others only through the medium of his candid countenance" (280). Hyacinth spends his time at these gatherings "waiting for a sign" from Paul, a sign that will give him a role that he can "play with brilliancy, to offer an example—an example, even, that might survive him—of pure youthful, almost juvenile, consecration," an artistic and not political view of the part he dreams of playing (280). Hyacinth fantasizes about the dramatic role that he will perform and not of the political goals that he will help to realize. He is drawn in not by the logical rhetoric of the group's social complaints, but by Paul's voice and Paul's "candid countenance" (280). The culmination in the scene of both his affection for and desire to please Paul, along with his aesthetically idealized vision of his theatrical role in a passionate revolution, catapults him into Hoffendahl's apartment where he makes the tragic pledge.

Despite Hyacinth's proud declaration to the Princess that he "gave [his] life away," it is clear from the rest of the novel that Hyacinth has promised only his physical body and not his mind (327). Describing his reaction to Hoffendahl, Hyacinth states, "he made me see, he made me feel, he made me do, everything he wanted," but Hoffendahl is not the only person to so inspire Hyacinth, suggesting that the response has less to do with Hoffendahl's political agenda and more to do with Hyacinth's tendency to devote himself to people he finds either physically or intellectually beautiful (330). He is willing to do as much for the Princess as he is for the revolution when he offers to kill Captain Sholto, "if he troubles [her]," and he recognizes that

even Millicent's beautiful vitality would easily dominate him if they ever were to marry (353). Hyacinth's artistic, affectionate temperament, not his intellect, keeps him oscillating between such seemingly incompatible worlds, and part of his vulnerability to suffering from the conflict he perceives between art and morality is caused by his unwillingness to succumb to or embrace one dogma to the exclusion of other points of view or to the possible exclusion of any member of his surrogate family.

Hyacinth's internal conflicts are reflected in his construction of relationships with the various people who serve as his parents, both biological and surrogate. Although Hyacinth only meets his mother when he is very young and has only read about his father, only once is he referred to as an orphan. (The narrator describes Amanda Pynsent's fear that twelve-year-old Millicent will teach "the innocent orphan low ways" (94)). Miss Pynsent acts as his adoptive mother, saving him from the workhouse and the streets, and Mr. Vetch becomes his first and most touching father figure. His loyalty to Miss Pynsent and Mr. Vetch, and indeed to all of his surrogate parents including the Poupins, Paul, and the Princess, affects his sense of identity until his death.

Hyacinth is also affected by the ideas he creates from the small amount of information he has about his biological mother and father. He struggles to incorporate the knowledge he has about his parents into his self-image, but "there was no peace for him between the two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of his passionate, plebian mother and that of his long-descended, super-civilised sire" (479). He feels a strong loyalty to both parents whom he has never really known, attributing his "first impulses toward social criticism" to his mother and attempting to create for his father "some conceivable and human countenance...some expression of honour, of tenderness and recognition" (479). The memory of each biological parent is a

combination of fact and artistic invention, yet Hyacinth feels “to desert one of these presences for the other—that idea had kind of a shame in it, as an act of treachery would have had” (479). He even imagines his father’s voice, a voice he has of course never heard, reprimanding him for his involvement in revolutionary societies.

Hyacinth’s loyalty to the memories he constructs of his biological parents, along with his affectionate attachment to his various surrogate parents, combine in him to create a mind that not only cannot be pinned down by any single ideology, but—more troubling for Hyacinth—seems at times incoherent. When Paul declares that the conditions for the poor in London are “abominable” and “the present arrangements won’t do,” Hyacinth agrees, but he only does so with “a dolefulness begotten of the rather helpless sense that, whatever he saw, he saw (and this was always the case), so many other things beside. He saw the immeasurable misery of the people, and yet he saw all that had been, as it were, rescued and redeemed from it: the treasures, the felicities, the splendours, the successes, of the world” (445). Hyacinth is able to sympathize all at once with the misery and the beauty, which allows him to sympathize even further with the many members of the family he creates. Cynthia Weinstein examines nineteenth-century interpretations of the word sympathy, pointing out that in most cases, it was necessary that a person recognize diversity or difference in order to feel sympathy.⁶vi Hyacinth’s ability to create such a large and diverse surrogate family requires him to sympathize with each member of the family even if he does not fully subscribe to each person’s beliefs. William James notes in *The Principles of Psychology* that “sympathetic people...can feel a sort of delicate rapture in thinking

