Henry James, Painters, and Painting

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and, except where otherwise stated, describes my own research.

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Abstract

In his major essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884) Henry James suggested that the analogy between painting and fiction was, so far as he could see, 'complete'. Taking him at his word, critics have tended to focus on what the novelist learned from painting, or have fixed on instances in which he 'chose to elevate the art of the painter,' as one commentator has recently put it. Contrary to this critical trend, my thesis argues that throughout his corpus James stages a contest between painting and fiction, consistently emphasising the ways in which the latter ought to be considered the superior art. This formed part of a broader programme in which the novelist sought to demonstrate the value and intellectual seriousness of fiction – still in jeopardy in the nineteenth century – by contrasting it with painting. This thesis therefore seeks to revise the ways in which criticism has approached James's relation to the painter's art. It shifts both the terms and the focus of the debate: away from broad correspondences between James's work and artistic movements such as Impressionism and towards a finer understanding of the novelist's unique response to painting; away from the supposedly controlling presence of critics such as John Ruskin or Walter Pater and towards the uses to which James put his conception of the painter's art. In this way, the thesis amends longstanding ideas about the novelist's response to and communication with painters and painting. At the same time, it reveals through the eyes of a major writer some of the ways in which painting and fiction corresponded in the period. More broadly, it offers a methodological example of how to textually, historically, and biographically frame an individual author's relation to and engagement with another art form. In foregrounding the contexts which animated James's work – from his negotiation of the transatlantic literary marketplace to his abiding interest in France and the French language, from issues of gender and portraiture to his response to Romantic painting, Pre-Raphaelite art, the Barbizon School, and Impressionism proper – the intention is to elucidate the inner workings of the novelist's oeuvre. Each chapter is therefore built around a close focus on James's most consistent passion, his most profound practice: the art of fiction.

Acknowledgements

I used to find it difficult to understand, when I read the acknowledgements in theses and academic works, how something that seemed so small could owe so large a debt to so many people. In other words, I understood nothing at all about what I was undertaking when I began this thesis. I get it now.

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Contents

Introduction

In 1868, at the age of 25, Henry James published his first work of art criticism. Years before, in Newport, Rhode Island, he had tried his hand at painting, testing the weight of the brush under the supervision of the American painter William Morris Hunt (1824–79) and alongside his brother, the future philosopher and psychologist William James. While William for a time seriously pursued painting, Henry only ever daubed, and he was quickly discouraged by his lack of talent.[1] But it was in the artistic ambiance of Hunt's Newport studio that James first fell in love with the works of Balzac, Flaubert, and Sainte-Beuve, writers whose example would change the course of his life.[2] Following an unsuccessful stint studying law at Harvard in 1862, the young Henry James decided his vocation: he would dedicate himself to literature; he would follow the path of Balzac, whose novels he had first discovered alongside his experiments in paint, and who he would go on to call a 'painter of the first order'.[3] From the mid-1860s on, James's commitment to literature was unwavering. Indeed, his first act as an art critic was to claim the authority of the writer over that of the visual artist. In his maiden work of art criticism, he argued that 'painters need to be interpreted and expounded, and that as a general thing they are themselves incompetent to the task'; they would have to rely, James confidently contended,

[1] Ross Posnock has suggested that William's youthful interest in painting might have been the catalyst for Henry's pursuit of fiction, a reading that is chiefly based on James's own account of William's skill with the brush given in chapter 19 of his autobiographical work *A Small Boy and Others*: Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 168.

[2] Although James had been tutored in France in the 1850s and was by this time familiar with *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840–2), he nonetheless reports in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), the autobiographical continuation of *A Small Boy and Others*, that it was in Hunt's Newport studio that the American painter John La Farge offered the young Henry James his real introduction to French literature: 'Most of all he revealed to us Balzac; […] to re-read even after long years the introductory pages of *Eugénie Grandet* […] is to see my initiator's youthful face': Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, in *Autobiographies*, ed. Philip Horne (New York: Library of America, 2016), 310; for the novelist's brush with Balzac in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* during the 1850s see ibid., 204. On James and La Farge see Declan Kiely, Marc Simpson, and Colm Tóibín, eds., *Henry James and American Painting* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 7-8 and passim.

[3] Henry James, *Literary Criticism 2: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 133.

on writers like himself.[4] For the rest of his career, he compared the arts of painting and literature, contrasting the relative means available to 'the novelist and his brother of the brush' (as he put it in 1884 in "The Art of Fiction").[5] But he always insisted that painters needed writers; writers, on the other hand, could stand alone.

This thesis argues for a new understanding of James's relation to the painter's art. Critics have tended to focus on what the novelist learned from painting, or have fixed on instances in which James 'chose to elevate the art of the painter,' as Ruth Bernard Yeazell has recently put it.[6] Contrary to this critical trend, I suggest that throughout his corpus James instrumentalises the art of painting to advance the cause of fiction. In other words, he consistently stages a contest between painting and fiction to emphasise precisely the ways in which fiction ought to be considered the superior form. I make two central claims. First, that in his criticism James deploys the metaphor and rhetoric of painting to reveal the comparative advantages of his literary art; at the same time, he uses painting as a tool to develop his own literary theories. Second, that the positions articulated in James's criticism are consistent with his narrative fiction—that is, there is a degree of continuity between his polemical and theoretical writings and his fictional practice (but the key word is "continuity": I do not suggest an equivalence between the two forms).

I use these two claims to make a broader argument concerning James and a notional hierarchy of the arts. James has long been considered a central figure in the transformation of the novel which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[7] He more than

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[4] Henry James, *The Complete Writings of Henry James on Art and Drama* (*CWA*), ed. Peter Collister, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1: 4. All further references are to this edition and given in parentheses within the text.

[5] Henry James, *Literary Criticism 1: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: Library of America, 1983), 50.

[6] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Henry James's Portrait-Envy," *New Literary History* 48, no. 2 (2017): 309–35. Critics who have focused on what James learned from painting include Peter Brooks, *Henry James Goes to Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) and Viola Hopkins Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970).

[7] Such an account has been advanced since at least Joseph Beach's *The Method of Henry James* (1918) and Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) through to James E. Miller, Jr.'s *Theory of Fiction: Henry James* (1972) and, more

anyone presided over its metamorphosis from a relatively disposable, easily-consumed object of distraction to an intellectually serious, formally innovative art form, the cultural dominance of which remained unthreatened for decades; he more than anyone gave strength and force to a long-derided literary form. Thus, in any case, runs the classic account of James's relation to the modern novel, an account that is troublingly imbricated with the theory, practice, and history of literary modernism. Indeed, James's purported role as modernist creator-destroyer – the Great Man who abolished the loose baggy Victorian monster and brought formal order to the modern novel, all while forging the principles of modern literary criticism and inaugurating in his fiction key modernist themes such as exile and alienation – was constructed by the modernists themselves. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, for instance, enlisted James's example and authority to sanction their own literary projects.[8] Later, critics such as Percy Lubbock and R. P. Blackmur erected James as the lawgiver who held the keys to the right practice of modern fiction; and then, influential scholars like Hugh Kenner, working with categories and historiographical notions inherited from modernist writers, produced a literary history in which a Jamesian rupture cleared the way for the Pound era.[9] Still today, James is regularly treated as

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recently, Dorothy Hale's *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) or even James Wood's *How Fiction Works* (2008).

[8] Pound and Eliot installed Henry James as their forerunner and forebear, affiliating themselves with the formally innovative self-styled exile who, the first since Flaubert, had practiced his art with religious devotion and scrupulous attention to its formal qualities, disdaining in the process what Pound called 'the domination of modern life' and the tyranny of mass culture while creating, as Virginia Woolf put it, 'the bridge upon which we cross from the classic novel […] to the modern novel, the novel of the twentieth century': Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 296; quoted in Daniel Mark Fogel, *Covert Relations: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James* (Charlottesville, NC: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 114. This is the 'mythic literary history' bequeathed by modernist writers who set the terms for the way in which their own work would be understood: Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 6, 1. Pound's essays on the novelist first appeared in the *Little Review* in August, 1918.

[9] Kenner argues, for instance, that 'James made not stories but "things," and did not write them but "did" them,' thereby deploying a modernist commonplace about the object-status of literary works: Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 27. Eliot and his academic followers were instrumental in forming the next generation of critics. The poet himself called James 'the most intelligent man of his generation': T. S. Eliot, "In Memory of Henry James," *Little Review* 5, no. 1 (1918): 46. Eliot's essay was reprinted in F. W. Dupee, ed., *Henry James* (London: Methuen, 1951). Dupee was a professor at Columbia and critic for *Partisan Review*, a periodical which through its contributors such as Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, and Edmund Wilson helped to construct in the postwar period James's truly major status in American letters. Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* had a lively reception: it was expanded upon in Virginia Woolf's 1922 essay "On Re-reading Novels" but contested in her diary – see October 15, 1923 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf II*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (New

both forerunner to and figurehead of modernism proper.[10] Although this account has been persuasively challenged by critics such as Michael Anesko, it remains indisputable that James campaigned relentlessly for the dignity and value of fiction, experimented continuously with its form, and provided the critical terms in which the novel was analysed for much of the twentieth century.[11] The art of painting, I contend, was central to his task. Across his oeuvre, James frames a contest between painting and fiction, comparing and contrasting the two arts in order to establish fiction as the supreme form in the hierarchy of the arts.

A hierarchy of the arts has been discussed in one form or another since antiquity.[12] Artists have lobbied for the superiority of their chosen medium, or have used a notional hierarchy to seek parity with other, more esteemed arts. Renaissance theorists, for example, sought for painting the prestige attributed to poetry – long considered the supreme form – by deploying Horace's dictum *ut pictura poesis*, as is painting so is poetry.[13] With the inception of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century, the hierarchy was newly systematised. Theorists

York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) – and it was challenged by, among others, E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

[10] See for example Maud Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[11] See Michael Anesko, *"Friction with the Market": Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). More broadly, scholarship on Victorian realism has demonstrated at length the ways in which, in the words of David Kurnick, the realist novel achieved 'undisputed cultural respectability and intellectual seriousness' prior to James's intervention: David Kurnick, "Empty Houses: Thackeray's Theater of Interiority," *Victorian Studies*, 48, no. 2 (2006): 257. Studies of Aestheticism such as Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) tend to offer comparable revisionist accounts, locating within Aestheticist theory and practice many of the key innovations typically attributed to modernism. As for James's lasting utility to criticism, Fredric Jameson has gone so far as to claim that James's critical and theoretical reflections on the novel 'have been as fundamental for narrative analysis in modern times as Aristotle's for the classical world': Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 181.

[12] In, for example, Socrates's discourse on poetry, painting, and mimesis in *Republic* 10 (595a–608b), or Aristotle's well-known comparison between poetry and history in the *Poetics* (9.1451b5–7). For a recent survey of the debate from antiquity to the Italian Renaissance see Joseph Jurt, *Les Arts Rivaux: Littérature et arts visuels d'Homère à Huysmans* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 11–69.

[13] See Clark Hulse, *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), especially chapters 2 and 3. However, as Adam McKeown points out, 'there is reason to believe the transformation of the painter during the Renaissance has its roots in the Middle Ages,' citing, for example, Gregory the Great's famous letters to Serenus in which painting is described as writing for the illiterate: Adam McKeown, "Humanist Discourse and the Idea of the Learned Painter," *Exemplaria*, 18, no. 2 (2006): 367. In seeking to turn painting into a liberal art, Renaissance theorists hardened Horace's dictum of *ut pictura poesis* into a doctrine—this despite the fact that Horace, like Aristotle before him, seems to have used the comparison for descriptive clarity rather than theoretical import. See the classic study on the subject: Rensselaer W. Lee, "*Ut Pictura Poesis*; The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 22, no. 4 (1940): 197–269.

frequently compared the relative merits and capacities of the arts: Lessing's classic *Laocoön* (1766), for example, has the telling subtitle *An Essay on the Limits* [or "boundaries": *Grenzen*] *of Painting and Poetry*; other thinkers, meanwhile, set out to rank the arts accordingly. In Hegel's lectures on aesthetics (1818–29), for instance, poetry is crowned the 'most unrestricted,' the 'most perfect art'.[14] Writers, artists, and critics continued these debates well into the nineteenth century. Painters such as J. A. M. Whistler (1834–1903), for example, contested *ut pictura poesis* and the relation it implied: as we shall see, he believed that the analogy was one of the tools through which writers asserted their dominance over painters, constraining them to works which exhibited, among other things, recognisable narrative content.

By Whistler's time, the novel was on its way to completing its 'quest for cultural hegemony,' as one critic has put it.[15] Some painters clearly perceived this cultural power as a threat. Degas (1834–1917), for instance, thought that Zola's *L'Œuvre* (1886) was a transparent attempt to assert 'an artistic hierarchy in which painting occupied a secondary position.'[16] But novelists also proposed a hierarchy among exclusively literary forms, self-consciously pitting their own art against poetry and the theatre.[17] As Pierre Bourdieu has shown, the hierarchy among literary forms in the nineteenth century depended in part on potential economic gain. Indeed, the prestige of a form was frequently figured as inversely related to its potential economic rewards. In other words, the more money one could earn from a medium, the less

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[14] G. F. W. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, I, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 626; *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik, Nach Hegel, Im Sommer 182, Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plotnikov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004), 197. Hegel discusses poetry in the broad sense, arguing, for example, that in the modern period epic poetry gives way to the novel form: ibid., 217. The reasons for the hierarchy are peculiar to Hegel's system: poetry is 'unrestricted' because it is 'at home' in symbolic, classical, and romantic art; it is 'perfect' because it can show spiritual freedom in both space and time as well as through a form of concentrated inwardness. Hegel also draws distinctions among each art form, suggesting, for instance, that dramatic poetry is superior to epic and lyric poetry: ibid., 207.

[15] Kurnick, "Houses," 257.

[16] Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge, eds., *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 9.

[17] See, for example, Emily Allen, *Theatre Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), and J. Jeffrey Franklin, *Serious Play: The Cultural Form of the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

likely one was to be considered a "serious" artist by one's peers, if not by one's audience.[18] Poetry was both the most prestigious form and the least well remunerated; theatre was the least prestigious because of its mass audience and thus enormous potential economic profit; the novel, meanwhile, served as an intermediate and intermediary form.

The novel had a formal advantage, however. It could represent the other arts, as well as the experience of creating, appreciating, or merely noticing these different forms. As Alison Byerly has argued, Victorian novelists such as William Makepeace Thackeray and George Eliot created in their works 'a complex system of aesthetic cross-referencing': they constructed scenes or scenarios in their novels that dramatised other art forms, such as the novelistic depiction of a play, for example, or a music recital; in the process, they erected a hierarchy of the arts in which the novel reigned supreme.[19] These writers evaded having to measure their realism 'in relation to an actual reality with which it cannot hope to compete'; instead, they ensured that the realism of the novel competed with the 'representational abilities' of other art forms, which were depicted as relatively limited when compared with fiction.[20] In this way, these Victorian realists used painting and drama as foils to the art of fiction, engineering a framework in which the novel emerged triumphant within the hierarchy of the arts.

James makes a similar claim for the representational ability of fiction, as we shall see, though his procedure differs from his predecessors in a key way. He came to privilege a form of psychological realism which provides the bridge between Victorian realist fiction – the kind of work which in Virginia Woolf's caricature conveyed the life of an individual by focusing on their material surroundings: 'Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of shop assistants in 1878. Discover what her mother died of. Describe cancer. Describe calico. Describe…' – and new forms of representing subjectivity

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[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015), especially 196–204.
[19] Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.
[20] Ibid., 6.

expressed in modernist texts such as Woolf's own *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).[21] As I will show, James vaunted fiction's capacity to represent (rather than merely suggest) change in time; this special power meant that, for him, fiction was 'the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious' of art forms, as he put it in his preface to *The Ambassadors* (1903), in part because it could portray the mercurial substance of selfhood as it altered in time.[22] In other words, the novel's ability to represent interiority as it developed and changed was central to his claim for the value of fiction. Strikingly, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, he made his case for the pre-eminence of fiction precisely by engaging with the art of painting.

But James, it might be objected, was a novelist not an aesthetic theorist, an artist not a philosopher; he had a horror of oversimplification, and he was committed to expressing the complexity of relations – which, as he famously put it in the preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1875), 'stop nowhere' – not reducing them for the sake of a Procrustean system.[23] Why, then, would he invest his energy in so reductive a task as hierarchizing the arts? One (glib) response to this question is that, as I have indicated above, everyone else was doing it. A better response is by means of comparison. We are used to thinking of Marcel Proust, too, as a great discriminator, a writer whose sensibility was preternaturally fine and who was incapable of the slightest simplification. This does not stop Proust's narrator from reflecting throughout *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27) on the powers and effects proper to each art, from drama to architecture, from painting to music, right up to the final revelation in *Le Temps retrouvé* that it is the novel and the novel alone that can recreate time.[24] It may be, then, that to consider the relative merits

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[21] The parody appears in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924): Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.
[22] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1321.
[23] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1041.
[24] Jean-Yves Tadié, *Proust et le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 294. In fact, the hierarchy of the arts is alluded to directly in the first volume of Proust's novel—I'll return to this moment in the conclusion. Proust, though, is in general more overtly philosophical than James – more committed to systematising – and is ultimately more invested in locating and expressing aphoristic *vérités*. Indeed, his serpentine sentences frequently finish with a flash of illumination, an epigrammatic explosion of the intellectual energy potentiated by the content and duration of the sentence itself, and that often glosses a metaphor. For example: 'Even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone and which need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is created by the

of the arts is merely one form that criticism can take; it may be, too, that the novel is capable of containing such criticism without suffering the meanest reduction in its density, its subtlety, or its sophistication. In short, James's aesthetic reflections do not, I contend, reductively fix artistic relations in pursuit of an abstract theory. Nor do they dismiss painting outright. Rather, the example of painting aids James in his defence of his most consistent passion, his most profound practice: the art of fiction.

Framing the field

James's contemporaries were at ease with the analogy between painting and fiction. Titles such as his own *The Europeans: A Sketch* (1878) were common, from Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* (1836) to Verlaine's "*Croquis Parisien*" (1866), for example, or Huysmans's own Parisian sketches (1880). So too were works that prominently featured painters or paintings – Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), for instance, or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) – to say nothing of the close relation between image and text evinced in the popular practice of book illustration.[25] There was also a considerable degree of exchange at the level of terminology. Realism, for example, first emerged as a 'critical and polemical term' to characterise the painting of Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) and was then by extension taken to describe a literary style.[26] Critics also used the analogy to elucidate challenging works of art. For

thoughts of other people': Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 2002), 19.

[25] On the proliferation in the nineteenth century of so-called "magic-picture" narratives such as Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures" and Wilde's *Dorian Gray* see Kerry Powell, "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction," *Philological Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1983): 147–70. For a comprehensive history of illustration and the novel see Gordon N. Ray, *The Illustrator and the Book in England from 1790 to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[26] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 16. Brooks's claim might be tempered, however, when looking at the broader history of the term realism in France: on the subject see the classic work Bernard Weinberg, *French Realism: The Critical Reaction, 1830–1870* (Chicago: Modern Language Association of America, 1937). For more on Courbet and realism see especially the classic and classically opposed studies T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic 1848–1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) and Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

example, an anonymous reviewer for *Harper's* praised James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) by arguing that it fulfilled the 'technical conditions that are essential for the production of a perfect portrait in oil'; in this way, the novel demonstrated 'how successfully the pen may compete with the pencil in the sphere of pictorial art'.[27] At the same time, there was a broader acceptance of the analogy at the level of style. For instance, commentators regularly spoke of the Victorian critic John Ruskin as a gifted word-painter, while the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins considered 'word-painting' to be 'the great success' of the nineteenth century.[28]

This trend continued in the early twentieth century. Artists, writers, and critics routinely deployed the analogy; at the same time, they campaigned for ever closer relations between the two art forms.[29] The British painter and art critic Roger Fry (1866–1934), for example, attempted to set up a broadsheet in which painters and writers could develop and share their theories side by side. Gertrude Stein, meanwhile, drew important equivalences between the two arts in her literary portraits and in works such as "Composition as Explanation" (1926). Not long after, Virginia Woolf suggested in a 1934 essay on the painter Walter Sickert (1860–1942) that 'painting and writing have much to tell each other: they have much in common'.[30] Like Joseph Conrad before her – who famously conceived of his task as a novelist as being 'by the power of the written word' to make the reader '*see*' – Woolf supported her claim by arguing that 'the novelist, after all, wants to make us see.'[31]

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[27] Anonymous, "The Portrait of a Lady," *Harper's* 64 (February, 1882): 474.

[28] On Ruskin the word-painter see George P. Landow, *Ruskin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 1; and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *In the Mind's Eye: The Visual Impulse in Diderot, Baudelaire, and Ruskin* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), 244–5. On Hopkins and 'word-painting' see *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 267.

[29] Though there were many who challenged the relation: see Collier and Lethbridge, *Artistic Relations*, 9–13. I return in the conclusion to one of the most powerful theoretical articulations of a supposed split between painting and literature which separated the two arts into notionally distinct spheres, Clement Greenberg's account of the emergence of modernism offered in his seminal essays "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940) and "Modernist Painting" (1961).

[30] Virginia Woolf, "Walter Sickert: A Conversation," in *Collected Essays*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), 2: 241.

[31] Joseph Conrad, "The Nigger of the Narcissus," in *Collected Works*, 26 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company 1925), 23: xiv, xii; Woolf, *Collected Essays*, 2: 241.

The analogy between the two arts took on a new life with the flourishing of academic literary studies. General works comparing painting and fiction became common features of the critical landscape, ranging from Jean Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts* (1958) to Jeffrey Meyer's *Painting and the Novel* (1975), from Wendy Steiner's *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting* (1982) to W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994), to name but a few. These texts variously attempt to provide an historical account of the relations between painting and writing or work to theorise this relation, often using one as the foundation for the other—that is, they use the theory to read the history or *vice versa*. Other scholars have opted for a different approach, seeking to marry a specific movement or style in painting with works of literature, such as Ruth Bernard Yeazell's *Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel* (2008).[32] Meanwhile, monographs on single authors and their relation to painting have appeared periodically.[33] Although some of these studies treat the visual arts broadly conceived, scholars nonetheless tend to focus on painting even within these works, especially when discussing nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers, many of whom worked as professional art critics. For example, much of Emily Orlando's *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* (2007) is built around Wharton's response to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Henry James's life and work provide particularly fertile ground for scholarship on artistic relations. The novelist possessed a rich visual culture, demonstrating familiarity with

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[32] Other recent examples include several chapters of Adam Parkes's *A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern British and Irish Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and collections such as Gérard Gengembre, Florence Naugrette, and Yvan Leclerc, eds., *Impressionnisme et littérature* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2012).

[33] See, for example, Conor Carville's *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Emily J. Orlando's *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007), William Berg's *The Visual Novel: Émile Zola and the Art of his Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press1992), and Eric Karpeles's 2008 *Painting in Proust* (to mention but one work on the author of *À la recherche du temps perdu*). The relation between the two arts has also proved popular in Francophone scholarship, much of which has been useful to my research: see especially Dario Gamboni, *La Plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1989); Laurence Brogniez, *Préraphaelisme et Symbolisme, peinture littéraire et image poétique* (Paris: Champion, 2003); and Anka Muhlstein, *La Plume et le pinceau: l'empreinte de la peinture sur le roman au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2016).

painting from the early-Italian Renaissance through to his own time.[34] He was also acquainted with a range of painters active in the period, from Whistler to Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98), from John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) to lesser-known artists such as Frank Duveneck (1848–1919) and Elizabeth Boott (1846–88). Moreover, his writing consistently manifests a relation to painting, from frequent passages of ekphrasis to the recurring use of painter figures in his fiction, from teasing correspondences in his critical lexicon such as "foreshortening" and "composition" to the myriad artistic references which appear throughout his oeuvre. For these reasons, studies which treat James and the visual arts have appeared with some regularity since the middle decades of the twentieth century.

F. O. Matthiessen inaugurated the focus in a 1943 essay for *The Kenyon Review* in which he argued that James's 'critical use of such words as "composition," "relations," and "values," is not a loose analogy.'[35] Rather, the novelist's manner of 'seeing life in pictures' was instrumental to the development of his 'organic form'.[36] In other words, for Matthiessen, it was James's pictorial vision of the world that brought him to his characteristic practice of restricted point of view. Matthiessen also explicated the devices that the novelist took from Nathaniel Hawthorne such as 'the use of a portrait to bring out character,' as well as offering an interpretation of James's broader artistic growth: for example, his 'assiduous attendance at the Salons' taught him 'not the art of painting but the necessity to master all the secrets of composition in his own art'.[37] In another article published a year later ("The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," 1944) Matthiessen took up James's own habit of putting the art of painting to work in service of literary criticism, using the metaphor of painting to describe the novelist's approach to revision in his collected works, the New York Edition (1907–9). In 1946, Adeline

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[34] Familiar but no necessarily expert: for example, James seems not to have 'recognised the distinction' between Impressionist and post-Impressionist painting': Susan M. Griffin, *The Historical Eye: The Texture of the Visual in Late James* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 142.
[35] F. O. Matthiessen, "James and the Plastic Arts," *The Kenyon Review* 5, no. 4 (1943), 535.
[36] Ibid., 533.
[37] Ibid., 535, 537.

Tintner further pursued relations between James and the visual arts in "The Spoils of Henry James," an essay which plays on the title of the novelist's 1897 work centred around a remarkable art collection, *The Spoils of Poynton*. Tintner went on to further trace James's relation to the visual arts with wit and erudition for the rest of her career. By 1956, interest in the subject was sufficiently great that an edition of the novelist's collected art criticism was published, taking its title from a compliment supposedly proffered by the American artist John La Farge (1835–1910) to the young Henry James (who had, La Farge thought, 'the painter's eye').[38]

Since then, numerous studies have appeared, most of which can be distributed into two categories.[39] The first relies on what the critic Marianna Torgovnick calls the 'documentary' approach.[40] These studies trace James's reception of specific painters or paintings, and frequently consider the ways in which allusions to these works operate within his fiction. Viola Hopkins Winner's invaluable *Henry James and the Visual Arts* (1970) is exemplary of this approach. Winner begins by describing the development of James's interest in the visual arts through his response to Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the art of the (chiefly Venetian) Renaissance; she then treats the novelist's fiction by explicating his allusions to specific works of art and by focusing on his use of the artist figure.

Although documentary studies such as Winner's are typically sensible and learned, the approach remains limited because of its narrow focus: in analysing the role of individual works of art and artist figures, these critics tend to ignore the uses or adaptations that James made of

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[38] La Farge added that 'few writers possessed' the 'painter's eye': Royal Cortissoz, *John La Farge: A Memoir and a Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 117. For the first edition of James's collected art criticism see Henry James, *The Painter's Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 43. Also in 1956, Edwin T. Bowden published *The Theme of Henry James: A System of Observation through the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), which extended Matthiessen's thesis concerning the novelist's 'pictorial vision'.

[39] There has been a parallel strand of scholarship which considers James as a literary Impressionist. I return to the issue in chapter 4, focusing exclusively in this introduction on scholarship which examine the novelist's relation to painting. On James and literary Impressionism see especially Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Daniel Hannah, *Henry James, Impressionism and the Public* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); John Scholar, *The Impression in the Essays and Late Novels of Henry James* (PhD diss., Oxford, 2014); and John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 189–217.

[40] Marianna Torgovnick, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 10.

broader theoretical articulations offered by art critics and theorists. Winner, for example, focuses on the ways in which Ruskin's ideas shaped James's taste, rather than the ways in which the novelist in his fiction engaged with, adapted, or rejected Ruskin's theories. In other words, these critics tend to elucidate James's likes and dislikes, but not the uses he made in his work of painters, paintings, art styles, or art criticism.

When these studies do turn to James's use of art and artists in his fiction, such scholarship frequently suffers from an overreliance on analogy. In *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes* (1993), for example, Tintner argues at length that Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) served as a pictorial source for James's own *The Ambassadors*.[41] This claim is based on plausible historical connections: the painting was acquired by the National Gallery in London in 1890 and was in 1900 the subject of a celebrated study by the art historian Mary F. S. Hervey (1853–1920); it might reasonably be inferred, then, that the painting was present in James's mind as he wrote his novel. But Tintner's argument finally rests on an extended analogy between the content and formal structure of Holbein's painting and that of James's fiction. Ultimately, her demonstration of the consonances between the two works stretches the limits of credibility. This is in part because of the level of abstraction required to sustain the link between text and image—for example, that Holbein's painting and James's novel are both signally concerned with mortality. In the end, such abstractions might illuminate each individual artwork, but they do not persuasively sustain a meaningful link between the two forms. Moreover, this analogical understanding of the techniques deployed by each medium is itself a legacy of modernism's literary history, a history in which James himself is strongly implicated. In the words of Jacques Rancière, a new concept of 'translatability' across the arts was inaugurated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: previously, 'the correspondence between the arts' was conceived under the aegis of *ut pictura poesis* 'as an equivalence between ways of telling a story'; later, this

[41] Adeline Tintner, *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes: Thirteen Artists in his Work* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), chapter 7.

notion of correspondence was figured as 'an analogy between forms of language'.[42] This understanding of inter-art relations has been routinely employed by modern critics and scholars, who "translate" the 'language' of one form (the representational techniques of Holbein's group portrait) into that of the other (James's 1903 novel). James himself did the same thing, as we shall see, most notably in his quarrel with portraiture which I describe in chapter 2. Scholars should be wary, however, of replicating precisely those techniques they would seek to explicate.

The second broad approach in scholarship on James and painting has figured the novelist in relation to major movements in visual art, most frequently Impressionism.[43] Contrary to many works which take the documentary approach, these studies tend to focus on the form (as opposed to the content) of the texts under discussion. In *Meaning in Henry James* (1991), for example, Millicent Bell suggests that James's restricted point of view can be compared to Impressionist canvases in which the 'undeclared subject' is the spectator or painter themselves; in this way, both Impressionist paintings and James's later fictions such as *The Ambassadors* foreground their physically restricted and thus epistemologically limited position.[44] Unfortunately, such scholarship has tended to privilege association over documentation. In *Person, Place, and Thing in the Novels of Henry James* (1977), for example, Charles Anderson argues that *The Ambassadors* uses 'language that increasingly suggests the mode of the Impressionist painters'.[45] But he does not sufficiently explicate this mode, and his discussion is ultimately based on a perceived similarity between a key scene in *The Ambassadors* and a Monet canvas, both of which portray women with pink parasols.[46] Peter Brooks in *Henry James Goes to Paris* works with a similarly broad conception of Impressionist art, suggesting that both James's later

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[42] Jacques Rancière, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 53.
[43] James's shifting response to Impressionism has been addressed at length in scholarship but see especially Winner, *Visual Arts*, 45–58; James Kirschke, *Henry James and Impressionism* (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing, 1981); Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 41–3; Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 349–53; Brooks, *Paris*, 3–5, 133–134; and Parkes, *Shock*, chapter 1.
[44] Bell, *Meaning*, 5.
[45] Charles Anderson, *Person, Place, and Thing in the Novels of Henry James* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 58–9.
[46] Ibid., 273–4.

fictions and Impressionist paintings dramatise a kind of 'extreme perspectivalism' (an epistemological claim comparable to the one made by Bell).[47] This is a classic pitfall of interdisciplinary studies, as Wendy Steiner has pointed out: scholarship which compares painting and fiction often falls into vagueness by failing to 'make explicit the basis of a given comparison—why perspective is parallel to point of view, for example'.[48] Brooks successfully negotiates this issue in part by grounding his discussion of James's style in relation to the influence of Flaubert's *style indirect libre*. Nonetheless, Impressionism tends to figure in these studies as merely a convenient analogy: *perspective in* The Ambassadors *functions like X, which is reminiscent of Impressionist paintings which do Y*. It should go without saying that such analogies can prove valuable. Indeed, these comparisons have brought clarity to some of the most challenging aspects of James's oeuvre, and have helpfully highlighted certain striking family resemblances between the novelist's work and the painter's art. But they do not tell us much about James's own conception of the relations between painting and fiction, nor how this conception might have impacted his literary practice. Nor do they provide substantial contextual information about these relations or James's place among them, save for the fact that he was writing in some sense "after" Impressionism.

Marianna Torgovnick's *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel* (1985) marries the two methods to persuasive effect. She traces artistic allusions within specific literary works, demonstrates a historicised understanding of art theory and practice, and constructs a coherent theory of the novel's relation to painting. In doing so, she convincingly combines the documentary approach with theoretical savvy. Her theory describes a 'continuum' of relations between image and text which begins with 'decorative' uses of the visual arts in fiction – when passages of description seem to be straightforwardly influenced by or modelled on the visual

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[47] Brooks, *Paris*, 51. Brooks makes a more comprehensive case for the relation between Impressionist painting and restricted narrative point of view Brooks, *Vision*, chapter 9.

[48] Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 149.

arts, or when a figure in a novel is a painter or a sculptor but their art has no real influence on the text – before moving on to 'ideological' uses, in which major themes of the fiction are embodied in descriptions, objects, metaphors, or artist figures. The last stage of this continuum is the 'interpretative' use of the visual arts, itself divided into two distinct categories: the first describes the way in which '*characters* experience art objects or pictorial objects and scenes in a way that provokes their conscious or unconscious minds'; the second considers the way in which fiction can 'pictorially stimulate' the reader towards a deeper 'understanding of the novel's methods and meanings'.[49]

Taken together, Torgovnick's study offers a compelling method for analysing the interrelations between literature and painting. It has broader theoretical utility in that it might profitably be applied to other periods and writers, and not just to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction. Nonetheless, there are limitations to her work, at least in her treatment of James's corpus. For example, her account of James's relation to contemporary movements and works of art is often summarily expressed. She declares, for instance, that the novelist had 'precisely the likes and dislikes that one might expect of his age and class'.[50] But this claim flattens the novelist's taste, a term James himself described as 'a blessed comprehensive name for many of the things deepest in us,' as well as the context which helped to form it.[51] Torgovnick also occasionally overemphasises the narrative function of the visual arts in James's work – that is, the relation between painting and plot, or between visual art and the notional psychology of a given character – at the expense of formal considerations such as the question of style. This emphasis is partially justified by her claim that scholars have relied on an 'unexamined critical consensus' that comparisons between styles in painting and literature are valid.[52] In her account, there is often only a metaphorical communication between the two

[49] Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 14–23.
[50] Ibid., 39.
[51] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1333.
[52] Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 10.

arts. Critics fool themselves, then, when they take the metaphor of painting literally and attempt to apply it to a literary text.

This position has, I think, its own problems. In the first instance, it seems to preclude the possibility that writers might themselves take the metaphor literally, or at least seriously enough to merit critical attention. Second, it suggests that a clear distinction can be drawn in such critical language between the literal and the metaphorical, a distinction which seems to me untenable in the context of inter-art relations and art writing more broadly (when we "read" a painting are we doing so literally or figuratively?). Third, it dismisses the authentic correspondences between the language used by artists and writers to describe their own work. These correspondences often reside in shared metaphors—in terms such as "texture," "composition," "balance," for example, or in James's idiosyncratic use of the term "foreshortening" to describe economy of narration. Taken together, this unduly minimises the fact that novelists like James actively sought to put their projects in relation to painting by metaphorically engaging, among other things, the visual sense. Indeed, the appeal to the visual sense is one of the central devices of the nineteenth-century novel, and it rests precisely on the idea that the novelist can *figuratively* 'make us see'. James himself frequently made such an appeal. In the preface to *The Golden Bowl* (1904), for instance, he argues that one of his characters 'makes us see the things that may most interest us reflected in [his consciousness] as in the clean glass'; in the same place, he notes that the novel itself puts forward 'illustrative claims'.[53] Such metaphors are vital to James's work and cannot easily be dismissed.[54]

[53] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1323, 1326.

[54] Indeed, James's theoretical and critical writings frequently manifest what W. J. T. Mitchell has called 'ekphrastic hope'—that is, the belief that 'the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a "sense" in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: "to make us see"': W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 152.

There is one unifying feature across these disparate studies: without fail, scholars working on the subject highlight James's distinctly literary approach to painting.[55] In general, these critics treat as shortcomings his habit of viewing paintings as demanding literary explication; his tendency to search for a notional plot or narrative within a given composition; and the fact that he never seems to have acquired an adequate vocabulary to describe the technical aspects of the painter's art.[56] This literary approach, it is argued, was partially responsible for James's failure to appreciate emerging forms such as Impressionism.[57] Recently, though, scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which the novelist's literary approach to painting was informed by Victorian art-critical orthodoxies.[58] His initial response to Impressionism, for example, was in both tone and content broadly in line with the contemporary reception of those painters in the mainstream Anglophone art press.[59] But James's literary approach to painting had another source, I suggest, and it served another purpose. It was also related to his personal understanding of the painter's art which in his work

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[55] Torgovnick, for example, suggests that the novelist considered paintings 'without a dramatic situation' to lack 'some of the essential qualities of art'; this desire for plot, it is claimed, stemmed from James's inability to see the painter's art from the painter's perspective: Torgovnick, *Pictorialism* 39, 41.

[56] Brooks, for instance, claims that the novelist lacked art-critical 'principles to support his taste, his likes and dislikes'; and when in 1876 he was confronted with Impressionism (at the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel's famous second Impressionist exhibition) James 'simply missed the point, completely': Brooks, *Paris*, 28–30.

[57] There have been rare dissenting voices: Wendy Graham, for example, departs from the majority opinion by arguing that James's enthusiasm for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood reveals his comparative progressivism; we have simply forgotten the real radicalism of the Pre-Raphaelites, she suggests, whose innovations have been obscured by the advent of European modernism and, especially, Impressionism: see Wendy Graham, "James and the Lesser of Two Modernisms," *The Henry James Review* 35, no. 1 (2014): 48–59. Looked at in this way, James 'backed an incipient English modernism that was left in the dust by European modernism': ibid., 49. It is worth mentioning, however, that much of this scholarship, including Graham's, deploys what John House has called 'an implicitly modernist historiography,' relying on a notion of rupture inaugurated by modernism itself: John House, *Impressionism, Paint and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 208. A similar point is made by Rachel Teukolsky about Victorian criticism more broadly, with critics tending to follow the modernists themselves in locating an aesthetic and historical rupture towards the end of the nineteenth century: see Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 192–9.

[58] As Graham points out, there was 'nothing remiss or unusual' about such a literary approach in the nineteenth century, in part because most Victorian journalists who covered art had no formal training in the discipline: Graham, "Modernisms," 51. In fact, James's writing on art was in Graham's words frequently 'beholden to the art chatter of the chief British periodicals,' revising or redeploying at various times the 'arguments and vocabulary of Ruskin, Robert Buchanan's "Fleshly School" diatribes (1871–1876), as well as other screeds against Aestheticism': ibid., 52. Rachel Teukolsky persuasively blames the process of literary canonisation for this phenomenon, which has tended to mask the extent to which critics were responding to contemporary debates: Teukolsky, *Eye*, 16.

[59] See Kate Flint, *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 4ff. James also seems to have borrowed terms from the Francophone art press, as in his use of the term "actual" – deployed, for example, by Zola in his 1868 account of *les actualistes* which drew direct comparisons between naturalism in literature and the work of contemporary painters – in his discussions of Impressionism.

is often conceived of in distinction to – and occasionally in direct conflict with – the art of fiction.

Painting in all the dimensions

This thesis seeks to revise the ways in which criticism has approached James's relation to painting. It shifts both the terms and the focus of the debate: away from broad correspondences between the novelist's work and artistic movements such as Impressionism and towards a finer understanding of the novelist's unique response to painting; away from the supposedly controlling presence of critics such as Ruskin or Walter Pater and towards the uses to which James put his conception of the painter's art, including his deployment of metaphors borrowed from his 'brother of the brush'.[60] In this way, my thesis amends longstanding ideas about the novelist's response to and communication with painters and painting. At the same time, it reveals through the eyes of a major writer some of the ways in which painting and fiction corresponded in the period. More broadly, it offers a methodological example of how to textually, historically, and biographically frame an individual author's relation to and engagement with another art form.

Throughout this thesis, I draw an opposition between painting and fiction that builds on James's own understanding of the characteristics he thought proper to each art. He consistently discussed and dramatised their divergences in his work, almost invariably concluding that fiction was the greater form. This conclusion was often reached, I argue, by highlighting fiction's capacity to represent change in time. To give for the moment but one example: in 1906, James was asked to contribute a chapter to a novel that was to be written by

[60] For a comprehensive treatment of Pater and James see Freedman, *Taste*; on Ruskin and James, see Parkes, *Shock*, chapter 1, and Winner, *Visual Arts*, chapters 1 and 2.

twelve different authors.[61] He used the opportunity to reflect on his own art, thereby continuing the critical work he was preparing to undertake for his prefaces to the New York Edition. In his chapter, he wrote:

> When you paint a picture with brush and pigments, that is on a single plane, it can stop at your gilt frame; but when you paint one with a pen and words, that is in *all* the dimensions, how are you to stop?[62]

James's distinction depends on the difference between painting's extension in space (the 'picture' on 'a single plane') and writing's extension in time (the 'picture' with 'pen and words' in '*all* the dimensions'). The phrase '*all* the dimensions,' moreover, handily accounts for both the physical fact of the book and its text, as well as signifying the way in which the book is consumed—that is, as part of the reading process which takes place over a protracted period. Painting is extended in space and is static, even if it does tend to privilege what Lessing called 'the pregnant moment,' the instant which is 'most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are most comprehensible'; writing, on the other hand, is extended in time and so allows for change.[63] It can narrate the entire life of an individual or dwell on its own form of 'the pregnant moment'; it can contain 'preceding and succeeding actions' within the same clause, the same paragraph, the same narrative; it can portray process and represent experience. In other words, painting is an art form that is both produced and consumed spatially

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[61] The project was devised by James's close friend, the American novelist William Dean Howells, and overseen by the *Harper's* editor Elizabeth Jordan. It proved a moderate success: John William Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of William Dean Howells* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 96–7.

[62] Henry James, 'The Married Son,' in *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (New York and London: Harper Brothers, 1908), 166.