6 Weinstein’s study in *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* focuses on the role of sympathy or lack of sympathy in biological and adoptive families in sentimental fiction.

that however sick, ill-favored, mean-conditioned, and generally forsaken they may be, they are yet integral parts of this brave world” and because they experience this sense of sympathetic connectedness James states that “the outline of their self often gets uncertain” (W. James, *Principles* 189). Perhaps William James’s analysis can be invoked to illuminate the observation by Henry James’s narrator that Hyacinth “had become vague, he was extinct” just when he felt “an insurmountable desire to do justice” to Paul by not challenging his friend “even in imagination” (H. James, *Princess* 582). Similarly, when he imagines the Princess’s voice speaking “so bravely in the name of the Revolution...he had a sense of his mind, which had been made up, falling to pieces again” (582). His feelings of loyalty for Paul and the Princess and his desire to maintain a connection with each of them make him feel “vague” or as though his mind is “falling to pieces” (582). Hyacinth’s sympathy for other characters further incorporates them into his diverse family, while contributing to his flexible, artistic temperament and to his incoherence.

Although Hyacinth allows himself to travel among and try on the many perspectives of his biological and surrogate family, he is also aware of Emerson’s recognition in “Self-Reliance” that the only “data” others have “for computing our orbit” is “our past act or word...and we are loath to disappoint them” (Emerson 265). Not only is Hyacinth deeply devoted to the members of his surrogate family, but he also depends on them to help him understand his role in the world. Because of his reliance on them to help him interpret his identity, Hyacinth is deeply troubled when he feels misunderstood by his friends. His sensitive awareness of audience and his overriding concern with the regard of others reverberates in his actions and feelings throughout the book. Hyacinth is philosophically open-minded in his tendency to reject dogma and his “desire to do justice” to his friends, but he does not trust that the people he admires most will be

as open-minded with him (James, *Princess* 582). His fear of being classified and judged or even of being disregarded by the people around him sometimes undermines his resistance to dogma, making him vulnerable to manipulation by ideologues. Paul senses Hyacinth's fear of being judged when they are at the Sun and Moon, telling him, "you're the boy he [Hoffendahl] wants"; Paul knows Hyacinth's self-consciousness will make him easy to control, a good tool for the revolution (296).

Hyacinth's dependence on his friends and his fear that they will forsake him for his inconsistency make him question his perceptive temperament and desire to honor both his appreciation of beauty and his moral sense. Hyacinth's shame about his background, for example, makes him feel that he must "go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle," and throughout his life he attempts to regulate people's perceptions of his identity (109). Since he was a child, and with Miss Pynsent's encouragement, Hyacinth has sought to distinguish himself from what he perceives to be the vulgar and miserable life of Lomax Place. Yet the word "vulgar" is also used to describe certain aspects of the upper classes. For example, we hear that in Madeira Crescent the Princess finds "a delightful detachment from the invasive, vulgar, gossiping, distracting world she had known hitherto," and that Lady Aurora finds Captain Sholto to be vulgar, but says that the working poor are not (430). Hyacinth is as much averse to being seen as a swell as he is to being seen as too low, and he often feels that he should hide his aesthetic sensibility as much as he hides the story of his mother and father. In this way, Hyacinth is less philosophically forgiving of himself than he is of the rest of the world; for while he allows his views of society to be loose and forgiving, shaped by his artistic and affectionate temperament, he often worries that his friends would love him more if his identity were narrower.