[63] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, ed. and trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 78. Although I focus on James's understanding of the differences between the two arts, the definition I have given of these terms owes a debt to Lessing's *Laocoön*, and especially the philosopher's distinction between the work of the painter, whose material is 'figures and colours in space,' and that of the writer – Lessing was speaking explicitly of poets – who use 'articulated sounds in time': ibid., 78. The distinction is fundamental to *Laocoön* but see especially chapter 16.

– that is, it is appreciated from a physical position as a physical object with relative immediacy – while literature is consumed slowly and so is implicated in a reading process.

This distinction can further be understood in the context of James's monumental contribution to the theory of the novel in English. This influence has been so powerful that scholars have set out to recover what Nicholas Dames calls the 'pre-Jamesian theory of the novel,' nineteenth-century accounts of fiction that were oriented around physiological responses to novel reading and that took in 'debates over the novel's role in shortening attention spans, diminishing the temporal reach of cognitive effort, and dangerously accelerating textual consumption'.[64] Strikingly, both the earlier 'pre-Jamesian theory' and the novelist's own theory turn on the related issues of time and readerly attention. Earlier Victorian theories of the novel assumed in their readers a great deal of skipping, skimming, and other forms of inattention: they accepted that novels could be left on bedside tables or on bookshelves for an indefinite period before they were picked up again, if ever; and they accounted for the long stretches of time between serial instalments.[65] James's theory, on the other hand, is premised on the linearity of both the text and its consumption.

At its most basic level his theory and criticism is a plea for discipline in his readers. He asks them to focus their attention, to read if necessary 'just five pages a day' of a work such as *The Ambassadors* so as not to 'break the thread,' because the 'thread is really stretched quite scientifically tight'.[66] To do so, he proposed a partnership: the writer would guarantee that the maximum level of artistry had been employed and, in return, the reader would neither skip nor skim; they would be deliberate in their enjoyment and so extract the maximum pleasure possible from the aesthetic exchange. This makes James into a figure who, as one recent critic has put

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[64] Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 70, 4. Critics such as Dames sometimes give the impression that they question James's capital role in this theoretical shift, despite the fact that even to speak of a 'pre-Jamesian theory of the novel' attests to the novelist's impact. Dames's fundamental point, though, is that James's success and influence in this field has obscured the strikingly different theory and theorists that came before him: Dames, *Physiology*, 70.

[65] See ibid., 25ff.

[66] Henry James, *Letters 4: 1895–1916*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 302.

it, 'is not an artist of moments, but of durational time as a readerly exercise, one that cultivates the perception of an extended present to its maximum length,' most notably through the tortuous syntax of his later works.[67] In this way, James turned one of the supposed problems of the novel – that each work took many hours or, in the case of serialisations, many months to read, the reward for which seemed at best difficult to gauge, at worst negligible – into a merit.[68] Instead of bemoaning the inordinate length of time involved in consuming fiction, he argued that this unfolding in time should be recognised as one of the essential advantages of the novelist's art. And it was by grappling with painting – by staging a contest between the two forms and their discrete properties – that James framed and justified his views on fiction. There is a further parallel, then, between Lessing's seminal essay and James's view of inter-art relations. As W. J. T. Mitchell has argued, the 'aim of Lessing's laws of genre […] is clearly not to make the spatial and temporal arts separate but equal, but to segregate them in what he regards as their natural inequality'.[69] James, for his part, argued for a 'complete' 'analogy' between painting and fiction, as he put it in "The Art of Fiction".[70] But this analogy ultimately led him to a radical conclusion: 'the novel,' he wrote, 'seems to me the most magnificent form of art'.[71]

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[67] Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 208–9. Zemka connects the tortuous syntax of James's late style with experiments on human temporal perception conducted by the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920); more broadly, she suggests that James's work is inseparable from the shifts in time-consciousness that took place in the nineteenth century and which have been viewed as constitutive of modernity as resumed in Lewis Mumford's famous phrase 'the clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern age': quoted in ibid., 2. For more on the cultural transformations associated with this time-consciousness in the period see especially Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture 1880–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[68] See especially Dames, *Physiology*, 25–70 and 247–55; Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); and Emily Steinlight, "Why Novels are Redundant: Sensation Fiction and the Overpopulation of Literature," *English Literary History* 79, no.2 (2012): 501–35.

[69] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 107. Mitchell quotes a representative example from Lessing: 'Poetry has the wider sphere […]. Beauties are within her reach which painting can never attain'; 'more is allowed to the poet than to the sculptor or the painter': quoted in ibid., 107. Thus, as Mitchell puts it, the 'apparent argument from the mutual respect of borders turns out to be an imperialist design for absorption by the more dominant, expansive art': ibid., 107.

[70] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 46, 61.

[71] Ibid., 61.

In what follows, I discuss texts from the key phases of James's career which represent major aspects of his oeuvre – *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors* – alongside more minor works like *The Tragic Muse* (1890) as well as little-studied stories such as "A Landscape Painter" (1866), "The Story of a Masterpiece" (1868), and "The Madonna of the Future" (1873). I thereby offer a comprehensive account of the novelist's engagement with the art of painting as it evolved throughout his career. For this reason, I work for the most part with editions that print the text of the first book publication or, in the case of certain short stories, the text taken from the periodicals in which they first appeared. In foregrounding the contexts which animated James's work – from his negotiation of the transatlantic literary marketplace to his abiding interest in France and the French language, along with his response to Romantic painting, Pre-Raphaelite art, the Barbizon School, and Impressionism proper – my intention is to elucidate the inner workings of the novelist's oeuvre. Each chapter is therefore built around a close focus on the literary texts themselves.

In chapter 1, I discuss several of James's early short stories about painters and painting. These tales are inquisitive about painting's unique qualities and interested in where it differs from fiction. They also repeatedly emphasise their own textuality, most notably through extended allusions and borrowings from earlier literary works. Because of these textual sources, James's early tales about painters and painting might easily be framed in relation to an anxiety of influence. What is more, these short works engage with an issue that obsessed him at the beginning of his career—namely, the relation between American art and European art history, itself a variation on the so-called international theme, in which spirited and purportedly innocent Americans confront sophisticated but jaded Europeans. But these tales seem to stage and simultaneously resolve this transatlantic conflict by foregrounding the American artist's liberty to 'take possession of the old world,' as James put it in a letter home written from

London in 1875.[72] This approach to American art and identity has tended to inform criticism on the tales, and it plays an important role in my discussion. However, while these stories show the ambitious American writer questioning himself about the relation between his art and that of the "old world," they use this theme, I suggest, as a vehicle for their aesthetic reflections. These three tales, I argue, use their tissue of allusion and quotation to critically examine both painting and fiction. They do so by staging a host of contests: between different ways of seeing the world – for example, a Romantic vision as against a realist emphasis on rational observation – or between different habits of perception which stem from divergent artistic practices (for instance, painting as against writing); and between different artistic styles and historical models of artistic production. Through the framework of these various contests, James reflects on the art of painting and, in the process, the art of fiction, all while considering what young Americans could achieve across both forms.

In chapter 2, I focus on *The Portrait of a Lady*. I argue that at key moments in the text James dramatises the distinction between the art of painted portraiture and fictional representation. In doing so, the novel suggests that fiction offers the greater as well as the fairer form of representation, especially for women such as the novel's protagonist Isabel Archer. I show the ways in which James repeatedly stages in his novel a disjuncture or, in certain cases, an ironic gap between the experience of the characters and the paintings which surround them, and by ironizing the viewing habits encouraged by painted portraiture. In the process, painting is represented as merely one way of seeing, one that is, above all, used by men to neutralise or control female characters within the text. This process of gendered ekphrasis (in which a male character "reads," views, or figures a female character as an aesthetic object) exercises several constraining effects on Isabel, variously domesticating her or freezing her into a recognisable and aesthetically-pleasing mould. But the text, I suggest, works to ensure that Isabel evades

[72] Henry James, "To the James Family, 1 Nov [1875]," *Complete Letters of Henry James, 1872–76*, ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 3: 3.

these ekphrastic traps by distinctly literary means—that is, through the novel's capacity to unfold in time. When she is 'framed' beautifully 'in a gilded doorway' in the second half of the novel, for example, looking every inch 'the picture of a gracious lady,' she quickly 'turn[s] away' after being reminded of the control exercised over her by her husband.[73] In other words, she literally turns her back on the image which her male observers have constructed of her. The novel does, however, have its own gender biases. Ultimately, I argue that the two strategies are interrelated: gendered ekphrasis indicts a coercive way of seeing the world which is deployed by men to control women; at the same time, it is one of the means through which the novel articulates a contest between painting and fiction and so argues for the final superiority of fiction.

In chapter 3 I discuss *The Tragic Muse*, a novel which ostensibly treats the relation between painting, the theatre, and politics. I argue that the text constructs a hierarchy of the arts which depends precisely on the extent to which the artist is subject to their audience: for example, painting is seen to be higher than drama because the painter has more autonomy. This hierarchy is broadly in keeping with the one described by Bourdieu and outlined at the opening of this introduction. In this way, the text challenges the Aestheticist position on art by refusing to divorce artistic production from the pressures of the market—that is, the novel repeatedly calls attention to the fact that the supposedly autonomous, "useless" art object theorised by Aestheticism retains its exchange value, its position within the market. I further claim that the text implicitly inserts the novel form within the artistic hierarchy precisely by showing the ways in which fiction eludes the fate of the other arts, both in its strategies of representation and in its relation to the market. In this way, James's reflections on the art of painting and drama are made to form a part of his broader theorisation of the novel. At the same time, the text also

[73] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 2011), 387. All further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses within the text. Horne's text is based on the 1882 one-volume Macmillan edition of the novel; I have opted for this text rather than the revised New York Edition of 1907–9 because of my focus on James's thought about artistic relations as it evolved throughout his career.

represents a powerful expression of the novelist's anxiety about the fate of literature in the marketplace.

Lastly, in chapter 4, I focus on *The Ambassadors*, concentrating on the style of the text and its relation to James's conception of the painter's art. Critics have often accounted for the action and style of this late novel by describing what they suggest James learned from painting, most notably Impressionism. Contrary to these positions, I argue that *The Ambassadors* owes much to the novelist's working understanding of the distinction between painting and fiction. These discrete qualities help to account for the way in which the climax of *The Ambassadors* unfolds, as well as explicating aspects of the novel's style, most notably James's manipulation of rhetorical devices such as anaphora and asyndeton and his famous subordinate clauses, which deftly play with tense and time to produce effects of stasis and movement in the text. Key to this dynamic is the novelist's emphasis on the distinction between the stasis of visual art and the extension in time afforded in literature, a fact which guarantees fiction's place at the top of the hierarchy of the arts.

1. Romantic landscapes, magic portraits, and the history of art: painting in James's early fiction

Looking back on his experiences as a child growing up in the middle years of the nineteenth century, Henry James recalled in his autobiography *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) that a trip to the Louvre in the 1850s left him 'overwhelmed,' 'bewildered,' and utterly captivated.[1] This visit played a key role in his 'awakening aesthetic responsiveness,' as one critic has recently put it, and inaugurated the novelist's enduring interest in the painter's art.[2] But if his elder brother, William, focused his admiration on Eugène Delacroix's celebrated *La Barque de Dante* (1822), Henry's attention was elsewhere: he was transfixed by the French academic artist Paul Delaroche's (1797–1856) *Les Enfants d'Edouard* (1830).[3] James knew that, by 1913, it appeared almost comical to speak of Delaroche and Delacroix in the same breath, and their juxtaposition occasions some self-effacing humour. While William was certain of Delacroix's lasting glory, Henry, for his part, was just as sure about Delaroche, a painter 'for whom the pendulum was at last to be arrested at a very different point'.[4] But despite this wry regard for his youthful enthusiasms, there are compelling links between Delaroche's painting and James's own artistic

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[1] James, *Autobiographies*, 207. Henry James, Sr. (1811–82) had brought the family to Europe with the intention of giving his children the kind of cosmopolitan education that was unavailable in America: on Henry James, Sr. and the education of his children see Peter Kuryla, 'Vastations and Prosthetics: Henry James, Sr. and the Transatlantic Education of William and Henry James,' in *William James and the Transatlantic Conversation: Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Martin Halliwell and Joel D. S. Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Much has been made of the episode in the Louvre described in *A Small Boy* but the focus has been on the nightmare scene it apparently occasioned, with an emphasis on what might this mean for James's sexuality: on the subject see especially Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), chapter 2 and John Fletcher, "The haunted closet: Henry James's queer spectrality," *Textual Practice* 14, no. 1 (2000): 75ff.

[2] James, *CWA*, 1: xxiii.

[3] Delacroix's first Salon painting, *La Barque de Dante* was a *succès de scandale* in 1822, initially censured but nonetheless purchased by the state and ultimately celebrated: for a history of the painting's genesis and its reception see Sébastien Allard, *Dante Et Virgile Aux Enfers D'Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: Réunion Des Musées Nationaux, 2004). As for Delaroche, he was renowned during his lifetime as a brilliant history painter and celebrated by prominent critics like Gautier; but by the early twentieth century had been derided and forgotten along with countless other academic artists: see especially Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion, 1997).

[4] The novelist could gently mock his own youthful taste because he could see Delacroix, at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'in firm possession of his crown' and for having 'from so far back been sure of it': James, *Autobiographies*, 206.

priorities.[5] *Les Enfants d'Edouard* depicts in the then-popular *style troubadour* the Princes in the Tower moments before their assassination, allegedly ordered by Richard III.[6] The young Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury are shown seated on a bed near the centre of the canvas: there is a book open between them but they are not reading; they have lifted their heads as though alarmed by a sound or movement nearby while, at the bottom left of the canvas, a dog stands poised before a closed door, its ears raised and its body alert; beneath the closed door is a ray of light interrupted in its centre by a looming shadow, the shadow, that is – as Delaroche's narrative apparatus wishes to tell us – cast by the assassin sent to murder the princes. This is profoundly Jamesian in the sense that its power consists precisely in its representation of the Princes' awareness of their impending doom—in other words, it depicts the moment of revelation rather than the bloody act itself. The painting, like much of the novelist's work, suggests a terrible fate rather than showing it explicitly: dread, disgust, or mere disappointment are always lurking in James's fiction but, for the most part, remain confined to the other side of the door, intimated only by broken light and creeping shadows. The canvas fits, too, with the novelist's taste in painting, preferring throughout his career artworks with strong narrative situations that held 'dramatic or psychological interest'.[7]

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[5] There is also a connection between *Les Enfants d'Edouard* and, *mutatis mutandis*, James's autobiography: the novelist describes Delaroche's painting as a 'reconstitution of far-off history of the subtlest and most "last word" modern psychologic kind'; *A Small Boy and Others*, too – with its focus on 'historical knowledge,' its interest in 'words spoken in the past,' its 'exchanges of speech *with* the past' – is a 'reconstitution of far-off history': ibid., 206; Oliver Herford, *Henry James's Style of Retrospect: Late Personal Writings, 1890–1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 201. The novelist in his correspondence routinely emphasised the fact that by 1913 there were few people living on whom his 'meaning' would not be 'wasted,' who could truly understand his reminiscences: quoted in ibid., 202. Delaroche's work might also be considered melodramatic, and some of James's work also has an intriguing relation to melodrama: see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

[6] Troubadour Style, the somewhat pejorative term for a popular style which briefly flourished under the French Restoration, was contiguous with French Romanticism in its interest in a fantastic Middle Ages: see François Pupil, *Le Style Troubadour ou la nostalgie du bon vieux temps* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1985) and Elsa Cau, *Le style troubadour, l'autre Romantisme* (Paris: Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2017).

[7] Marianna Torgovnick has argued persuasively that James considered paintings 'without a dramatic situation' to lack 'some of the essential qualities of art': Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 39. Such narrative situations might be implicit or even imagined by the critic, a common practice since at least Diderot: see Julie Wegner Arnold, *Art Criticism as Narrative: Diderot's Salon de 1767* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

James eventually developed a theory of painting and its relation to fiction which held that the limitations of the painter's art could be seen in a canvas like *Les Enfants d'Edouard*. Painting can only show a 'single moment of an action,' in Lessing's classic formulation; consequently, the painter must select the moment which is 'most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible'.[8] The novelist, on the other hand, is not limited to a single instant. Instead, he can show the development of an action as it unfolds through time. However similar their priorities, then – be they narrative, psychological, or historical – fiction, for the James of 1913, was unequivocally superior to painting. But in the 1860s and early 1870s, when he first began writing about painters and painting, the young writer had not yet arrived at this theory of artistic relations. Three of his most successful early tales dramatise the art of painting and its myriad challenges: "A Landscape Painter," "The Story of a Masterpiece," and "The Madonna of the Future" all make use of painterly rhetoric, provide ekphrastic accounts of both real and imagined paintings, and, more generally, depict the painter at work (though mostly, as we shall see, at rest). In these stories, James appears far from dogmatic about painting. The tales are curious about what painting can achieve, inquisitive about its capacities, and interested in where it differs from his chosen form, the art of fiction. Indeed, in at least one of these works, "The Story of a Masterpiece," painting is shown to be an astonishingly powerful interpretative model—that is, a potent and compelling way of seeing and understanding the world. This chapter, then, will focus on James's first forays into the realm of inter-art relations.

Despite their focus on the painter's art, these tales also repeatedly emphasise their own textuality, most notably through extended allusions and borrowings from earlier literary works. "A Landscape Painter" alludes constantly to English poetry and fiction such as Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" (1842) and may even have been based on the poet's "The Lord of Burleigh"

[8] See Lessing, *Laocoön*, 78.

(also 1842); "The Story of a Masterpiece" openly borrows thematic, psychological, and aesthetic concerns from Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842); and "The Madonna of the Future" appropriates wholesale the template of Balzac's *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1831).[9] Because of these textual sources, James's early stories might easily be framed in relation to an anxiety of influence. What is more, these tales engage with an issue that obsessed him at the beginning of his career—namely, the relation between American art and European art history, itself a variation on the so-called international theme in which spirited and purportedly innocent Americans confront sophisticated but jaded Europeans.[10] But these stories seem to stage and simultaneously resolve this transatlantic conflict by foregrounding the American artist's liberty to 'take possession of the old world,' as James put it in a letter home written from London in 1875.[11] Americans, he declared in 1867, could 'deal freely with civilisations not our own,' could 'pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically &c) claim our property wherever we find it'.[12] Thus, the American artist could assimilate or reject at will; he was not constrained by mere borders; rather, he was bound by his nature and novelty to be cosmopolitan and free.

This approach to American art and identity is undoubtedly significant in these stories. It has frequently informed the scant criticism on the tales, and it will be a recurring theme in this chapter.[13] However, while these stories show the ambitious American writer questioning

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[9] The persuasive links between James's tale and Tennyson's poem was pointed out by Miriam Allott, "'The Lord of Burleigh' and Henry James's 'A Landscape Painter,'" *Notes and Queries* 2 (1955): 220–1. For more on Tennyson and James see Philip Horne, "Henry James Among the Poets," *The Henry James Review* 26, no. 1 (Winter, 2005): 73–4.

[10] The international theme has animated critical conversation around Henry James since at least William Dean Howells's 1882 essay "Henry James, Jr.," but see especially the accounts of James offered by T. S. Eliot in *The Egoist* in 1918; many of the essays in Dupee's *Henry James*; Christof Wegelin, *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958); John Carlos Rowe, "What the Thunder Said: James' 'Hawthorne' and the American Anxiety of Influence," *The Henry James Review* 4, no. 2 (1983): 81–119; Beverly Haviland, *Henry James's Last Romance: Making Sense of the Past and the American Scene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Dan McCall, *Citizens of Somewhere Else: Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Sarah Wadsworth, "Innocence Abroad: Henry James and the Re-invention of the American Woman Abroad," *The Henry James Review* 22, no. 2 (2001): 107–27; and, more recently, *Henry James's Europe: Heritage and Transfer*, ed. Dennis Tredy, Annick Duperray and Adrian Harding (Cambridge: Open Book Publishing, 2011).

[11] Henry James, "To the James Family, 1 Nov [1875]," in *Letters 1872–76*, 3: 3.

[12] Henry James, "To Thomas Sargent Perry, 20 September [1867]," *The Complete Letters of Henry James, 1855–1872*, ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 1: 179.

[13] We will see throughout this chapter how few critics have engaged with these works. But when they have, they have tended to focus on the issues of American identity discussed above: see, for example, Kendall Johnson,

himself about the relation between his art and that of the "old world," they use this theme, I argue, as a vehicle by which to carry their aesthetic reflections. These three tales, I suggest, use their tissue of allusion and quotation to critically examine both painting and fiction. They do so by staging a host of contests: between different ways of seeing the world – for example, a Romantic vision as against a Realist emphasis on rational observation – or between different habits of perception which stem from divergent artistic practices (for instance, painting as against writing); and between different artistic styles and historical models of artistic production. Through the framework of these various contests, James reflects on the art of painting and, in the process, the art of fiction, as well as considering what young Americans could achieve across both forms.

The uses of fiction

In 1866, James confidently declared that 'the taste of the age is for realism'.[14] He duly set about satisfying this taste: thematically, "A Landscape Painter" is an evisceration of Realism's familiar enemy, Romanticism – specifically, the Romantic character as represented through the figure of the artist – and a vindication of Realism's conventional foci such as 'close observation of the

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"'Dark spot in the picturesque': The Aesthetics of Polygenism and Henry James's 'A Landscape Painter,'" *American Literature* 74, no. 1 (2002): 59–87 on "A Landscape Painter" and emergent race theory, or Arthur Coleman Danto, "The Future of the Madonna," *The Henry James Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 113–25 on "The Madonna of the Future".

[14] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 280. The review of the 1866 novel *L'Affaire Clemenceau* by Dumas *fils* from which this line is drawn originally appeared as "The Last French Novel" in *Nation* 3 (October 1866): 286–88. 'Whatever its difficulties and contradictions,' George Levine has put it, 'realism was a historical impulse that manifested itself as a literary method and imposed itself on almost every form of prose narrative' in the nineteenth century: George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 11. This Realist impulse has often been linked to the Civil War, though the subject is fraught and critics have suggested myriad other factors that might have contributed to this 'taste,' from the impact of the Higher Criticism to the spread of evolutionary thought or, in the United States, the fiscal fluctuations that began with the Panic of 1837; in the same period, scientists began to embrace materialism and positivism, philosophers started to abandon Idealism, and politicians argued that the nation had to "face up to the facts". Scholarship on the subject is voluminous, but on the Panic of 1837 and the practice of Realism see especially Andrew Lawson, *Downwardly Mobile: The Changing Fortunes of American Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); on the broader trends in nineteenth-century American culture which might be considered "Realist" see David Shi, *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6ff.

details of society and the context in which characters move,' in George Levine's phrase, along with the concomitant search for 'strategies for describing the world as it was'.[15] The key strategy the tale articulates, I will be arguing, is its demonstration of the ironic gap between the painter's Romantic attitude, which is recorded in his diary entries, and the social reality around him as registered through the Realist vision of the artist's love interest and foil. This strategy will have a capital importance in James's work, as we shall see in chapter 4. For this reason, it is worth dwelling on "A Landscape Painter," its earliest formulation in his oeuvre.

The narrative of the tale can be stated briefly: a rich young man with artistic ambitions is disappointed in love and flees New York society; he poses as a poor landscape painter and finds lodgings on the New England coast, where he quickly falls in love with his host's daughter, Esther. He falls ill, during which time Esther reads his diary and discovers that he is rich. During his recovery, he proposes to Esther, who accepts, but who confesses on their wedding night that she married him for the money: 'You deceived me,' she says at the end of the tale, 'I deceived you'.[16] As Kimberly Vanderlaan has put it in one of the few works of criticism on the tale, the protagonist of "A Landscape Painter" is 'incapable of clear perception'; in this way, he is used by James to 'satirise the flawed painter'.[17] But this account misses the dialectic at work throughout the story which negotiates between the Romantic (represented by Locksley, the eponymous landscape painter) and the notionally Realist, represented by Esther. She is Locksley's foil, a woman believed to be meek and simple but who turns out to be a cunning reader of the world around her. This conflict between the ideal and the actual will go on to

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[15] George Levine, "Literary Realism Reconsidered: 'The World in its Length and Breadth,'" in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 30–1.

[16] Henry James, *Complete Stories 1864–1874*, ed. Jean Strouse (New York: Library of America, 1999), 101. All further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses within the text. Although the story was revised for inclusion in *Stories Revived* (London: Macmillan, 1885), Strouse's edition prints the text of "A Landscape Painter" as it appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1866. I also work from the Library of America edition in my discussion of the two other stories under consideration: Strouse's edition prints "The Story of a Masterpiece" as it appeared in *Galaxy* in January–February 1868 and uses the text of "The Madonna of the Future" as it appeared in *The Madonna of the Future and Other Tales* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

[17] Kimberley Vanderlaan, "The Painter Henry James Might Have Been," *American Literary Realism* 41, no. 1 (2008): 3.

animate in sophisticated ways James's first novel, *Roderick Hudson*.[18] But in "A Landscape Painter," his third-ever published story, these binaries are put in direct and sometimes crude relation. For instance, when Locksley contemplates 'the infinite Atlantic' – a moment which might seem to occasion the highest rhetoric of the Romantic sublime – he notes bathetically that it is from over the sea that 'all the pretty things are brought from Paris' (70). The archetypical example of this dialectic is in *Madame Bovary* (1856), which famously disappoints Emma's Romantic yearnings and which at this early stage in his career James read and cautiously admired.[19] As in Flaubert's novel, James's story emphasises the fact that Romanticism is simply one way of seeing the world, a way of seeing, moreover, that might be flawed or even dangerous.[20] In this way, the tale works through the young writer's own approach to fiction by focusing on the painter's art.

But subtending this thematic clash between the Romantic and the Realist – between the painter and Esther – is a consideration of the Romantic vision of landscape, rather than painting itself. When James wrote "A Landscape Painter," Romantic landscape painting was profoundly popular in America. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Frederic Church's (1826–1900) landscapes were 'cultural phenomena,' objects of enormous admiration that earned their author his status as the 'nation's first artistic celebrity,' as one recent commentator has argued.[21] In 1863, just three years before James's tale appeared, Albert

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[18] This has been a commonplace of criticism on James's first "acknowledged" novel – he disavowed *Watch and Ward* (1873) – but for a useful summary and persuasive counter to aspects of this tradition see Craig Milliman, "The Fiction of Art: Roderick Hudson's Pursuit of the Ideal," *The Henry James Review* 15, no. 3 (1994): 231–41.

[19] James and Flaubert are frequently compared, but see especially David Gervais, *Henry James and Flaubert: A Study in Contrasts* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Peter Brooks, "Henry James and Dirty French Novels," *The Henry James Review* 28, no. 3 (2007): 202–12; and Brooks, *Paris*.

[20] For a compelling recent revision to this tradition of reading *Madame Bovary* see Jacques Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," *Critical Inquiry* 34, (Winter, 2008), 233–48. Rancière argues that Flaubert's conception of style engenders the action and tragic conclusion of the novel: the real content of Flaubert's text is the sensations and phenomena that are described – a plume of dust, a gust of wind, the traces of gold in a lover's eye – and not the plot or the desires of the characters. For a summary of the critical history of the novel as well as an account not dissimilar to Rancière's see Jonathan Culler, "The Realism of Madame Bovary," *MLN* 122, no. 4 (2007): 683–96.

[21] Jennifer Raab, *Frederic Church: The Art and Science of Detail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 7; J. Gray Sweeney, "An 'Indomitable Explorative Enterprise': Inventing National Parks," in *Inventing Acadia: Artists and Tourists at Mount Desert*, ed. Pamela J. Belanger (Rockland, ME: Farnsworth Art Museum, 1999) 143. James himself wrote about Church with reserved admiration: James, *CWA*, 1: 117–8.

Bierstadt's (1830–1902) intensely Romantic *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (1863) was saluted by a contemporary critic as 'one of the most essentially representative and noble illustrations of American landscape art'.[22] As a child, James looked regularly and with wonder at a painting of Florence by Thomas Cole (1801–48), a painter James refers to in *A Small Boy and Others* as "'the American Turner'".[23] Locksley, however, is not directly associated in the tale with a school, movement, or even an artistic style: there is little concrete mention of his artistic ambitions, save that he pursues 'the victories of the brush' (69). Nonetheless, his Romantic credentials are foregrounded from the outset. He fled New York because he believed urban life to be too much under the influence of money; his self-imposed exile is in part a Rousseauian flight to the pastoral in search of a Romantic, putatively authentic nature: he asks, for example, 'How can a man be simple and natural who is known to have a hundred thousand a year?' (71). Similarly, the Romantic trope of a natural human uncorrupted by society informs his understanding of Esther: he notes that, although she 'has a number of traits in common with her town-bred sisters,' in her these traits are 'severely natural' (86). This Romantic taste is explicitly linked to Locksley's painting: although he does not directly name the painters he admires, he praises a local sunset as 'one of those gorgeous vertical sunsets that Turner loved so well,' a 'splendid confusion of purple and green and gold' (90).[24] Locksley, then, might reasonably aspire to be a Romantic landscape painter in the mould of the Hudson River School, themselves inspired by Turner.[25]

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[22] Quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 73. For more on the subject see especially T. J. Barringer and Andrew Wilton, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, c. 1830–1865* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

[23] James, *A Small Boy*, 163.

[24] By the 1860s Turner's reputation was essentially assured, famously in part thanks to Ruskin, so there was nothing unusual about Locksley's praise: for useful summaries of Turner's reception see Andrew Wilton, *Turner in his Time* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006) and Barry Venning, *Turner* (Berlin: Phaidon, 2003).

[25] On the Hudson River School see John K. Howat, *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987) and Linda S. Ferber, *The Hudson River School: Nature and the American Vision* (New York: New York Historical Society, 2009).

It is not Locksley's painting that is satirised in the tale, then, but rather his Romantic vision and his focus on landscape. Much of the first half of the story is taken up with Locksley's ekphrastic exercises and with his 'sensuous ecstasy at the unparalleled life, light, and transparency of the air' on the New England coast, along with 'the stupendous resources possessed by the ocean in the way of color and sound' (69). But it is precisely these ekphrastic enthusiasms that lead to his deception: Locksley fails as a painter because he does not paint; instead, he spends his time writing or enthusing about the quality of the sunset. He fails to turn this vision into a work of art. He sees, for example, that the 'prospect' of a landscape nearby 'is ever more or less like a picture which lacks its final process, its reduction to unity' (92), because he himself is incapable of supplying this unity. In fact, he declares his endless appetite for such observation, at one point noting that he 'could write till morning' (69); but he only dreams of the 'victories of the brush,' does not actively pursue them. Indeed, the word work recurs repeatedly in the short tale (16 times, in one form or another) without Locksley producing any painting at all, a stark contrast to Esther who is 'overworked' (89) and who 'day after day' undertakes the same 'wearisome round of visits' (78). He is deceived by Esther because he has too much imagination – he confesses that he 'never was a practical character' (70–1) – and because he lacks a critical faculty. He sees his love interest as a 'sweet, womanly listener' (95) rather than an intelligent observer, and he dwells too much on the surface of things: his interest in her piano playing, for example, resides in its '*effect*' rather than 'with its meaning' (74). This contrasts neatly with Esther's refined critical sense. She remains throughout the tale alert to the disjuncture between Locksley's painterly performance and the reality of his social position; she is aware of the 'innumerable tacit allusions which might serve effectually to belie [his] character' (80).

The opposition, then, is between Locksley's Romantic interest in the landscape versus Esther's Realist reading of Locksley himself. This throws into ironic relief the painter's claim that Esther is 'sadly ignorant' because she reads 'nothing but novels' (75); in fact, her novel

reading equips her to see through the painter's charade—more on this in a moment. Locksley, on the other hand, proves ignorant of her deeper interest and motivation, confining himself to an appreciation of her beauty and to figuring her as a 'womanly listener'. He does the same thing with Esther's father, whose 'simple heart' Locksley 'bless[es]' (71) after convincing the man of his position as a 'simple, natural' (71), and above all poor landscape painter. Esther begins, for Locksley, as a 'dark spot in the picture' (73) but he believes in the end that he has her figured out. He projects his own failing on to her: 'You have a great deal of imagination,' he says, 'but you rarely exercise it on the behalf of other people' (98).[26] He fails to read, too, the variety of hints she drops about her awareness of his situation: 'I don't know whether you are rich or not,' she says after their engagement, 'but I know that I am,' to which Locksley responds: 'Indeed! I was not aware that you had a private fortune' (99). In this way, Locksley anticipates James's later protagonists such as the telegraphist in *In the Cage* (1898): he is a centre of consciousness on whom nothing, apparently, is lost, but who finds that by the end of the tale he has done little more than construct an alternate reality.

Locksley even romanticises Esther's labour: 'What a poetry there is, after all, in red hands!' he declares (77). But Esther is far from Romantic, is indeed Locksley's opposite. A childhood friend of James's once observed that the 'heroes' of his early stories were 'white lambs by the side of the sophisticated heroines, who seemed to have read all Balzac in the cradle'.[27] This might seem to suggest that Esther has been corrupted by the author of *La Comédie humaine*, a common implication at the time.[28] But in fact, it points to Esther's critical faculty,

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[26] For the potential racial implications of this comment see Johnson, "Dark Spot," 59ff.

[27] Quoted in Henry James, *A Life in Letters*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 2000), 2. Usually their sophistication leads to an ironic reversal in the plot, as in the mirrored deception in "A Landscape Painter". In the 1864 tale "A Tragedy of Error," for example, Hortense Bernier hires a brigand to get rid of her husband, but the assassin murders Hortense's lover by mistake. It was Thomas Sergeant Perry (1845–1928), author, editor, and Harvard academic, who spoke of James's white lambs.

[28] For those of James's generation outside France, Balzac was 'scandalous,' 'the kind of French writer someone like Swinburne admired'; even an author as daring as George Eliot described one of Balzac's greatest works as a 'hateful book': David Gervais, "The Master's Lesson: Balzac and Henry James," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2004): 315; quoted in ibid., 315. (The novel in question is the 1835 *Le Père Goriot*; Eliot's view was recorded in her journal in 1859). Gervais's essay offers a helpful reception history of Balzac in America and Britain, but for an earlier, more complete account of Balzac's relation to James's fictional practice see Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*.

her skill in reading the social world around her.[29] This social reality is much like the one described by Balzac—that is, it revolves around money.[30] She herself confesses that it is a 'constant vexation to me to be poor. It makes me frequently hate rich women; it makes me despise poor ones' (85). She suggests that 'of all things' a 'sentimental man is the most despicable' (89), and claims that she does not 'have time for' '[s]entiment and loveliness' because she is 'not rich enough' (89). This contrasts with Locksley's own view on the subject: 'When people have to economise with the dollars and cents, they have a right to be splendid with their feelings' (79), he argues. It is no surprise then that, when she is safely married to Locksley, she declares that finally she is 'free, with our hundred thousand a year!' (101). Esther subverts Locksley's deception by observing the telling details and deducing a Realist's account of his behaviour. Witnessing his sustained and cheerful indolence, for example, she asks: 'Are you, then, so poor and friendless?' (83). In the end, she is stunned by Locksley's ignorance, by the fact that the painter had not noticed she had seen through his act, not least after she had declared that she meant 'to marry the first rich man who offers' (86). She asks him: 'Mercy! Didn't you see it? Didn't you know it? See that I saw it? Know that I knew it? It was diamond cut diamond' (100–1). Coming directly after their marriage, Esther's use of the diamond image is mordant; but it further foregrounds her economic motivation as well as the hardness of her Realist vision.[31] It also lends ironic weight to Locksley's pontificating throughout the tale about Esther's 'pure and upright soul' (83).

The two come into direct conflict over Locksley's habit of observation, the ground for their dispute between his Romanticism and her Realism. Esther observes Locksley admiring a

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[29] James highlighted what he understood to be Balzac's acute understanding of the social world in his early career. In *Roderick Hudson*, for example, Rowland declares that when Roderick 'turned sculptor a capital novelist was spoiled, and that to match his eye for social detail one would have to go to Honoré de Balzac': Henry James, *Novels 1871–1880: Watch and Ward, Roderick Hudson, The American, The Europeans, Confidence*, ed. William T. Stafford (New York: Library of America, 1983), 226.

[30] This is a traditional reading of Balzac's Realism, though for two concise but detailed recent studies on the subject see Patrice Baubeau, Carole Christen-Lécuyer, and Yves Citton, eds., *La Comédie (in)humaine De L'argent* (Lormont: Collection Diagnostics, 2013) and Armine Kotin Mortimer, *For Love or for Money: Balzac's Rhetorical Realism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).

[31] For an extended account of this kind of social vision in nineteenth-century fiction see Brooks, *Vision*.

local landscape and says: 'You consider that you are working now, don't you? Many persons would not call it work' (85). This would seem to attack Locksley's artistic vocation and thereby affiliate James's tale within an established New England literary tradition represented most notably by Hawthorne, whose artist figures have their endeavours ceaselessly questioned, derided, or dismissed as illegitimate forms of labour.[32] But in fact, Esther calls into question Locksley's Romantic vision, not his work. She does not criticise his vocation; rather, she censures his lack of artistic production which, as described above, results precisely from his private enjoyment of the landscape as recorded in his diary, the 'occasional records of [his] idleness' (69). Esther's disbelief about Locksley's failure to notice her awareness of his social position ('Mercy! Didn't you see it?'), implies a further critique of Locksley's observational priorities: it is his reverence before the landscape that leads directly to this failure. The tale, then, suggests that Locksley's Romantic fervour for landscape leaves him ignorant of the social world around him; Esther's critical faculty, on the other hand, allows her to see through his act. These differences in perception are also partially oriented along gender lines, a division which will prove central to "The Story of a Masterpiece" and, as we shall see in the next chapter, will have a capital importance in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Although "A Landscape Painter" emphasises the divergences between an idealised vision of the natural world and a clear-sighted observation of the social world, the tale briefly offers a broader critique of the painter's art. When Locksley is first struck by Esther's beauty, he lists her features one by one: 'Her smile is eminently intelligent. Her chin is full, and somewhat heavy' (73); but he admits that, in describing her thus, he has constructed 'a tolerable

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[32] In, for example, Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844). Hawthorne's notebooks were serialised in *The Atlantic Monthly* in the mid-1860s, with passages appearing in the same issue as "A Landscape Painter": 17, no. 1 (February, 1866). There is no clear relation between these notebook entries and James's tale, though the link between the two authors has been accepted since James's own time. For a recent account of James's own work on Hawthorne see Mathew Peters, "Henry James's *Hawthorne*" *The Cambridge Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2013): 305–17; for a summary of the longer links between the two novelists see Elissa Greenwald, *Realism and the Romance: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and American Fiction* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989); for a persuasive argument about Hawthorne's influence on James and other American writers see Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

catalogue' of Esther's attributes 'but no picture' (74). This is a complicated moment. In one way, it shows that Locksley's vision of the world falters when faced with the challenge of knowing or representing another individual: he remains a landscape painter, or at least a landscape painter *manqué* who thrills at the 'brightness and freshness' of sea and sky that seem to him like 'a clever English watercolour' (77); for this very reason, he fails to notice anything significant about the woman in front of him, save for the mute fact of her beauty, going so far as to figure an aspect of her attractiveness – the colour of her eyes – by comparing them to 'slate-cliffs […] weltering under the tide' (75). In another way, this can be read as the tale itself acknowledging its limited representational power: a literary catalogue is 'no picture'; it lacks the self-evident surface of a painted canvas. Tellingly, however, Locksley declares that it is neither Esther's 'coloring' nor her 'form' that impresses him most, figurations of the old debate between colour and line in painting.[33] Rather, he is taken with her 'movement': 'She walks like a queen' (74). In this way, the tale gestures towards James's later idea that it is only through the dynamism of the written word that one can see Esther 'at full length—emphatically the portrait of a lady' (74), and not through the suggestion of movement exhibited in paintings such as *Les Enfants d'Edouard*. But for now, it is only a gesture. We will have to wait for that other portrait of a lady, James's 1881 novel, for more on the subject.

The tale critiques the Romantic aesthetic pleasure Locksley feels but refuses to translate into practice, alongside his focus on landscape at the expense of closer attention to human relations. Locksley himself, however, suggests that this failure can partially be ascribed to the

[33] The debate between colour and line is perhaps most famously represented in the argument that broke out in the 1670s between the Poussinists and the Rubenists in the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which was itself a legacy of the controversy between the *disegno* advocated by the painters of the Florentine Renaissance as against the *colore* associated with the Venetian Renaissance. The debate continued well into the nineteenth century. For general histories of this conflict see John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993) and Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For the debate in Venice see T. Puttfarken, 'The Dispute about "Disegno" and "Colorito" in "Venice: Paolo Pino, Lodovico Dolce and Titian," *Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1400–1900*, ed. P. Ganz and others (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 45–99. For the debate in seventeenth-century France see T. Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Finally, for the debate in nineteenth-century France – figured through a contrast between Ingres and Delacroix – see Andrew Carrington Shelton, "Ingres versus Delacroix," *Art History* 23, no. 5 (2000): 726–742.

paucity of American artistic production, a low view of American painting that James himself held for much of his career.[34] Locksley describes his own artistic ambition in distinctly national terms:

> One of these days I mean to paint a picture which in future ages, when my dear native land shall boast a national school of art, will hang in the *Salon Carré* of the great central museum, (located, let us say, in Chicago,) and remind folks – or rather make them forget – Giorgione, Bordone, and Veronese (94).[35]

The landscape painter's ambition is always deferred, always located in an ambiguous future by which time his 'dear native land' will have matured sufficiently to 'boast a national school of art'.[36] Tellingly, the arbitrarily-located 'central museum' of America's artistic maturity is framed in terms of a European model, requiring both the architectural and linguistic template of a *Salon Carré*. In other words, Locksley does not have the kind of collector's ambition manifested by Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl*; he does not want to gather the old world up and place it in a

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[34] Lloyd Goodrich has argued that James saw in Winslow Homer's work 'the pictorial embodiment of everything he loathed in his native land': *Winslow Homer* (London: Macmillan, 1944), 53. James's largely negative vision of American painting remained fundamentally consistent throughout his life, though for a nuanced account of the subject see *James and American Painting*, chapter 2. In 1872, James complained that his art reviews in America were 'pitiful work,' declaring that he 'shall of course soon collapse for want of material': James, *Letters, 1855–72*, ed. Walker and Zacharias, 2: 437. His opinion of individual American painters was also consistent, only seriously praising certain works by John Singleton Copley (1738–1815); Frank Duveneck in James, *CWA*, 1: 103–5, 137–9; Edwin Abbey (1852–1911) in ibid., 404–14; Sargent in ibid., 415–32; and, later in his career, Whistler, though even then only in passing and only perhaps because, like Sargent, of his distinctly "European" qualities: Henry James, "The American Scene," in *Collected Travel Writings, Great Britain and America: English Hours, The American Scene, Other Travels*, ed. Richard Howard (New York: Library of America, 1993), 393. For his relation to Winslow Homer, see Patrick McCaughey, "Native and Nomad: Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent," *Daedalus* 116, no. 1 (1987): 136–8.