The conflict Hyacinth feels between his loyalty to art and order and his loyalty to his revolutionary friends is at least temporarily transcended when Hyacinth uses Mr. Vetch's money to travel to Paris and Venice. One of the most beautiful examples of Hyacinth's construction of family and avoidance of solitude occurs on his trip to Paris where he imagines his grandfather as a travel companion. "All Paris struck him as tremendously artistic and decorative," and he stops at Tortoni's to escape the danger of becoming "incoherent to himself," for he feels he is in need of "balancing his accounts" (379-382). Hyacinth is worn out from paying attention to the decoration and style of the beautiful city and must rest; wandering alone through Parisian streets, he has indulged his artistic and affectionate temperament to the fullest, and as he sat in the "dandified café...and felt his pulse and took stock of his impressions... 'Splendid Paris, charming Paris'—that refrain, that fragment of an invocation, a beginning without an end, hummed itself perpetually in Hyacinth's ears" (380). This description of his experience demonstrates Hyacinth's success, in the Paterean sense, which is "to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy" (Pater 152). Although Hyacinth feels that he needs to "balance his accounts," that is, to balance his attention to style with attention to substance, he also sits down to take "stock of his impressions" so that he can draw his artistic experience out, so that he can "maintain this ecstasy" (James, *Princess* 379; Pater 152). When Pater warns that "we are all under sentence of death," he also allows that it is with "a sort of indefinite reprieve," and his counsel is that "our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (Pater 153). The wisest, from Pater's perspective, spend "this interval...in art and song" (153). As one would expect with Hyacinth, who is more immediately and literally under sentence of death, more aware of his fleeting reprieve, than the generic humans to which Pater refers, his impressions of Paris are clearly artistic, for they are

extremely sentimental, visual, and even musical, but they also become moral when Hyacinth connects them to his family.

According to Robert Pippin, Henry James was not a moral skeptic as some critics have interpreted him to be; instead, Pippin argues, James is interested in and deals with the increasing complexity of making moral assessments, a complexity that has to do with the increasing unavailability of what we used to be able to rely on in interpreting and assessing each other, on the new role of money and the social mobility it made possible, the psychological suspicions it engendered, on new, much more extensive and deeper forms of social dependencies, and on very new ways of understanding the fluid, relatively unfixed, quite variously interpretable dimensions of psychological life. (Pippin 11, 12)

James engages Hyacinth, whose perceptive temperament allows him to oscillate between the style and substance end of Lanham's continuum and who struggles with the resulting inconsistency of this temperament, in a world of moral complexities, and Hyacinth embodies what Pippin describes as "the fluid, relatively unfixed, quite variously interpretable dimensions of psychological life" (12). Furthermore, Pippin explains that James "seems to have more idealist views about the reality of these moral terms...seems to make them depend somehow (for their sense and authority) on the communities that institute such commitments," demonstrating James's belief that modern moral ambiguity necessarily leads to dependency on others (9, 10). This dependency "and some 'lived out' acknowledgment of such dependency...makes up the new moral experience" (11). Hyacinth's dependency on his surrogate family to help him define his identity helps him to experience Jamesian morality.

Pippin's account of James's morality provides a useful context for reading Hyacinth's disclosure to the Princess that "there was something demoralising in his particular situation" of

“accepting thirty pounds” from Mr. Vetch to travel to Paris and Venice (James, *Princess* 385). Although the narrator pretends to tell us what Hyacinth means by his “particular situation” by stating that “it disposed one to take what one could get, made one at least very tolerant of whims that happened to be munificent,” it is not clear whether Hyacinth refers only to his lack of money or if he is also talking about his promise to Hoffendahl, his rapture with the beauty of Paris, his taking money from someone who opposes the revolution, or his struggle to interpret his place in the world (385). Whatever Hyacinth feels his particular situation is may actually be unimportant, which is why it is left vague. Of more importance is the notion that when he accepts the money from Mr. Vetch, Hyacinth sustains and strengthens his connection to his surrogate family, which serves as his moral community. While using Mr. Vetch’s gift to explore Paris, Hyacinth

recognized, he greeted, with a thousand palpitations, the seat of his maternal ancestors—was proud to be associated with so much of the superb, so many proofs of a civilization that had no visible rough spots. He had his perplexities, and he even had now and then a revulsion for which he made no allowance, as when it came over him that the most brilliant city in the world was also the most blood-stained; but the great sense that he understood and sympathized was preponderant, and his comprehension gave him wings. (380)