[35] James admired throughout his career the painters of the Venetian Renaissance and, like Ruskin before him, praised above all the art of Tintoretto: in "From Venice to Strassburg" (1873), for example, in which the influence of Ruskin is particularly evident, James praises Tintoretto by declaring that he 'never drew a line that was not, as one may say, a moral line': Henry James, "Venice: An Early Impression," in *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard (London: Penguin, 1992), 55. It is worth noting, then, that Tintoretto is absent from Locksley's list, a possible indication of his perfunctory aesthetic education. In this way, American art is presented in the tale as immature and dependent, much like Locksley himself. James's essay was revised for publication in *Foreign Parts* (1883); his Ruskinian sentiment in the article is accompanied by several quotations from the English critic, and it was even reported that Ruskin himself had admired the piece: ibid., "introduction," xxi.

[36] If James means 'school' in the sense of movement – as in the Barbizon School – then America already had several, not least the Hudson River School discussed above or its later offshoot, Luminism or the Luminist School, and the burgeoning American Barbizon School: see Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975). If, on the other hand, he means school in the sense of an academy or institution for the fine arts, the American Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1802 (though closed in 1841), the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1805 and is still active today, and the National Academy of Design was set up in New York in 1825.

version of Verver's American City, but instead wants to produce a genuinely innovative and authentically national work of art.[37] Locksley, however, cannot make up his mind whether he wants 'folks' to remember or forget the European models he himself introduces, a common trope in James's criticism of American painters.[38] Locksley's Romantic vision of the landscape, then, comes in for harsh criticism in the tale. James's next narrative of painters and painting, on the other hand, turns to the art of portraiture, and deals with 'the best portrait that has yet been painted in America' ("The Story of Masterpiece," 235).

The great poet's noble lyric

"The Story of a Masterpiece" was published in *Galaxy* in 1868, two years after "A Landscape Painter".[39] James was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the time and working towards his career as a professional man of letters. He was publishing a steady stream of tales and review essays – "The Story of a Masterpiece" was his seventh-published story – but his work as an art critic had not yet begun: his first art-critical essay, a review of Barbizon School paintings on

[37] On Adam Verver's project to build a 'museum of museums, a palace of art' (Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909], 145) see Mark Seltzer, *Henry James and the Art of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 24ff.; Thomas Galt Peyser, "James, Race, and the Imperial Museum," *American Literary History* 6 (1994): 48–70; Guy Davidson, "Ornamental Identity: Commodity Fetishism, Masculinity, and Sexuality in The Golden Bowl," *The Henry James Review* 28, no. 1 (2007): 26–42 and Sergio Perosa, "Henry James and Unholy Art Acquisitions," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2008): 150–63.

[38] In his 1887 profile of Sargent, for example, James declared: 'when to-day we look for "American art" we find it mainly in Paris. When we find it out of Paris, we at least find a great deal of Paris in it': James, *CWA*, 1: 416. Similarly, in an 1875 review of works by Frank Duveneck he wrote: 'as things stand with us at present, almost any young artist of promise is likely to do better out of American than in it': ibid., 104. Likewise, his praise for John La Farge was centred on the fact that the painter's work was 'a remarkable combination of France and America': quoted in *James and American Painting*, 56.

[39] The conclusion of "The Story of a Masterpiece" was likely altered following a request from F. P. Church, the editor at *Galaxy* and, later, writer of the famous editorial, 'Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus': see Charles K. Fish, "Indirection, Irony, and the Two Endings of James's 'The Story of a Masterpiece,'" *Modern Philology* 62, no. 3 (1965): 241–3. James, it seems, initially dismissed Church's recommendation. He wrote: 'As for adding a paragraph I should strongly object to it': Henry James, "To Francis Pharcellus Church, 23 October [1867?]," *Letters 1855–1872*, ed. Walker and Zacharias, 1: 187. The novelist seems finally to have relented. However, as Walker and Zacharias note, it remains an open question as to whether James's objections relate to "The Story of a Masterpiece" or to 'A Problem,' both of which appeared in *Galaxy* in 1868: see ibid., 187, n.1.

display at the Doll and Richards gallery in Boston, appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1872.[40] Nevertheless, a book review from 1868 reveals his precocious art-critical knowledge. Written when he was just 25, it demonstrates his attention to and interest in the painter's art, his impressive familiarity with French academic painting, and his broad knowledge of mainstream contemporary British and French art criticism.[41] In 1868, then, James was reading widely in art criticism and history, even if he was not yet writing such criticism; and he used his short story published in the same year to reflect at length on the art of portraiture.

"The Story of a Masterpiece" examines with subtlety and force the qualities inherent to a successful portrait; more profoundly, it wonders about the kind of knowledge a portrait can convey or produce. But if "A Landscape Painter" questioned the vision of its central character, "The Story of a Masterpiece" takes an altogether different tack. The tale considers, I will be arguing, whether the painter has a special gift of sight which allows them to reveal the "truth" about an individual, a truth that is otherwise hidden from inartistic eyes; or whether, instead, the painter merely provides a powerful interpretation of an individual, one that is ultimately removed from a notional "truth" of character. This brings the story in line with a broader interest in the period in the authenticity of portraiture.[42] It also affiliates the tale with the

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[40] On the subject see Beth A. Treadway, "The Doll and Richards Gallery," *Archives of American Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1975): 12–4. As Peter Collister notes (following John Sweeney, the original editor of James's collected art criticism), it was likely at the Doll and Richards gallery that Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* saw the Lambinet landscape to which I return at length in chapter 4: James, *CWA*, 1: 22, n.1.

[41] James was writing about *Contemporary French Painters* (1867) by the British artist and critic P. G. Hamerton (1834–94). In the review, James takes Hamerton to task for all but ignoring Delacroix; ponders the justice of the critic's views about better-known painters such as Ingres, Decamps, and Delaroche, as well as more minor figures such as Paul Alexandre Protais (1825–1890); declares his admiration for Ruskin and Reynolds; speaks with muted appreciation of works by Anna Jameson, W. M. Rossetti, and Hamerton himself; but ultimately decries the paucity of serious art criticism in English, arguing that the 'serious student' will ultimately be forced to leave English criticism behind and be compelled towards 'the perusal of the best French critics, such as Stendhal, Gustave Planche, Vitet, and in these latter days Taine,' thereby conspicuously failing to mention figures now considered major such as Baudelaire and Zola: ibid., 3. For more on Hamerton, a 'minor Ruskin' and 'one of the few Englishmen who knew or cared about French Impressionism' prior to the 1880s see James Kissane, "P. G. Hamerton, Victorian Art Critic," *Burlington Magazine* 114 (1972): 22–30.

[42] This interest may have been prompted in part by the problem of photography and Victorian spectacular culture: see especially Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Daniel A. Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Paul Barlow, "Facing the Past and Present: The National Portrait Gallery and the Search for 'Authentic' Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 219–38.

Victorian vogue for so-called 'magic-picture stories' such as Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1850), James's own "The Liar" (1888), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[43] This has led critics such as Richard Brodhead to see "The Story of a Masterpiece" as a direct reworking of Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837), a tale which presents portraiture as 'an occult art of visionary penetration'.[44] However, alongside its family resemblances to these fictions, "The Story of a Masterpiece" has a clear connection to an earlier magic-picture narrative, Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess". More on this in a moment, though for now it serves as a further indication that when James was writing about painting he was usually also thinking about literature.

"The Story of a Masterpiece" is, on its surface, the story of a marriage. John Lennox, 'a widower, of large estate, and without children,' becomes engaged to the 'very marriageable' Marian Everett (209). One day, Lennox encounters a painter named Stephen Baxter who is hard at work on a portrait of a 'fair-haired young woman in a rich medieval dress, and looking like a countess from the Renaissance' (213). Lennox is immediately struck by this Pre-Raphaelite-like 'countess,' not least because she bears a close resemblance to his fiancée.[45] Impressed by the painting and curious about Baxter's relation to Everett, Lennox commissions a wedding portrait of his bride-to-be. He soon discovers that the two had met before in Europe, that the painter had fallen in love with her, and that she had rebuffed his advances.[46] Baxter,

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[43] See especially Powell, "Magic-Picture Mania," 147–70. As Powell notes, the magic-picture story is itself an offshoot of the Gothic novel and its interest in the "romantic portrait": see ibid., 148ff.

[44] Brodhead, *Hawthorne*, 125.

[45] James had a first-hand familiarity with Pre-Raphaelite painting by the time he wrote "The Story of a Masterpiece," though he does not dwell on Baxter's artistic affiliations. The novelist's relation to Pre-Raphaelite art was always ambivalent. In *A Small Boy and Others*, he recalled that his first real introduction to the Pre-Raphaelites took place in the 1850s, first in London in 1856, then in 1857–8 at the celebrated exhibition of English painting organised by, among others, William Michael Rossetti, which travelled to Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. James wrote in his autobiographical work that the Brotherhood had a bright but fleeting significance for him: 'The very word Pre-Raphaelite wore for us that intensity of meaning, not less than of mystery, that thrills us in our perfection but for one season, the prime hour of first initiations': James, *Autobiographies*, 190. Its impact was, in any case, indelible. Sixty years later, the novelist was able to recollect from his visit to London in 1856 exactly which canvases he saw, describing as 'the first fruits of the Pre-Raphaelite efflorescence' Millais's *Vale of Rest* (1858–9), *Autumn Leaves* (1856), and his 'prodigious *Blind Girl*' (also 1856); he also remembers being struck at 'the academy show of 1858' by William Holman Hunt's *Scapegoat* (1854–6) 'most of all, which I remember finding so charged with the awful that I was glad I saw it in company': ibid., 190. For a detailed account of James's relation to the PRB see Graham, "Two Modernisms," 48–59.

[46] That Baxter trained as an artist in Europe is in keeping with the general pattern of artistic exchange in James's fiction which, in the words of Peter Collister, tends to be 'predominantly one-way, with Europe embodying the values of tradition and the highest artistic enterprise'; America, on the other hand, is regarded as 'well advised to

for his part, is disappointed but not surprised to learn that Everett is engaged to be married, and dutifully sets about preparing the wedding portrait. But when it is finally unveiled, Lennox finds himself strangely upset: the painting seems to intimate something secret and deplorable about Everett's character. After some hesitation, he convinces himself that it is the painting he despises and not his fiancée: 'Marian may be what God has made her,' he says, 'but *this* detestable creature I can neither love nor respect!' (241). Taking up a 'long, keen poinard [*sic*]', he decides to destroy to destroy the picture: he 'thrust' the dagger 'with barbarous glee, straight into the lovely face of the image'; and 'on the following day Lennox was married' (241).

The tale hinges on two radically different representations of Everett, both of which are painted by Baxter: the 'countess' painting and the wedding portrait. The first is the artist's romanticised rendering of his lost love, a melancholic expression of unrequited affection given sinister undertones from its association with Browning's poem; the second, meanwhile, can be described in the words of Daniel O'Hara, one of the few critics to address the tale at length, as a 'psychological masterpiece' intended to unveil Everett's 'deceptiveness,' a result of Baxter's 'wounded pride' which 'seeks to hold up the woman or her new partner or perhaps both to public scorn'.[47] O'Hara's focus is on the uncanny pleasure Lennox takes in destroying the wedding portrait; but in the process, the critic describes Baxter's portrait as 'betraying' Everett's 'true character'.[48] This is where "My Last Duchess" becomes vital to an understanding of the tale (O'Hara notes that Browning's poem is significant but misses, I think, the thrust of this

benefit from this uneven relationship': James, *CWA*, 1: xxvi. James's tale itself would seem to benefit from the exchange in its use of "My Last Duchess," and the novelist regularly recommended this process in his art criticism and correspondence: for example, in an 1875 review of several portraits by Frank Duveneck he wrote that the painter 'is now about to return to Europe. This, doubtless, is the wisest course […]. We confess that, as things stand with us at present, almost any young artist of promise is likely to do better out of America than in it': ibid., 104. It is worth mentioning that the status of this relationship was questioned in the United States in the period. After 1875, for example, the phrases 'foreign training' and 'foreign influence' appeared to become terms of critical approval at New York exhibitions, whereas previously they were pejorative: Margaret C. Conrads, '"In the Midst of an Era of Revolution": The New York Art Press and the Annual Exhibitions of the National Academy of Design in the 1870s,' in *Rave Reviews: American Art and its Critics*, 1826–1925, ed. David Dearinger (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000), 97.

[47] Daniel T. O'Hara, '"Monstrous levity': Between Realism and Vision in Two of Henry James's Artist-Tales," *The Henry James Review* 28, no. 3 (2007): 242. This point echoes Brodhead's position, cited above, which sees portraiture in the tale as 'an occult art of visionary penetration': Brodhead, *Hawthorne*, 125.

[48] O'Hara, "Monstrous levity," 242.

significance).[49] To show why the 'great poet's noble lyric' (as Lennox calls it: 213) is crucial to an understanding of the tale's reflections on the art of portraiture, I will first demonstrate the parallels between the poem and James's story. I will then recall in a brief excursus the ironic complexity of Browning's lyric before reading this irony back into "The Story of a Masterpiece".

James 'grew up revering Browning,' as one critic has put it, but he did not write about the poet till the 1870s and, even then, only in his correspondence.[50] It was not until "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*" (1912) that James discoursed at length on Browning. Strikingly, the novelist sought in this late lecture to assimilate the poet's work into the rubric of his own fictional practice.[51] This process was presaged, I suggest, in "The Story of a Masterpiece". There are a host of parallels between the poem and the story. To begin with, the tale alludes explicitly to the lyric: Baxter says that his 'countess' painting was originally an 'attempt to embody [his] own private impression' of 'something [he had] read—Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess,"' a work 'which has always had a strong hold on [his] fancy' (213). Lennox, in turn, sees a profound 'correspondence between the lady's expression' in Baxter's painting 'and that which he [Lennox] had invested the heroine of Browning's lines' (213). At the thematic level, the poem and the story both emphasise the link between romantic and aesthetic possession. Upon seeing the completed wedding portrait, for example, Lennox declares that it 'was *his* Marian, assuredly' (emphasis added, 231), echoing the objectifying impulse exhibited by Browning's speaker, who says of his intended bride that her 'self, as I avowed / At starting, is my object'.[52]

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[49] Ibid., 244.

[50] Jennifer McDonnell, "Henry James, Literary Fame, and the Problem of Robert Browning," *Critical Survey* 27, no. 3 (2015): 43.

[51] James also wrote a story, "The Private Life" (1893), which has often been read as the novelist's attempt to come to terms with the perplexing discrepancy between Browning's boorish public persona and his private poetic genius: see ibid., 44. For more on the relation between James's literary technique and Browning's dramatic monologue see William E. Buckler, "Rereading Henry James Rereading Robert Browning: 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*,' *The Henry James Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 135–45. For a monograph-length study of the subject see Ross Posnock, *Henry James and the Problem of Robert Browning* (Athens, GA: Georgia University Press, 1985).

[52] Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess," in *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 1: 349, line 53. All further references are to this edition and are given as line numbers parenthetically within the text. The duke in the poem, it is generally agreed, is Alfonso II d'Este

The painter even explicitly figures Everett as an object. He justifies the resemblance between the 'countess' painting and Lennox's fiancée by declaring 'You know how a painter works—how artists of all kinds work: they claim their property wherever they find it' (214). This strikingly mirrors James's letter from 1867, quoted above, in which he declared that Americans could '(aesthetically &c) claim our property wherever we find it'.[53] This textual echo can be read as an internal justification for the story's borrowings from "My Last Duchess". But parallels between the poem and the tale run deeper yet. Baxter says that his 'countess' portrait 'possesses a certain amount of vitality' (213) and the wedding portrait 'told of […] throbbing life and health' (234) while the portrait in Browning's poem shows the duchess 'Looking as if she were alive' (2). Finally, the jealousy of the poem's speaker – who complains that his duchess had 'A heart […] too soon made glad' (22) – is reflected in Lennox's spiteful phrase, 'Marian is generous' (235). More generally, the tale is animated by a dynamic which figures Everett as the subject for a portrait and an object of love.

Famously, "My Last Duchess" reveals in the form of a dramatic monologue the relation between an Italian duke and his deceased wife, the eponymous duchess.[54] The occasion for this monologue is the negotiation between the duke and a count, whose daughter the duke wishes to marry. As talks begin, the duke shows the count's envoy a portrait of his 'last Duchess' who appears 'painted on the wall / Looking as if she were alive' (2). He complains that she

> Thanked men, – good! but thanked
> Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift (31–4).

(1533–1597), about whom Browning read during his research for *Sordello* (1840): see Ian Jack, "Browning's 'Dramatic Lyrics' (1842)," *Browning Institute Studies* 15 (1987): 168.

[53] Henry James, "To Thomas Sargent Perry, 20 September [1867]," *Letters 1855–72*, ed. Walker and Zacharias, 1: 179.

[54] On the dramatic monologue see especially Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993); Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1985); and Jennifer Wagner Lawlor, "The Pragmatics of Silence and the Figuration of the Reader in Browning's Dramatic Monologues," *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 3 (1997): 287–302.

For her ingratitude and infidelity – because she had a heart 'too soon made glad' (22) – it is implied that the duke had her killed.[55] This information is contained within the painting of the duchess, a portrait of astonishing felicity: the painter 'Worked busily a day, and there she stands' (4). For the duke, the painting reveals the truth of the duchess's character. In the 'depth and passion of its earnest glance' (8) it records the fact that the duchess's 'spot of joy' (21), the 'faint / Half-flush that dies along her throat' (19), was called up by almost anyone. The duke declares:

> Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
> When'er I passed her; but who passed without
> Much the same smile? (43–5).

The poem performs a double revelation: the ekphrasis of the painting reveals the duchess's infidelity while the duke's monologue reveals his brutal response to her supposed betrayal. The suggestion of the duchess's demise is conveyed in, for example, the subjunctive of 'as if she were alive,' as well as the violence of the 'Half-flush that dies along her throat'; indeed, the only way to see the duchess is for the duke to display her portrait, which he keeps concealed: 'since none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I' (9–10), a conclusive way of constraining the woman's 'looks' which 'went everywhere' (24). Both the portrait and the irony of the duke's speech draw back the curtain, so to speak. They suggest the equal power of speech and painted representation to reveal, intentionally or otherwise, the deep "truth" about an individual.

However, as many critics have noted, the 'duke's description of the duchess, via the evocation of her portrait, is wholly controlling': she 'only looks like herself *as he conceives her*'.[56]

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[55] The duke's language is notoriously slippery, inviting a range of finely divergent readings: see, for example, Shifra Hochberg, "Male authority and female subversion in Browning's 'My Last Duchess,'" *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 3, no. 1 (1991): 77–84; Barbara MacMahon, "Indirectness, Rhetoric and Interpretative Use: Communicative Strategies in Browning's My Last Duchess," *Language and Literature* 5, no. 3 (1996): 209–23; Tamar Yacobi, "Interart narrative: (Un)Reliability and Ekphrasis," *Poetics Today* 21, no. 4 (2000): 711–749; and the excellent introduction to Adam Roberts and Daniel Karlin, *Robert Browning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[56] Stefan Hawlin, "Rethinking 'My Last Duchess,'" *Essays in Criticism* 62, no. 2 (2012): 146.