Hyacinth’s observation that the city had “no visible rough spots” demonstrates his attention to style and surface beauty, while the sympathy he feels for its bloody history reveals his ability to look through the surface to the substance (380). This scene represents a balance of Lanham’s at and through vision and a balance of an artistic and a moral perspective. It is in this moment of balance that Hyacinth feels liberated from the conflict with which he has been struggling for much of the novel: “his comprehension gave him wings”(380). Hyacinth’s sensation or artistic and moral synthesis in this passage is reminiscent of Isabel Archer’s feeling that her immediate sense of happiness as she explores the beauty of Rome mingles with her sense of the “terrible past” and “give[s] it wings that it could wave in the blue” (James, *Portrait* 251). Hyacinth, like

Isabel in Rome, collapses Lanham's continuum and feels somehow liberated by the act of paying attention, at once, to substance and style.

Hyacinth's creation of his grandfather as a traveling companion is both an artistic and a moral act; the narrator paints the picture with such an abundance of visual imagery, we feel that Hyacinth Vivier really "roamed about with Florentine's boy, hand in hand, sat opposite to him at dinner...and treated him to innumerable revelations and counsels" (381). Hyacinth knows little more about his watchmaker grandfather than that he "had known the ecstasy of the barricade and had paid for it with life," but Hyacinth imagines him as a complete character (381). The imagined grandfather, like Hyacinth's observation of the beautiful but "blood-stained" city, demonstrates a sort of artistic morality (380). Not only is Hyacinthe Vivier an artistic creation as part of Hyacinth's active imagination, but he is also an artisan, making watches just as Hyacinth binds books. The grandfather is moral not only because of his role on the barricades, but also because of the way he "gazed at [Hyacinth] with eyes of deep, kind, glowing comprehension and with lips which seemed to murmur that when one was to die tomorrow one was wise to eat and drink today" (381). Hyacinthe Vivier's appearance represents Hyacinth Robinson's need to create a community for himself, which Pippin would classify as a moral act when he says that "the key issue in morality" might be "the proper acknowledgment of, the enactment of, a dependence on others" (Pippin 10). Hyacinth needs someone else, someone who is part of his community or surrogate family, to tell him to "maintain this ecstasy" that he feels in Paris, and when no one else is available, he creates someone, further proof of his artistic and affectionate temperament and of his need to reconcile his conflicting loyalties (Pater 152). Hyacinth Vivier's existence is therefore further evidence of Hyacinth's ability to look at the world philosophically through an ever-changeable series of lenses that allows for the coexistence of two seemingly

incompatible ideologies. Yet an even closer examination of this at once real and imaginary character points to Hyacinth's dependence on others to help him define his identity, his need for a community to institute a moral commitment. Some might argue that because the grandfather is only imaginary he cannot represent for Hyacinth the reconciliation of art and morality, but the real reconciliation takes place not in the imaginary person but in Hyacinth and his ability to craft another family member who embodies seemingly conflicting characteristics. Although Hyacinth sets out to travel alone, he creates yet another parental figure to guide him, advise him, and most importantly approve of him. And then, like a ghost, Hyacinthe Vivier disappears as smoothly as he came.