This means that the supposed "truth" revealed by the portrait is in fact mediated by the duke's jealous reading of the painting. Moreover, the technique of the dramatic monologue ensures that this is the only interpretation of the duchess to which we have access; in any case, she cannot speak for herself. "The Story of a Masterpiece," I argue, takes up this understanding of portraiture. Far from 'betraying' Everett's 'true character,' as O'Hara put it, the tale in fact articulates a kind of idealist understanding of the portrait.[57] Painting, in the story, does not reveal a hidden reality. It is not a Hawthornian 'art of visual penetration,' in Richard Brodhead's phrase.[58] Rather, it represents the portrait as a complex object which triangulates the vision of the painter, the image of the subject, and the viewer's personal relation to both painter and subject. In this way, it inaugurates a theme to which James will return repeatedly in his fiction, most notably in "The Real Thing" (1892): the distinction between 'what is actual (or literal) and what will strike a reader or viewer as real."[59] But it grounds this analysis in the art of portraiture, an art which exercised a persistent and 'powerful attraction' on the novelist.[60]

Everett is subject to Baxter's conflicting interpretations, first as the Renaissance 'countess,' then as the unfaithful 'creature' in the wedding portrait. The radical difference between these images is due to a shift in Baxter's attitude towards Everett. For instance, after her refusal he is distraught, declaring her (in reported speech) 'the most superficial, the most heartless of women' (226). But eventually he 'made up his mind' that 'she was very far from the woman of his desire,' as the narrative voice puts it, and that 'the lapse of time had very much diminished the force of [Baxter's] feelings' (226, 227). However, the narrator adds: 'I do not mean to offer his judgment of Miss Everett as final; but it was at least conscientious' (227). And indeed, it is by no means 'final'. After a series of fraught sittings with Everett for the wedding portrait, Baxter's vision changes, resulting in the 'brutal' (229) final image. These interpretations

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[57] O'Hara, "Monstrous levity," 242.
[58] Brodhead, *Hawthorne*, 125.
[59] George Monteiro, "Realization in Henry James' 'The Real Thing,'" *American Literary Realism* 36, no. 1 (2003): 42.
[60] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 318.

are, in turn, mirrored in Lennox's own understanding of his fiancée's character. He begins by seeing in the 'countess' portrait a profound 'correspondence' (213) between the woman represented and his fiancée; but when he sees it again after viewing the wedding portrait, the likeness was 'as utterly absent as if it had never existed,' a fact which leaves Lennox so perplexed that he turns to Baxter 'half tempted to demand an explanation' (240). Baxter even tacitly admits that his portraits are subject to this kind of triangulation: 'The possessor of the picture,' he declares, 'is free to baptise it afresh' (213). The narrative voice states to similar effect that the wedding portrait was painted 'with something more than knowledge—with imagination, with feeling. He [Baxter] had almost *composed*' (232). This dynamic casts new light on Lennox's destruction of the wedding portrait. It is a romantic revenge on Baxter, a response to Lennox's own claim that the painter had 'taken [his] revenge' (234) through the wedding portrait. In this way, it is also an exorcism of the painter's aesthetic authority over his fiancée, a violent act of possession which lays a claim on Everett herself (*there can be only one vision of my fiancée—my own*, Lennox's act seems to declare). The sexual connotations of this act are clear, not least because the violence done to Baxter's image neatly mirrors the death of Browning's duchess and 'afforded him [Lennox] immense relief' (241).

Looked at in this way, Everett is ultimately nothing more than an aesthetic object. Like the poem's duchess, she is subject to the interpretative whims of her jealous male admirers.[61] Indeed, the narrative studiously avoids revealing her feelings. She is shown only from a restricted point of view, aestheticised and idealised by both Lennox and Baxter, and appearing – again, like Browning's duchess – in painted portraits that deprive her of agency or the means to express her own interiority. Like Esther, Marian is a good reader of the social world around her. During a sitting for the wedding portrait, for example, she 'read in Baxter's eyes that she looked supremely beautiful' (219). Indeed, she resists the force exerted upon her by the male

[61] This fits with Powell's interpretation of nineteenth-century magic-picture narratives, which often focus on 'the duality of art and life,' and on their irreconcilability: Powell, "Magic-Picture Mania," 149.

characters by controlling her appearance, by being 'a great artist in the *mise en scène* of emotions' (216). But she is naturally defensive when faced with an amorous eye such as Lennox's 'penetrating glance' (231). And she is ultimately forced to reveal her inner life through involuntary physiological responses. When Lennox reveals that he has made Baxter's acquaintance, for example, Everett 'changed color—ever so little; no more, indeed, than was natural to an honest surprise' (217).[62] This link between physiology and psychology has a parallel in Baxter's portrait: the painter's art shows on its surface what he believes to be the deep truth of Everett's character; Everett's blush, meanwhile, reveals on her body what she might otherwise have tried to hide. This involuntary revelation further links Browning's irony and James's tale. Lennox himself, however, declares that 'Whatever were her [Everett's] failings, they were profoundly involuntary' (240), which further negates her agency.

Throughout "The Story of a Masterpiece," then, Everett is an object to be constructed, rearranged, and possessed. Lennox himself confesses that he performs this kind of rearrangement, though with an emphasis on textuality rather than the art of painting: 'I put you together and take you apart,' he says, 'as people do in that game where they make words out of a parcel of given letters. But there's always one letter wanting. I can't put my hand on your heart' (231, itself echoing Baxter's attack on the 'heartless' Everett). If Lennox puts his fiancée together and takes her apart, Baxter's wedding portrait freezes her, shows her 'beauty' 'imprisoned forever': 'Her beauty was there, her sweetness, and her young loveliness and aerial grace, imprisoned forever, made inviolable and perpetual' (231). The competing interpretations outlined above throw into ironic relief Lennox's claim that the wedding portrait represented 'Marian, in very truth' (231). The fact that the likeness between Everett and the 'countess' portrait could disappear 'as if it had never existed' (240) proves that, once one aspect of the triangle around the portrait has shifted – the subject or the observer, for example – the image

[62] This 'troubled sense of the blush' is a common feature of nineteenth-century fiction: on the subject see Mary Ann O'Farrell, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 127.

itself shifts, too. Thus, the tale does not tell us who Everett "really" is. It does not reveal whether she is indeed the coquette Lennox and Baxter make her out to be, or indeed whether there is something which can be called the "real" Everett. Instead, we are left with an ambiguity which emphasises these competing interpretations but does not resolve them.[63]

At the end of the tale, there is a clear contrast drawn between a beautiful portrait and a "real" woman, a disjuncture between the painted representation and the vital beauty of a living person. Baxter's new fiancée, whom Lennox meets at the end of the story, places her

> head into almost immediate juxtaposition with that of Marian's image, and, for a moment, the freshness and the strong animation which bloomed upon her features seemed to obliterate the lines and colours on the canvas (240).

The distinction depends on the 'animation' of the woman's 'features' as against the stasis of the painting, her 'freshness' compared to the inert paint on canvas. But this notion of 'animation' points to a deeper issue in the art of painting, one gestured towards above in Locksley's catalogue of Esther's features that form 'no picture' (74). Through its divergent depictions of Everett, "The Story of a Masterpiece" suggests that an individual cannot be contained by a single portrait; one must go on remaking, reforming the image to accommodate – or indeed create – these shifts.[64] These reflections will have lasting implications for James's own fictional

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[63] In this way, the tale's presentation of Everett maintains, to borrow Eve Kosofosky Sedgwick's description of "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), a 'humility of point of view' which 'seems to give the reader permission to imagine some female needs and desires that are not structured exactly in the image of [its male characters' needs and desires] or of the story's own laws': Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 199.

[64] This can be linked with James's use of point of view in the later novels as discussed in Brooks, *Paris*, 51ff and in Bell, *Meaning*. As we shall see in chapter 4, novels like *The Ambassadors* practise a kind of epistemological boundedness: James's observers are in some sense cut off from the world around them, must survive by building working interpretations of the characters with whom they interact, interpretations that are consistently disappointed and constantly modified; these observers, moreover, communicate their inner workings in a curtailed and fragmentary fashion; but they do so in a manner which, as it accretes over time – that is, throughout a novel – provides a broad and well-developed image of the individual. The aesthetic-epistemological reflections in "The Story of a Masterpiece" can be directly affiliated, then, with James's later work, and might even be seen to anticipate them; and these reflections, it should be noted, are occasioned by the art of painting itself, a rival form that motivated James throughout his career to consider and theorise the capabilities of his own art. His tale "The Real Thing" further questions this divorce between art and reality: for a theoretically-sophisticated discussion of the epistemological issues raised by the tale see Fiorenzo Iuliano, "Making and Unmaking (Im)Possible Worlds:

practice. As we shall see in the next chapter, they went on to inform the action of *The Portrait of a Lady*. In that novel, James first articulated his belief that only fiction could contain and construe the mercurial substance of selfhood.

The future of art history

"The Story of a Masterpiece" considers the qualities proper to the art of portraiture, and "A Landscape Painter" focuses on the implications of an enthusiasm for landscape painting. Both tales therefore describe and analyse forms of painting as such, and they can be seen as James's earliest extended reflections on the painter's art. "The Madonna of the Future," on the other hand, takes a historical view of painting—that is, it examines the relation between the American artistic present and European art history; at the same time, and from within this framework, it considers whether certain works or styles might prove untimely or even impossible in the light of historical change. It is apt, then, that James wrote the tale in Rome, a city to which artists of all kinds, from Du Bellay to Piranesi, had come to contemplate how in time majesty may pass to ruin.[65] In January 1873, James sent a letter to his brother William from the newly-established Italian capital – the 1870 Capture of Rome and its subsequent role at the centre of a unified Italy are frequently regarded as the final stage of the *Risorgimento* – where the young American could feel 'the influence' of 'an atmosphere electrically charged with historic intimations and whisperings,' an influence from which he hoped to gain 'practical profit'.[66]

James would have encountered in Rome at the time 'neo-classicists or academic narrativists,' painters whose ambition might 'at best be to make a masterpiece within these arid

Language Games, Naming, and Necessities in 'The Real Thing,'" *The Henry James Review* 40, no. 2 (2019): 137–51, which also provides a useful summary of other key critical problems raised by the tale: ibid., n3.

[65] Rome famously fascinated the Victorians. For a good summary of the relation between Rome and Victorian culture, see Laura Eastlake, *Ancient Rome and Victorian Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[66] James, *Letters 1872–6*, 1: 179. The literature on the *Risorgimento* is enormous but for one of the enduring standard works in the field see Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

styles,' as Arthur Danto has put it in one of the few works of criticism on the story – a recurring theme with these tales – but who were not trying 'to drive art history forward.'[67] And indeed, Theobald, the painter in "The Madonna of the Future," wishes to become 'a *maître d'autrefois* in the living present,' in Danto's words, a prospect which at the time was a 'serious possibility': 'Theobald is in conspicuous ways a deluded man, but James nowhere questions the viability of his ambition'.[68] I argue, however, that the tale is in fact profoundly concerned with precisely this notion of aesthetic progress—in other words, the story is deeply anxious about the viability of Theobald's ambition. But it provides a response to this anxiety, I suggest, through its own use of an earlier European artwork, Balzac's *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*. In this way, and as in the other tales, James once more responds to an issue raised by the painter's art by gesturing towards literature.

"The Madonna of the Future" takes the form of an after-dinner anecdote told by an American named H—.[69] On a trip to Florence, H— meets another American, a painter named Theobald. Theobald intends to become a great artist: he is painting a Madonna to rival those of his idol, Raphael; and he has found the perfect model on whom to base his picture, a local woman he calls Serafina.[70] H— is at first enchanted by the painter, believing him destined for

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[67] Danto, "Future," 113. James did indeed meet academic artists, including the director of the French Academy in Rome, Ernest Hébert (1817–1908), who was partially trained under Delaroche. Hébert invited James to 'his Sunday evenings at the Academy': James, *Letters 1872–6*, 1: 210.

[68] Danto, "Future," 114, 117.

[69] The fact that the narrator of "The Madonna of the Future" has his name obscured by an em dash naturally invites speculation. The letter H would seem to suggest Henry himself; but on the other hand, Theobald's tortured quest for artistic perfection, his life in Florence as a kind of isolated genius, and his dark disturbing fate aligns him with several of Hawthorne's artist characters, from "The Artist of the Beautiful" mentioned above to "The Prophetic Pictures". Hawthorne, too, lived in Italy for a year at the close of the 1850s, which might fit with the (admittedly vague) timeline outlined in James's tale. On the relation between the author of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and James's representation of Italy with a focus on the 1903 group biography *William Wetmore Story and his Friends* see John Carlos Rowe, "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality," *The Henry James Review* 20, no. 2 (1999): 107–34. H— remains H—, though, and there is no clear textual indication that this is anything other than an intentional blank. Its narrative function allows the focus to be on Theobald and therefore anticipates James's practice in *Roderick Hudson*, though not, I think, with the same troubled implications for his sexuality: on the subject see Michèle Mendelssohn, "Homosociality and the Aesthetic in Henry James's *Roderick Hudson*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 57, no. 4 (2003): 512–41.

[70] Raphael played a pivotal role in Victorian aesthetic debates. His Madonnas were taken to represent 'the height of beauty in canonical Victorian art histories,' and they were used by Darwin as an aesthetic reference point with which to compare the beauty of peacock feathers: Teukolsky, *Eye*, 157. But the painter from Urbino also had a 'split identity in terms of the Victorian schema of art history,' as Stephen Cheeke has put it, both 'supremely Christian and dangerously pagan,' admired and reviled for his technical (or, in the pejorative form, mechanical)

artistic greatness. He soon learns, however, that Theobald has been discussing his Madonna for years but has so far produced nothing, save a small though superb 'drawing in red chalk' that 'recalled the touch of Correggio'.[71] H— is shocked, too, to meet Serafina: she has grown old, grown 'coarse,' and is, in any case, distinctly unvirginal (749). When H— informs Theobald of this fact, the painter retreats to his studio; later, he is found paralysed in front of a blank canvas, hours from death. After the funeral, H— leaves Florence for Rome, pausing only to think of Theobald's 'transcendent illusions and deplorable failure' (766).

The tale sets up a conflict between the great artistic past, represented by Raphael's High Renaissance, and the supposedly sterile present, represented by the American Theobald and his imaginative failure.[72] Theobald laments the passing of an age when 'people's religious and aesthetic needs went arm in arm,' when the 'demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable,' must have given 'firmness to the artist's hand'; but as H— declares, 'there is no [such] demand now' (739).[73] For Theobald, the contemporary artist must try to reclaim through imitation the grandeur of the past; for H— this is impossible because historical conditions have shifted. The painter seeks inspiration in Raphael because the 'soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit' (733), as he puts it, a phrase James would later echo in his 1879 study of Hawthorne: 'the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep,' he declared,

perfection: Stephen Cheeke, *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature Before Aestheticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

[71] James, *Stories 1864–1874*, 750.

[72] James had in 1867 read 'Taine on *Italy*,' as he put it to William in May of that year, which made him 'hungry for works of art' (quoted in Danto, "Future," 113). In some ways, Taine is the perfect rival to Ruskin in this tale: the Frenchman's historicism is at odds with Ruskin's vision precisely because Taine does not believe that the necessary conditions can be reconstructed, were this even desirable; he is all too aware of the differences in *race, milieu,* and *moment* that divide the nations. Indeed, his *Philosophie de l'art en italie* – what James called 'Taine on *Italy*' – repeatedly compares England, Germany, Italy, and France both during the late middle ages through the high renaissance *and* to those countries today, emphasising at each stage their various evolutions. For a representative example see Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art en italie* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1866), 55–89. In a way, then, the reflections in 'Madonna' on the historical possibility of Theobald's art consistently attempt to negotiate between a Ruskinian faith in the art of the past and its ability to revivify society as against Taine's historicist account of artistic production.

[73] As Danto points out, the tale is also 'a kind of parable about deferral, of preparation protracted beyond reason': Danto, "Future," 113–4.

and 'American civilisation has had hitherto other things to do then produce flowers'.[74] Thus, if Theobald fails to produce his transcendent painting, it is because he was insufficiently nourished in the womb of his native land: as he puts it himself, Americans 'are the disinherited of Art' (733). H—, however, believes that the future of art history belongs to the American who does not talk but who acts: 'Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nutritive soil,' he declares, 'The worthy part is to do something fine! There is no law in our glorious Constitution against that' (733). Thus, artistic production is linked in the tale to the supposedly American virtue of action as against a putatively superior "European" perception, a dynamic which will go on to animate *The American* (1878).[75] These national differences are also framed in explicitly gendered terms. For instance, H— praises the purportedly masculine, vigorous nature of America and Americans, while Theobald draws inspiration from the allegedly feminine beauty of his European surroundings, asking: 'Is Florence of the same sex as New York, as Chicago?' (741).

"The Madonna of the Future" seems to ask distinctly Ruskinian questions about art and its capacity to revivify a spiritually-stultified society. For example, when Theobald decries the modern separation of spiritual and aesthetic needs, he articulates one of Ruskin's most common complaints; further, he speaks in Ruskinian language about the feminine nature of Florence as against masculine, industrial modernity incarnated in the American city.[76] James was an avid reader of Ruskin in the 1850s and 1860s, a fact which inflected the novelist's early

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[74] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 2. And yet, as James repeatedly notes, it is striking that Hawthorne should be 'so deeply rooted in the soil,' 'the soil of New England [from which] he sprang,' and that his work 'savours thoroughly of the local soil': ibid., 3, 4.

[75] For the classic early study on the subject see Quentin Anderson, *The American Henry James* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957); for a more recent account see Martha Banta, ed., *New Essays on The American* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially chapters 2 and 3.

[76] Though Theobald seems to elide the sexual decadence implied by Ruskin in this feminisation – based, itself, on the critic's distinctive and distinctly negative view of female sexuality – a corruption most clearly articulated in *The Stones of Venice* (1851), which led the critic to place the responsibility for 'the fall of Venice firmly upon the curse of sexuality': J. B. Bullen, 'Ruskin, Venice, and the Construction of Femininity,' *The Review of English Studies* 46, no. 184 (1995): 520.

art criticism and apparently impressed itself upon his 1873 short story.[77] Idiosyncratically, however, Theobald makes his point about the spiritual death of modern art by praising the model of Raphael, the very painter decried by Ruskin as 'the ruin of art'.[78] This pseudo-Ruskinian position points, I think, to a slightly different target for the tale. The real issue is the strictly aesthetic future of American art and the uses it can make of European art history, and not the spiritual or social issues which art might raise—that is, the story is focused on the artist and his work rather than the public and its reception.[79]

The text articulates a liberal belief in progress redeployed in the aesthetic realm and centred on the makers of art.[80] In other words, "The Madonna of the Future" suggests that it

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[77] For example, in an 1868 review essay James argues that Ingres had unfortunately 'looked at natural objects in a partial, incomplete manner'; to be a true artist 'it is necessary to look at Nature in the most impartial and comprehensive manner, to see objects in their integrity, and to reject nothing': James, *CWA*, 1: 6. This echoes Ruskin's injunction to aspiring artists in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843) to 'go to nature in all singleness of heart […] and remembering her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing': John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 29 vols. (London: George Allen 1903–12), 13: 624. James, it should be noted, later explicitly declared his dissatisfaction with Ruskin's views. In an 1877 essay entitled "Italy Revisited," James wrote that instead of 'a garden of delight' Ruskin finds in art 'a sort of assize court in perpetual session. Instead of a place in which human responsibilities are lightened and suspended, he finds a region governed by a kind of Draconic legislation': James, *Italian Hours*, 117.

[78] Quoted in Harold I. Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his parents 1845* (Oxford: Clarendon 1972), 97. Ruskin saw Raphael as partially responsible for the tragic shift from 'vital' religion to 'formal' religion in art and consequently in society: Ruskin, *Works*, 9: 31. He was, above all, the artist to whom the 'medieval principles led up' and from whom 'the modern principles lead down': ibid., 12: 150. This last position was famously taken up by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

[79] Later, in novels such as *The Bostonians*, James considered the problem from the public's perspective. His 1886 novel would seem, in the words of Emily Coit, to imagine 'the expansion of access to culture as self-serving theft and wanton destruction,' and so 'understand democracy' as in fact 'the destruction of culture': Emily Coit, "Henry James's Dramas of Cultivation: Liberalism and Democracy in *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*," *The Henry James Review* 36, no. 2 (2015): 190.

[80] Though this notion of progress must be carefully distinguished from the project of "educative democracy" outlined by American intellectuals in the period which sought, in the words of Leslie Butler, the 'liberal cultivation of democracy' by expanding access to culture: Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 123–5. This project was advocated by a host of American intellectuals in the latter half of the nineteenth century, including by James's early mentor Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), and was carried out in journals such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, where "The Madonna of the Future" was published. As Butler puts it, an amalgam of 'Millian liberalism and the veneration of culture associated with Carlyle and Arnold formed the distinctive character of this enterprise,' with figures such as Norton arguing that a serious national engagement with the arts might prove 'as much a leap toward the future' as the contemporaneous embrace of Darwinian science: ibid., 139–40, 148. James was, in the 1870s, increasingly arch about this project and sometimes downright snobbish. For example, in an 1873 review of the newly opened Bethnal Green Museum he declared that art is 'an infinite relief and refuge from the pressing miseries of life'; but although 'art is an asylum,' it is also 'a sort of moated strong-hold, hardly approached save by some slender bridge-work of primary culture, such as the Bethnal Green mind is little practised in': Henry James, "The Bethnal Green Museum," *Atlantic Monthly* 31 (1873): 69. James's review, then, represents an early articulation of an attitude that came to be seen as a hallmark of modernism—namely, the (highly political) effort to disclaim any relation between art and politics.

is Americans who can lead art out of its historical impasse, who can drive art history forward. James, we recall, had written to T. S. Perry in 1867, 'we young Americans are (without cant) men of the future,' while H— declares that the 'Nothing is so idle as […] talk'; the 'worthy part is to do something fine!'[81] In this way, the arguments staged within the tale can be considered an intervention into questions of aesthetic practice relevant to James in the 1870s, the terms of which would occupy him in one way or another throughout his career—namely, what kind of art can an American produce and how will it relate to European artistic models? James's use of Balzac in the tale suggests that the answer is clear: Americans can simply paint over European canvases. Instead of pining like Theobald for the lost paradise of Raphael's Renaissance – an epoch that, like the aged Serafina, can no longer serve as an appropriate model – American artists should set about making it new.

"The Madonna of the Future" essentially rewrites Balzac's story. Both tales feature painters obsessed with achieving the ideal; both artists fail to produce a recognisably complete painting; and both are finally driven mad by their own failure, leaving nothing behind after their tragic ends. James quotes *Le Chef-d'œuvre* directly in the tale: Theobald, for example, is more 'poet than a painter,' while Balzac's Frenhofer is '*plus poète que peintre*'.[82] Theobald's fate, moreover, is foreshadowed through another explicit allusion to *Le Chef-d'œuvre*. An American resident of Florence says of Theobald that 'if one were to get into his studio, one would find something very like the picture in that tale of Balzac's—a mere mass of incoherent scratches and daubs, a jumble of dead paint! (745). This passage closely mirrors Balzac's description of the painter Frenhofer's supposed masterpiece, a canvas upon which one could see 'only colours confusedly amassed and contained by a multitude of bizarre lines which form a wall of paint'.[83]

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[81] James, *Letters 1855–72*, 1: 179.
[82] Honoré de Balzac, '*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*,' in *La Comédie Humaine*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex, Thierry Bodin, Pierre Citron, Madeleine Fargeaud, Henri Gauthier, René Guise, and Moïse le Yaouanc, 12 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 10: 437.
[83] '*Je ne vois là que des couleurs confusément amasses et contenues par une multitude de lignes bizarres qui forment une muraille de peinture*': ibid., 436. My translation.

James, then, created a novel piece of art from the template of an earlier tale by an acknowledged master; unlike Theobald, the young writer was far from hamstrung by the master's aesthetic achievement, did not feel the 'ineffable scorn' of the past's 'triumphant authors' (763). Indeed, his use of Balzac legitimises the practice of artistic "borrowing": as Theobald himself declares, like Baxter and James before him, the 'genuine' artist 'takes his property wherever he finds it' (743).

Like James's tale, Balzac's story also intervened in contemporary aesthetic debates. As Jon Kear has shown, Frenhofer's aesthetic principles have 'far more meaning' in respect to discussions about 'line and colour in contemporary French painting' than to the context of seventeenth-century France in which the story is set.[84] Contrary to *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, however, James does not engage with issues of painterly method in "The Madonna of the Future," in part, perhaps, because Theobald never actually sits down to paint. He prefers his leisure in the galleries and churches of Florence to the labour of artistic production, declaring that art is 'a temple of labour, but of leisure' too (735). This dynamic of labour versus leisure, action versus contemplation animates the text throughout, just as it did "A Landscape Painter"; it also marks many of James's later works, which often portray people in whom, in James's own words, 'contemplation takes so much the place of action'.[85] This further echoes Balzac's narrative: Theobald lacks that acutely Balzacian quality, energy, which, as many critics have noted, is closely related in the Frenchman's work to the idea of sexual potency.[86] In *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, for instance, art and sexual desire are clearly conflated. As Jon Kear has put it, 'the act of looking at the naked model and the act of painting are for Frenhofer essentially

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[84] Jon Kear, "'Frenhofer, c'est moi': Cézanne's Nudes and Balzac's *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*," *Cambridge Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (October, 2006): 347. Though as noted above, this was a long-running debate which in fact saw one of its most significant episodes in the seventeenth century. *Pace* Kear, then, it seems to me significant that Balzac chose a young Poussin as his protagonist – given the conflict between Poussin's follows, the so-called *poussinistes*, as against the *rubénistes* – which allowed Balzac to intervene obliquely into the debate between Delacroix and Ingres: see Puttfarken, *Theory*, Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700–1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Shelton, "Ingres".

[85] James, *A Small Boy*, 19.

[86] See especially Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), chapter 3.

interdependent acts of passion.'[87] Indeed, Frenhofer's masterpiece is deferred in part because he has failed to find a suitably beautiful model, which gives the story's protagonist, a young Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), the idea to offer his own lover as a model for Frenhofer in exchange for the elder painter's mystical secrets. But in James's tale, the gazing artist has become impotent, with Theobald lacking what Danto calls 'romantic frenzy' (120). This could be a direct result of his idealisation of Raphael: transfixed by the example of the old master, Theobald cannot bring himself to produce anything at all. He lives, ultimately, in an aesthetic realm of perpetual belatedness; he has come too late in the narrative of art history, too fatally after Raphael; and this very belatedness negates his own future action.

In the end, Theobald is, like Locksley in "A Landscape Painter," betrayed by his lack of industry; he is deceived by his idealising vision; and he is paralysed by his devotion to Raphael. His lack of energy and his inability to act are neatly contrasted to a local artist, a 'small, wiry man' with a 'little black eye, and waxed ends to his moustache' (755–6). This man (who remains unnamed) is crude, oleaginous, and seems to H— to be 'little more than exceptionally intelligent ape' (759)—a striking affinity given that the tale itself is fundamentally concerned with historical evolution. However, he is also a productive artist who makes statuette figures of male and female animals that satirise 'human life,' and that are 'strikingly clever and expressive, at once very perfect cats and monkeys and very natural men and women' (759). H— immediately asks himself whether Serafina 'had an eye for contrasts' (760), such is the man's naked cynicism and gross productivity: nothing could be further from Theobald's exalted idleness than his Italian counterpart's rough industry. In this formulation, Theobald had too much faith in the timeless, transcendent power of the "masterpiece," while other, less idealistic artists went about their business. In this way, 'Madonna' shifts the valence of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, transforming Balzac's *étude philosophique* into a kind of morality tale, the moral of which

[87] Kear, "'Frenhofer, c'est moi,'" 356.

is "real painters paint".[88] Like "A Landscape Painter," then, the story also reflects on what artists in general require: a penetrating critical faculty as well as a capacity for work; a sense of the ideal married to a sense of the practical; and a knowledge of art history coupled with a willingness to borrow freely from it. These reflections do not apply specifically to painters. They are valid in the world of letters, too. It is worth noting, then, that when "The Madonna of the Future" was first published, James had yet to produce a single major work.

Alongside their considerations of the painter's art and their concomitant reflections on the art of fiction, each of these tales stage a conflict between the possessive and aestheticizing gaze of their male characters against their female characters who seek, with varying degrees of success, to evade this form of possession. In all three of these stories, James's painters idealise or aesthetically control the women they encounter, treating them as ready-made portraits, Renaissance countesses, or radiant Madonnas; and in all three tales, this perception is challenged, dismantled, or evaded by more prosaic observers. In 'Madonna,' for example, H— notes that Serafina was to Theobald 'as loftily exalted above the line of common vision as his artistic ideal was lifted above the usual practice of men' (747); but when H— finally meets her, he declares that she is 'neither haggard nor worn nor grey; she was simply coarse' (748–9). Moreover, these female characters are often positioned as aesthetic objects with recourse to the art of painting, either by metaphor (being compared to or described as a portrait) or through having their portrait painted. But these women are lucid counter-observers, capable of subverting or taking advantage of this way of seeing. This establishes a tension in these tales between the effects one can achieve through writing as against painting. But it also sets up a tension between attitudes of interpretation: male characters like Locksley possess a classic male gaze, reading the surface for aesthetic pleasure, while female characters like Esther read

[88] Although Balzac's Poussin, too, is warned that he must not divagate, must not imitate Frenhofer: '*Ne l'imitez pas ! Travaillez ! Les peintres ne doivent méditer que les brosses à la main*': Balzac, *La Comédie*, 10: 427.

suspiciously, and turn this suspicion to their advantage. Nowhere is this dynamic clearer in James's work than in his first major novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*.

2. Henry James's portrait painting

By the time Henry James met John Singer Sargent in Paris in 1884 – the year *Madame X* was the Salon's *succès de scandale* – the novelist could consider himself firmly established.[1] He had produced seven novels, tens of short stories, a range of critical essays, a biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and several works of travel writing. In other words, he was no longer the apprentice author we saw in the first chapter. In fact, James was confident enough in his own position to consider Sargent's carefully. In June 1884, he wrote about the painter to his friend, the American artist Elizabeth Boott.[2] He described the scandalised response to *Madame X* as a 'pretty bad' 'failure' which showed that Sargent had 'got all […] that Paris can give him'.[3] London was the obvious next step: 'I want him to come here to live and work,' James said, 'there being such a field in London for a real painter of women, and such magnificent subjects'.[4] He soon got his wish. In 1886, Sargent left Paris definitively and took over Whistler's old studio on Tite Street in Chelsea.[5] From his own residence in London, James continued to watch over the painter's career. In 1887, he wrote a profile of the artist for *Harper's Magazine* which helped

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[1] James had been in Paris working on *The Bostonians* and visiting novelists such as Zola and Alphonse Daudet. He wrote: 'They do the only kind of work, today, that I respect […]. & in spite of their ferocious pessimism & their handling of unclean things, they are at least serious and honest': Michael Anesko, *Letters, Fictions, lives: Henry James and William Dean Howells* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243. On James's relation to naturalism see especially Lyall H. Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1971); and Nicholas Tingle, "Realism, Naturalism, and Formalism: James and 'The Princess Casamassima,'" *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 21, no. 2 (1989): 54–66. On Sargent's *Madame X* see especially Trevor Fairbrother, "The Shock of John Singer Sargent's *Madame Gautreau*," *Art Magazine* 55 (1981): 90–7; Elaine Kilmurray and Richard Ormond, *John Singer Sargent: Early Portraits, Complete Paintings*, 9 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998–2016), 1: 112–7; and Susan Sidlauskas, "Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent's 'Madame X,'" *American Art* 15, no. 3 (2001): 8–33.

[2] Boott was an active part of the American expatriate community in Florence, where she lived for many years at the Villa Castellini, widely believed to have inspired Gilbert Osmond's residence; she exhibited in both America (including at the Doll and Richards gallery in Boston) as well as, in 1886, at the Paris Salon; and she was married to the American artist Frank Duveneck: see Carol M. Osborne, "Lizzie Boott at Bellosguardo," in *The Italian Presence in American Art, 1860–1920*, ed. Irma B. Jaffe (New York and Rome: Fordham University Press and Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1992). On James's correspondence with Boott in the 1880s see Jennifer Eimers, "'No greater work of art': Henry James and Pictorial Art," *The Henry James Review* 23, no. 1 (2002): 72–84.

[3] Henry James, *Letters 3: 1883–1895*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 42.

[4] Ibid., 42.

[5] For more on the subject see Devon Cox, *The Street of Wonderful Possibilities: Whistler, Wilde, and Sargent in Tite Street* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2015).

Sargent on his way to becoming the 'darling of Boston's artistic elite' when he visited America in 1887–8.[6]

If James and Sargent have 'often been paired together' by art historians and literary critics, the connection is worth dwelling on further, at least for a moment.[7] Because it is in his profile of Sargent that James famously declared: 'There is no greater work of art than a great portrait'.[8] This is an 'extraordinary statement,' as Ruth Bernard Yeazell has recently put it, 'especially from an artist who is himself known above all for the representation of human consciousness rather than appearances'.[9] Indeed, its seemingly frank deference to the art of portraiture has animated some of the best criticism on James's relation to painting, including Yeazell's own penetrating essay. It is also one of the only places the novelist spoke at length about portrait painting, which has made it the privileged site of enquiry into James's response to the genre.[10] In this chapter, however, I want to trouble the meaning assigned to the novelist's claim by critics such as Yeazell. I will suggest that *The Portrait of a Lady* qualified, in James's terms, as a 'great portrait'; but I will argue that, rather than as an analogue to painting, the novel positions itself as a rival to the art of portraiture. I will begin by contextualising this rivalry,

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[6] Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 68. Sargent received over twenty commissions on this trip alone, including such lucrative offers as a $3000 commission from Isabella Stewart Gardner: McCaughey, "Native and Nomad," 134.

[7] The habitual pairing of the two artists is highlighted in Barry Maine, "Picture and Text: Venetian Interiors in Henry James and John Singer Sargent," *The Henry James Review* 23, no. 2 (2002): 138. For the most recent accounts of their relation see *James and American Painting*, 75–95 and Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 309–35. See also Millicent Bell, "Sargent and James," *Raritan* 18, no. 3 (1999): 58–84.

[8] James, *CWA*, 1: 427.

[9] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 309.

[10] Yeazell provides an almost comprehensive account of James's more theoretically-oriented discussions of portraiture. She notes his familiarity with Reynolds's *Discourses* – in his 1868 review of P. G. Hamerton's *Contemporary French Painters* the novelist listed the *Discourses* as one of the few works in English for the 'serious student' of painting – and deduces from this his familiarity with 'classical art theory': James, *CWA*, 1: 3; Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 313. She also mentions James's 1873 review of the Wallace Collection – then on display at the Bethnal Green Museum – in which the novelist wrote briefly about Reynolds and Gainsborough, as well as his 1897 review of the New Gallery on Regent Street, London, in which James had an 'imaginary thrill' in response to portraits by G. F. Watts: ibid., 316–7, 324. On the history of the Wallace Collection see Donald Mallett, *The Greatest Collector: Lord Hertford and the Founding of the Wallace Collection* (London: Macmillan, 1979). For James's less theoretically-charged comments on specific portraits see especially his brief discussion of Frans Hals and Aadrian de Vries: James, *CWA*, 1: 41–2; his response to Frank Duveneck, in which he compares the painter to Velasquez: ibid., 103–5, 137–8; and his account of the 1876 Salon including portraits by Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–84) and Carolus-Duran (1837–1917): ibid., 187–90.

showing the ways in which such a pursuit appeared legitimate in the 1870s and 1880s, before turning to the novel itself.

The pen, the pencil, and pictorial art

The Portrait of a Lady was a major publishing success but its critical fortunes were mixed.[11] Many contemporary critics were exasperated by the novel's insistent suggestiveness, by its ambiguities, and, most of all, by its inconclusive ending.[12] Perhaps because of its forbidding subtlety, several of these reviewers used the inter-art analogy suggested by the novel's title to structure their response. Boston's *Literary World* praised James's 'minuteness in portraiture' while the *London Times* spoke of the 'vast canvas' which was 'finished off with the minute detail of the most painstaking miniature painter'; the *New York Times* declared that James 'indulge[d] himself more than ever in the pleasure of putting little strokes everywhere' while *Critic* described the novelist as one of America's 'keenest and most vigorous character painters'.[13] Part of this language was mere convention: the prolific reviewer R. H. Hutton, for example, spoke of James's *Washington Square* (1880) in similar terms, despite there being no apparent relationship between that novel and the visual arts.[14] Nonetheless, the frequency and consistency of its use

[11] On the subject see the introduction to Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Michael Anesko (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), lxiii–lxiv.
[12] See Roger Gard, ed., *Henry James: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1998), 93–124.
[13] Kevin J. Hayes, ed., *Henry James: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 133, 131–2, 125, 128. The list goes on: the reviewer for the *Athenaeum* counselled James to 'furnish his box with some stronger colours, and lay them on boldly' (122); *Nation* spoke of the novel's 'light touch,' 'low tones,' and 'polish' (148); and the *New York Sun* noted that James distinguishes his characters 'not by sharp divergences of contour and color, but by slight linear variations and faint diversities of shade,' and therefore used only 'pencils of the finest point and pigments of a soft and exquisite gradation' (122).
[14] For example, Hutton writes that 'it interests him [James] much more to paint the various aimless ways in which human beings get almost involuntarily into a sort of entanglement with each other, than to paint the course of a series of events […]. In his pictures, most passions fade away': Gard, *Heritage*, 88.

across these reviews suggests that, for these critics, there was a clear analogy between *The Portrait of a Lady* and the art of portraiture.[15]

Modern commentators have continued to highlight the connection between *The Portrait of a Lady* and painting. Adam Parkes, for example, has discussed the novel in relation to the Ruskin-Whistler trial of 1877–8, focusing on the moral and political issues at stake in the conflict between critic and artist.[16] David Lubin, on the other hand, has placed the text alongside Thomas Eakins's *The Agnew Clinic* (1889) and Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882), arguing that James's fiction is an attempt to 'make a portrait' of its protagonist, Isabel Archer, that simultaneously assesses 'the moral value – the benefits, the drawbacks, the psychological cost – of engaging in such an act'.[17] Marc Simpson has briefly but suggestively described James as the 'supreme prose portraitist' who 'found in Sargent a potential pictorial match.'[18] And in Yeazell's account, *The Portrait of a Lady* shows itself in sympathy with Sargent's art by occasionally 'occluding [Isabel's] consciousness and inviting us to imagine – rather than pretending to know – what she is thinking.'[19] Like James's contemporaries, then, these critics also see the novel as in powerful ways analogous with portrait painting. Contrary to this position, I argue that *The Portrait of a Lady* is self-consciously at odds with the art of portraiture—that is, the novel gives sustained attention to the discrepancies between painted and literary

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[15] This analogy was suggestively sustained by a critic who, responding negatively to Sargent's works at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1886, described the painter as 'the Henry James of portraiture; and I can't help wishing he were not—as I can't help wishing that Henry James were not the Sargent of the novel': quoted in *James and American Painting*, 85.

[16] The narrative of the trial is well-rehearsed: Ruskin accused Whistler of 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' and asking for two hundred guineas in exchange (the painting in question was *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* [1875]); Whistler sued the critic for libel and won, but was awarded only a single farthing in damages; Ruskin's pride and reputation were wounded, while Whistler was bankrupt within six months. In Parkes's persuasive account of the trial, Whistler challenged one of Ruskin's dearest beliefs: that art could help to construct a moral community which would, in turn, produce an equitable political community; contrary to this position, Whistler argued that art should be amoral, apolitical, and, crucially, unmediated by critics. In this way, the painter questioned the notion, dear to Ruskin, that art could and should be for all members of a society, and not simply for a cultivated, sensitive, happy few. James, in Parkes's analysis, took up these competing notions of justice and deployed them in his *Portrait*: see Parkes, *Shock*, chapter 1. For Ruskin's attack see Ruskin, *Works*, 29: 160. For an exhaustive account of the trial see Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

[17] David Lubin, *Act of Portrayal: Eakins, Sargent, James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 124.

[18] Marc Simpson, in *James and American Painting*, 85.

[19] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 331.

portraits; in the process, it highlights the relative advantages afforded by fiction in this pursuit. Lubin's argument therefore misses something fundamental about James's novel: *The Portrait of a Lady* does indeed examine the 'moral value' of portraiture; but rather than assessing the art of portraiture in general, the text repeatedly stages a contest between painted and literary portraits. Likewise, though Yeazell is right to emphasise those aspects of painting which James might have envied, he nonetheless concluded unequivocally, I think, in favour of the art of fiction.[20]

The novel articulates a distinction between painting and fiction that was lucidly captured in February 1882 by the anonymous critic for *Harper's*. Unlike other commentators who merely gestured towards the inter-art analogy, this reviewer framed artistic relations as a contest. James's work proved 'how successfully the pen may compete with the pencil in the sphere of pictorial art':

> the pencil has the advantage of appealing directly to and delighting the eye, and the impressions it is thus able to make upon us are instantaneous and permanent; but it is subject to limitations which do not circumscribe the range or hamper the freedom of the pen. For however admirable a portrait in colors may be, it can present its subject in one only of his attitudes, it must drape him in an unvarying garb, it must environ him with accessories that become monotonous under their unchanging fixedness, and it can only reproduce the expression that he wore at a single moment of his life.[21]

This account of the relative capacities of the two arts essentially recapitulates Lessing's classic theory on the subject which, we recall from the introduction to this thesis, holds that painting is extended in space and therefore necessarily static, while writing is extended in time and thus allows for change.[22] In Lessing's own words, painting 'can use only a single moment of an action' and must therefore choose 'the one which is most suggestive and from which the

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[20] Along with the sheer 'spectacle' and immediacy of a well-executed portrait, Yeazell suggests that James might have envied the 'lifelike' presentation of a painted individual, the image of which invites 'the beholder to imagine an inwardness that is finally closed to him': ibid., 309, 318.
[21] Anonymous, "The Portrait of a Lady," *Harper's* 64 (February, 1882): 474.
[22] See Lessing, *Laocoön*, especially chapter 16.

preceding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible.'[23] But as the critic for *Harper's* notes, each chapter of a novel develops the narrative while also contributing to the unity of the work and thereby develops its characters; in this way, James was able to produce a 'continuous and sustained portraiture' of his protagonist, Isabel Archer, rather than a single, static image of her.[24] Thus, for this reviewer at least, *The Portrait of a Lady* was able to beat portrait painting at its own game.