The same balance between superficial and penetrating vision, between style and substance, is struck when Hyacinth stands alone at the Place de la Concorde. Although he recognizes "its tremendously historic character," what is even more present to him is "the spirit of life that had been in it, not the spirit of death (James, *Princess* 393). That shadow was effaced by the modern fairness of fountain and statue, the stately perspective and composition," showing that his attention to the style of the square in which he stands erases, or at least hides, the substance beneath the surface; Hyacinth's admiration of the "stately perspective and composition" makes it hard for him to care about the "turpitude and horror" that once occurred there (393). Despite the seeming erasure of substance, the apparent lack of attention to justice or morality, it is actually Hyacinth's attention to surface and style that leads him into moral contemplation and assessment. The beauty of the square's composition causes him to linger and "a sudden sense overtook him, making his heart sink with a kind of desolation—a sense of everything that might hold one to the world, of the sweetness of not dying...The tears rose to his eyes" and he asks himself in reference to his beloved Paul, "'How could he—how could he'...for

Hyacinth had dreamed of the religion of friendship” (393). Thus, Hyacinth’s artistic sensitivity leads to a moral inquiry in which he reveals the one dogma that he does not resist—friendship—and in which he exposes the moral limitations of Paul’s ideology; it apparently enables him to sacrifice a friend without a shudder or compunction. Pippin’s ideas about the new morality of dependence support the argument that Hyacinth reconciles the conflicting messages of aesthetic order and social justice when he travels to Paris and Venice.

Although Hyacinth finds a balance between his artistic response and his sense of justice in Paris, he is not completely aware of his success, and, in fact, fears that his attention to style has left him demoralized. When he visits Venice, his letter to the Princess reveals his shifting loyalties and the attention he pays, on his travels, to surface beauty, again imagining himself as part of a “composition” in which he reclines “on a faded magenta divan in the corner” (395). Although he writes that the Venetian women’s faces “all look underfed,” Hyacinth pays less attention to their hunger than to how those faces are “framed” by their shawls and to their “cheap cotton gowns, whose limp folds make the same delightful line that everything else in Italy makes” (394). Hyacinth directs his attention to the surface rather than to the substance of the hungry women, turning their outlines into part of the landscape of the beautiful city.

Further on in the letter, Hyacinth worries that when he returns to London he will find his work to be a “terrible grind,” which will mean that he is “deeply demoralized” (395). By the end of the letter, he declares that he will not participate in the destruction of “the great achievements...the splendid accumulations of the happier few,” of which people have been capable in spite of the toil and suffering, for he says he has “a devout hope that if [he] is to pass away while [he] is yet young it may not be with that odious stain upon [his] soul” (397). He turns his adoration of the beautiful and his desire to protect “the ceilings of the Veronese” which he

imagines Hoffendahl would cut “into strips, so that every one might have a little piece,” into morality when he imagines that his participation in the destruction of such beauty would cause a “stain” on his soul (396-397). Morality, for Hyacinth, whose flexible identity allows for more contradiction and incoherence than someone like Paul, includes the protection of human achievement and beauty.

Hyacinth recognizes and wonders about the incoherent aspects of his identity when he compares himself to Paul. Hyacinth “already knew that his friend’s view of him was that he was ornamental and adapted to the lighter kinds of socialistic utility,” and, when he has to “remodel a good deal of his original conception” of Paul, he finds himself “awe-stricken...by the spectacle of his sublime consistency” (390). Although Hyacinth dislikes the idea of being classified by his friends, he also fears that they would love him more if he had a more consistent or coherent identity, and he is convinced that Paul’s consistent allegiance to revolutionary action over social bonds is admirable. Hyacinth knows that “he himself could never have risen to that point,” and he feels that “most enviable of all was the force that enabled [Paul] to sink personal sentiment where a great public good was to be attempted and yet keep up the form of caring for that minor interest” (390-391). Although he feels that it makes him less worthy, Hyacinth’s knowledge that he “could not have detached himself from the personal prejudice so effectually as to put forward in that way, for the terrible ‘job’, a little chap he liked” renders him, in the Jamesian sense, more morally upstanding than Paul (390).

On his return to London, Hyacinth “gave a little private groan of relief when he discovered that he still liked his work”; in fact, he found that “his taste had improved” as he proved to be a “genuine artist” working the “impressions he had accumulated” in Paris and Venice into his craft, and he began to dream that someday he might “write something” (403).

Hyacinth may relish the artistry of bookbinding and not his association with other workers, but his ability to come home and continue his craft with some enjoyment prove that he is able to be both creative and productive. Despite these signs that his travels have not ruined or demoralized him, as he feared they would, Hyacinth becomes increasingly anxious about whether or not his friends will recognize the morality in his seemingly incoherent identity.

Twice before he kills himself Hyacinth demonstrates his distaste for solitude, a symptom of his increasingly desperate reliance on his constructed family to help him resolve his identity conflict. The first series of visits takes him from Millicent, who rejects his plan to be with her for the evening, to Lady Aurora's house, where Lady Aurora is kind but is preparing to reenter the world of society, and then to Poupin's house. Hyacinth's search for company ends here, and his quest for a clear-cut and tightly defined identity that would please his friends is answered with the letter from Hoffendahl. Hyacinth finally receives an external call to action that gives him a clear and definite purpose, yet the moral obligation he discovered on his trips to Paris and Venice to protect the beauty that might be destroyed by revolutionary action prevents him from feeling any relief at the end of his quest.

When Hyacinth makes his final visit to the Princess, he has already decided that he will not keep his promise to Hoffendahl, but he almost changes his mind. He is tormented by her passionate bravery and her ignorant sense of assurance that he will never be called to act, and "he had a sense of his mind, which had been made up, falling to pieces again; but that sense in turn lost itself in a shudder which was already familiar—the horror of the public reappearance, on his part, of the imbrued hands of his mother" (582). Even in these last moments, Hyacinth bases his decision-making on his awareness of audience. His sensitivity to and desire to control the Princess's ideas about him almost cause him to commit the assassination and incur the "stain

upon his soul” that he has so hoped to avoid, while his repugnance to the idea of the reintroduction of his mother’s shame prevents him from doing it (397).

Hyacinth’s death, then, does not simply represent the artistic sensibility’s inability to assimilate into the world of politics or morals. Such a view of Hyacinth is inadequate partly because it ignores his highly artistic and moral experiences in Paris and Venice and partly because it fails to take into account the role his dependence on others for self-definition plays in his dilemma and ultimately his death. His self-conscious awareness of audience destroys his trust in perceptive temperament, and in the end Hyacinth reveals a truth that may be universal: philosophic open-mindedness is more easily applied to external dogma than to truly internal and intimate ideas, intimate because they are no longer abstract but linked to the human being associated with them, about one’s own identity.

Yet Hyacinth can still be viewed as a successful hero, a “genuine artist” who was not only highly concerned with doing justice to the family he constructed for himself, but who also reconciled the almost life long tension he felt between art and morality and who learned in Paris and Venice to make the most of his brief time. According to Pater, “with this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch,” and he argues that any theory “which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience...has no real claim upon us” (Pater 152-153).

Hyacinth is not always comfortable with the liberating incoherence that his temperament allows, yet Pater would applaud Hyacinth’s artistic temperament and his rejection of the revolutionary dogma that threatens his enjoyment of the physical, sensual world. Despite James’s observation in a notebook entry on *The Portrait of a Lady* that “the whole of anything is never

told,” he does not leave Hyacinth “en l’air” as he had left Isabel Archer in the earlier novel (James, *Portrait* 628). The sense of closure conferred by Hyacinth’s story by his suicide is another quality of *The Princess Casamassima* that distinguishes it from much of his other fiction. Hyacinth’s suicide provides a stronger sense of unity than one may be used to with James, and the lack of authorial commentary on Hyacinth’s death compels readers to search out patterns and find the definitive elements of meaning that only come into full focus when a life is completed. As we have seen in the foregoing commentary, Hyacinth has met the challenge of bewilderment through an integration of invention and style that, while unsustainable, has truly qualified him as “one upon whom nothing is lost”: thus, although Hyacinth dies young and alone, he does not “sleep before evening” (James, “The Art of Fiction”; Pater 152).

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