The critic for *Harper's* was more explicit on the subject than James himself in 1880–1, when his novel was first being serialised. Nonetheless, although the novelist began his career by focusing on the qualities and capacities of the painter's art as such in short stories like "The Story of a Masterpiece," in *The Portrait of a Lady* he directly compared painting and fiction. The novel suggests that the style of portraiture afforded by fiction is unique. The distinctive capacities of fictional portraiture are summarised in a discussion between Madame Merle and Isabel concerning the self: as against the art of painting, the novel can take advantage of both the inward and outward 'expression of one's self,' as Madame Merle puts it, can represent simultaneously '[o]ne's self – for other people' – that is, the outward, material forms, like the way one acts or the buttons on one's clothing – as well as what Isabel describes as 'just the other way,' the sense of self that is internal and resides in sensations, emotions, and intellect.[25] The novelist can depict the latter self through a representation of psychological processes and convey the former by portraying a character like Isabel with other people, or from their diverging perspectives.[26] James's fiction, moreover, represents its characters as in constant need of representation and interpretation – Isabel herself reflects that 'things change but little, while people change so much' (599) – a position which led one contemporary critic to complain that

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[23] Ibid., 78.
[24] Anonymous, "Portrait," *Harpers*, 474.
[25] James, *Portrait*, 211.
[26] This representation depends on a notion of character which, as Peter Brooks has pointed out, has an 'enormous semantic range' and is in general 'very hard to talk about,' not least because it 'stretches beyond any formal definition to encompass much of what we want to include when we speak about "persons"' as well as 'identity': Peter Brooks, *Enigmas of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), vii–viii. It is precisely this range of meaning I mean to embrace when I use the term "character" in this discussion.

James's heroine was ultimately so mercurial, so unfixable, that she appeared to be a 'great blot in the centre of a carefully-painted picture'.[27]

We will see in chapter 4 the full extent of the novelist's opposition between the stasis of painting and the dynamism of fiction as it is figured in *The Ambassadors*. But in *The Portrait of a Lady*, I argue, the contest between the two forms is oriented around the issue of gender. James's novel has long been recognised as centrally concerned with gender: critics have framed the text in relation to subjects such as popular fiction and misogyny, contemporary conceptions of feminism, and the performance of gender identity.[28] I suggest that in *The Portrait of a Lady* the male characters use the techniques, rhetoric, and example of painting to neutralise or control the female characters, and especially Isabel Archer. This process of gendered ekphrasis – in which a male character "reads," views, or figures a female character as an aesthetic object – exercises several constraining effects on Isabel, variously domesticating her or freezing her into a recognisable (and usually stereotypically feminine) mould. But crucially, the text works to ensure that Isabel evades these ekphrastic traps by distinctly literary means—that is, through the novel's capacity to unfold in time. When she is 'framed' beautifully 'in a gilded doorway' in the second half of the novel, for example, and looks every inch 'the picture of a gracious lady,' she quickly 'turn[s] away' after being reminded of the control exercised over her by her husband (387). For Yeazell, passages like this make James's 'portrait-effect explicit,' showing Isabel 'through others' eyes as if seen in a portrait'.[29] This is undoubtedly correct. But it shows, too, the constraining effects the art of portraiture might exert over women as well as the power the

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[27] The critic in question is R. H. Hutton: quoted in Parkes, *Shock*, 35.

[28] On the subject see Paul M. Hadella, "Rewriting Misogyny: *The Portrait of a Lady* and the Popular Fiction Debate," *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 26, no. 3 (1994): 1–11; Richard Henke, "The Man of Action: Henry James and the Performance of Gender," *The Henry James Review* 16, no. 2 (1995): 227–41; Delia Da Souse Correa, "*The Portrait of a Lady*: identity and gender," in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities* (London: Routledge, 2001); Dana Luciano, "Invalid Relations: Queer Kinship in Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady," *The Henry James Review* 23, no. 2 (2002): 196–217; Kristin Sanner, "'Wasn't All History Full of the Destruction of Precious Things?': Missing Mothers, Feminized Fathers, and the Purchase of Freedom in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*," *The Henry James Review* 26, no. 2 (2005): 147–67.

[29] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 331, 300.

portrait artist's gaze might offer men.[30] The novel as a form allows Isabel to literally turn her back on the image which her male observers have constructed of her as the 'picture of a gracious lady'; in this way, the text itself points to the constricting force produced by framing Isabel as the (painted) portrait of a lady while gesturing towards the notionally liberating power of the novel. I say notionally because the novel, too, has its own gender biases, as we shall see. At the very least, *The Portrait of a Lady* demonstrates a readiness to prosecute the way of seeing deployed by its male characters, if it does not finally free its protagonist from this aestheticizing pressure. Ultimately, I argue, the two strategies are interrelated: gendered ekphrasis indicts a coercive way of seeing the world which is deployed by men to control women and which is fostered by the techniques of painted portraiture; at the same time, it is one of the means through which the novel articulates a contest between painting and fiction and so argues for the final superiority of fiction. It therefore looks forward to James's mature theory of artistic relations—namely, his belief that fiction belongs at the top of the hierarchy of the arts.

His brother's keeper: the novelist and his brother of the brush

Despite the attention contemporary critics paid to the relation between James's novel and the art of painting, *The Portrait of a Lady* was published at a time when this analogy was being seriously contested. Rather than stressing the connections between the two forms under the aegis of *ut pictura poesis*, a host of painters and critics in both Britain and France – the two countries in whose literature and art James was most invested, and where he spent most of his time after his move to Paris in 1875 and then London in 1876 – had begun to favour an analogy

[30] As Michal Peled Ginsburg has noted, 'portrayals of a woman by a man (and the stories that represent such portrayals) are often read as reaffirming woman's status as object,' but they also show that men are 'constituted' as 'subjects' through the act of representation: "On Portraits, Painters, and Women: Balzac's *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* and James's 'Glasses,'" *Comparative Literature* 62, no. 2 (2010): 124.

with music.[31] Walter Pater offered only the most famous formulation of the musical analogy in his 1877 essay "The School of Giorgione," arguing that '*all art constantly aspires to the condition of music*'.[32] More broadly, the boundaries between the different art forms were being challenged and redrawn in the period. As Robyn Asleson notes, the concept of equivalence among the various art forms which had 'absorbed ancient and Renaissance theorists sparked new interest in England (as well as on the Continent) in the 1860s'.[33] In fact, the issue had been broached with some regularity since at least the close of the eighteenth century, though artistic relations became increasingly strained as the nineteenth century progressed.[34] By the 1860s, painters and art critics – many of whom were novelists earning a more reliable living through the practice of criticism – can frequently be seen to express in their works 'undercurrents of competition, territoriality, and the subtle but unmistakeable effort to establish new generic boundaries,' as Alexandra Wettlaufer has shown.[35] In other words, the notion of the sister arts became once

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31 There has been a long tradition of debating whether James was "more" British or American as a novelist, with major contributions from F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), Robert Emmet Long in *The Great Succession: Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979) and Brodhead, *Hawthorne*. But there has been a parallel (and in many ways still vital) tradition recognising, in Edwin Sill Fussell's phrase, the French side of Henry James: Philip Grover's *Henry James and the French Novel* (London: Elek, 1973); Brooks's *Melodramatic Imagination* and *Paris*; Pierre A Walker's *Reading Henry James in French Cultural Contexts* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995); Adeline Tintner's *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); and Edwin Sill Fussell's own *The French Side of Henry James* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). A survey of James's collected critical writings on art and literature will show that he devoted almost equal attention to both contexts, though with the balance tipping in favour of France in the 1870s and 1880s.

32 Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124. If in Britain the musical analogy has become closely associated with Whistler and Pater, in France it was linked with Impressionist ways of seeing, most notably in its use by Paul Gauguin and the poet Jules Laforgue: James H. Rubin, "*L'impressionnisme et le régime du visuel*," in *Impressionnisme et littérature*, 11. The analogy worked the other way, too. Critics who struggled to categorise Debussy's music, for example, referred to it as Impressionist: Erik Frederick Jensen, *Debussy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6ff.

33 Robyn Asleson, "Nature and Abstraction in Albert Moore," in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 126.

34 On the sister arts, as they were known in Britain, see especially Richard Wendorf, ed., *Articulate Images: The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983) and Thora Brylowe, *Romantic Art in Practice: Cultural Work and the Sister Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). On *la fraternité des arts*, as it was frequently called in France – art being a masculine noun in French – see especially Collier and Lethbridge, *Artistic Relations*. The question took on a particular urgency in the context of French Romanticism and consequently had enormous repercussions in French art throughout the nineteenth century. For a good summary of the critical issues raised by the subject see Pierre Laforgue, *Ut Pictura poesis: Baudelaire, la peinture, et le romantisme* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000). On the topic of art genres and gender see especially Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) and Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

35 Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "Metaphors of Power and the Power of Metaphor: Zola, Manet, and the art of portraiture," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 21, no. 3 (1999): 442. For an account of a comparable dynamic in Britain

more a 'drama' of 'sibling rivalry,' just as it had been in Renaissance Italy, with each form vying for supremacy.[36] For this reason, James's fictional challenge to the art of portraiture was a legitimate pursuit in the 1870s and 1880s.

The 'sibling rivalry' played out, for the most part, in the domain of criticism. Indeed, its signal battle – that between Ruskin and Whistler – was fundamentally concerned with art writing.[37] This is how James himself seems to have understood it when, in December 1878, he analysed the case for the *Nation*. He concluded that the verdict, handed down in November of that year, would satisfy neither party. But he emphasised what it meant for the value of Ruskin's art criticism: although the critic was 'formally condemned,' Whistler was 'not compensated'; 'Mr. Ruskin too, doubtless, is not gratified at finding that the fullest weight of his disapproval is thought to be represented by the sum of one farthing'.[38] James returned to the issue in February 1879, in a review of Whistler's pamphlet, *Whistler v. Ruskin, Art and Art Critics* (1878). The novelist argued that this 'little diatribe against the critics' 'suggests the state of mind of many of his brothers of the brush in the presence of the bungling and incompetent disquisitions […] of the fraternity who sit in judgment upon their works'.[39] Once more, James put art writing

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see Wettlaufer, "The Sublime Rivalry of Word and Image: Turner and Ruskin Revisited," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2000): 149–69.

[36] Michele Martinez, "Women Poets and the Sister Arts in Nineteenth-Century England," *Victorian Poetry* 41, no. 1 (2003): 621. Martinez persuasively suggests that this rivalry was informed in part by the 'rise of professional women painters and sculptors' in the nineteenth century: ibid., 621.

[37] It was therefore part of the long tradition of 'word-image rivalry': on the subject see especially W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," *SAQ* 91, no. 3 (1992): 695–719; and Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). For Whistler, the material specificity of painting was elided by a critical language which treated paintings as allegories in demand of explication, what Pierre Bourdieu has called 'the painting as pretext to literary dissertation': Pierre Bourdieu, *Manet, une révolution symbolique* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 131. According to Whistler, critics interpreted paintings as 'more or less a hieroglyph or symbol of a story,' and treated works in paint as they would 'a novel – a history – or an anecdote': James Abbot McNeill Whistler, *Ten O'Clock* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), 17. This meant that, for Whistler, criticism was, in the words of Michèle Mendelssohn, 'deleterious to art' itself: Michèle Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 114. The issue went on to have a significant critical afterlife. Oscar Wilde, for example, would later interpret positively what Whistler had taken negatively, suggesting in "The Critic as Artist" (1891) that, for the critic, 'the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own': Oscar Wilde, *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (London: Everyman's Library, 1991), 29.

[38] Henry James, "Notes," *Nation* 17 (19 December 1878), 385.

[39] James, *CWA*, 1: 301. In fact, the novelist argues that the defect is principally with British art criticism: the 'critiques in the local journals' in London are 'almost incredibly weak,' he says; 'to turn from one of them to a critical feuilleton in one of the Parisian journals is like passing from a primitive to a very high civilization': ibid., 302.

at the centre of the issue. On this count, the novelist had some sympathy with Whistler. Indeed, he noted that the 'whole artistic fraternity' is 'in the same boat': painters, writers, and musicians all had a 'standing, and in many ways a very just, quarrel with criticism'.[40] Based on James's response to the trial, then – as well as his account of Whistler's 'diatribe' – the problem seemed clearly to be with criticism itself. It therefore did not necessarily entail, for the novelist, a conflict between painting and fiction.

As early as 1868, James registered his awareness of the 'quarrel with criticism' expressed by 'his brothers of the brush,' but he was sanguine about its outcome. In his review of P. G. Hamerton's *Contemporary French Painters* (1867), he noted that painters 'have a strong sense of the difference between the literary point of view and the pictorial, and they inveterately suspect critics of confounding them'; James, however, argued that, though painters 'naturally' had a 'great distrust' of those who wrote about their art, they nonetheless required 'honest and intelligent mediators' to 'interpret' and 'expound' their work to the public.[41] Nevertheless, by 1884, the novelist was decidedly less optimistic about the role of literary criticism. Frustrated by what he perceived to be the unequal treatment critics gave writers and painters, he spoke out on the subject in his influential polemic, "The Art of Fiction". In that essay, he moved from

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[40] Ibid., 303. James would later express a similar sentiment of solidarity, declaring to Whistler in 1897 that 'the arts are one, and with the artist the artist communicates': Henry James, *Selected Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 303. For the processes involved in the kind of criticism with which Whistler took issue see Stefano Evangelista, "Swinburne's Galleries," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (2010): 160–79.

[41] James, *CWA*, 1: 4–5. The economic realities of the contemporary art world supported his judgment as, throughout the period, shifting material and institutional factors brought painters, critics, and the art market into ever closer relation. In France, for example, the growing independence of individual artists and movements, along with the decline of the Academy's cachet, meant that painters became progressively more dependent on the art press and art dealers: see Michael Moriarty, "Structures of cultural production in nineteenth-century France," in *Artistic Relations*, 15–29; Patry, ed., *Inventing Impressionism*; and House, *Impressionism*, 190ff. In Britain, the proliferation of art writing and specialist periodicals conform to a similar pattern, although the motivating factors were naturally different. In the British case, for example, the impact of liberal ideas concerning the education of the middle classes via culture had a greater impact than a shift in the Royal Academy's influence, which had never been as powerful as its French counterpart. As Kate Flint puts it, in Britain the emphasis was on 'a shared knowledge, and shared opinion' rather than the French focus on the 'activation of the individual eye': *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 196. The role of the Royal Academy in Britain, though relatively restrained when compared with France, was nonetheless significant: see Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe, 1700–1830: A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Urban Economic Growth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 262–3. In both countries, art criticism flourished, sustaining what Peter Collier has called an 'elaborate interplay between' image and text: Collier, "Romantic image," in *Artistic Relations*, 161. On the British context more generally see especially Teukolsky, *Eye*; and Wendy Graham, *Critics, Coteries, and Pre-Raphaelite Celebrity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

articulating a shared quarrel with criticism to outlining what he viewed as the superiority of fiction as against the painter's art.

"The Art of Fiction" consistently links painting and the novel. James declares from the outset that 'the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete'.[42] He does so with the explicit intention of winning for the novelist the same rights he saw as granted to the painter: he argues that there is a lingering 'suspicion' against the novel as there used to be against painting – an oblique reference to iconoclastic traditions within Christianity – and he suggests that the only way to vanquish this suspicion is 'to emphasise the analogy,' 'to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history' (46).[43] He further stresses the analogy to advocate for a better critical practice. For instance, he claims that there are 'bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning' (55). Similarly, he attacks the 'moral timidity' (62) which has allowed a 'certain difference' to persist between that which critics 'feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature' (63)—that is, James takes issue with the primness of English fiction and its critics who restrict the resources available to the novelist.[44] He seeks to counter this 'moral timidity' by further linking painting and fiction. He asks 'how (a novel being a picture) [can] a picture […] be either moral or immoral?' (62). Thus, the analogy between the two arts is presented as indeed 'complete'.

But there is a striking slippage in "The Art of Fiction". James begins by advocating for complete equality and equivalence across the two forms. He writes: 'Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle), is the same, their success is the same' (46). But he ends by declaring that fiction is the superior form. He frankly declares that 'the novel seems to me the most magnificent form of art' (61). This is because it offers

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[42] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 46.
[43] As Yeazell points out, to call 'the novel a "picture" was to claim the authority of an art apparently dedicated to representation as an end in itself—an art that could serve as a precedent for [James's] own efforts in another medium': Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 315.
[44] On the kinds of situation James had in mind see Brooks, "French Novels," 202–12.

'few restrictions and such innumerable opportunities. The other arts, in comparison, appear confined and hampered; the various conditions under which they are exercised are so rigid and definite' (64)—the 'grammar of painting,' for example, 'is so much more definite' than that of fiction (50).[45] The novelist has 'few restrictions' and 'innumerable opportunities'; and this comparative liberty means that fiction, for James, was the 'most magnificent form' of art.[46]

"The Art of Fiction" ostensibly looks to painting as an ally in a shared 'quarrel with criticism'.[47] But in the process, it frames the painter's art as an opposing and, ultimately, inferior

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[45] James's understanding of the 'grammar' of painting can usefully be clarified by his response to Whistler, who developed his own 'vanguard stance' against 'careful finish, naturalistic subject-matter,' and other representational strategies to which James was accustomed: Caroline Arscott, "Poynter and the Arty," in *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, 138. James disapproved of Whistler's exclusive emphasis on form, and was scathing about his use of the musical analogy. In 1877, in his account of an evening at Sir Coutts Lindsay's Grosvenor Gallery, James took up Whistler's own emphasis on the musical analogy, only to turn it against the painter: 'Mr Whistler presents half a dozen "nocturnes", "arrangements", and "harmonies". Since our business is with pictures, it were better, I suppose not to speak of these things; but, after all, their material is paint and canvas, and they are framed and hung upon a wall': James, *CWA*, 1: 237. The novelist went further still: he declared that he had 'never seen any combination of these ingredients which has struck me as less profitable'. The exchange value implied by the term 'profitable' as well as its moral implications (in the sense of providing edification) suggests that the critic has been short-changed by the painter's attempts at artistic innovation. The problem for James was that these works illustrated 'only what one may call the self-complacency of technicality'; 'they belong to the closet, not to the world': ibid., 237. On the Grosvenor Gallery see *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, ed. Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) and Barbara Bryant, "The Grosvenor Gallery, Patronage and the Aesthetic Portrait," in *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860–1900*, ed. Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 158–77.

[46] George Eliot makes a similar point about the novel and its 'few restrictions' though with a different target in mind. In her 1856 essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" Eliot argues that 'there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements'; 'in novel-writing there are no barriers for incapacity to stumble against, no external criteria to prevent a writer from mistaking foolish facility for mastery': George Eliot, *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 324. If James sought to win for fiction the prestige associated with painting, Eliot's essay is oriented along gendered lines: women can 'fully equal men' in the art of fiction because the novel is 'free from rigid requirements,' which means that no 'educational restrictions can shut women out from the materials of fiction': ibid., 324. In other words, women were not constrained by the institutional or social barriers which prevented them at the time from training in the other arts. The Royal Academy, for example, excluded women art students until 1862, and even then there were enormous prejudices to overcome. For more on the subject see especially Enid Zimmerman, "Art Education for Women in England from 1890–1910 as Reflected in the Victorian Periodical Press and Current Feminist Histories of Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 32, no. 2 (1991): 105–16: Clarissa Campbell Orr, *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); and Jo Devereux, "The Evolution of Victorian Women's Art Education, 1858–1900: Access and Legitimacy in Women's Periodicals," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 4 (2017): 752–68.

[47] As Hilary Fraser notes, however, art criticism had 'an unprecedentedly important public function in nineteenth-century Britain,' with writers such as Ruskin formulating and disseminating 'an entirely new concept of the cultural and moral value of looking at art': Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2. In other words, James's quarrel always differed from Whistler's—though the novelist might have wished literary criticism could take on a similar public role. Indeed, as a 'generalized cultural observer,' in Sarah Burns's phrase, James stood to gain more from criticism than he had to lose: Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 7. The novelist, moreover, had a high conception of criticism at its best. For the young James, it was represented chiefly by the figures of Arnold, Ruskin, and Sainte-Beuve, though their influence on the novelist began to wane in the 1880s. On James and Arnold see Tim Lustig, "James, Arnold, 'Culture' and 'Modernity'; or, a Tale of Two Dachsunds," *Cambridge Quarterly Special Issue: Henry James in the Modern World* 37, no. 1 (2008): 164–93. As for Ruskin,

form. In this way, it slips from a complaint about criticism broadly conceived to a vindication of the rights of the novel. James's essay thereby enacts a kind of ironic repetition of painting's original historical ascendancy: as we saw in the introduction, Renaissance theorists borrowed the authority of poetry through the figure of *ut pictura poesis* to argue for painting's status as a liberal art, thereby granting it the prestige previously reserved for poetic production; James, in turn, borrowed the prestige of the painter's art to guarantee the dignity and value of the novel; but he used this apparent parity to argue for the high place of fiction in the hierarchy of the arts.

On the evidence of "The Art of Fiction" as well as his response to the Ruskin-Whistler trial, the question of the inter-art analogy was vital to James in the late 1870s and early 1880s. And under the guise of a 'complete' analogy between painting and the novel in "The Art of Fiction," he in fact pursued a rivalry. By 1884, however, he had already anticipated in practice this theory of artistic relations, comparing in *The Portrait of a Lady* literary and painterly portraiture. What is more, the novel turns precisely on the question of liberty – Isabel's pursuit of it, and the various means by which it is restricted – just like James's account in "The Art of Fiction" depends on fiction's formal flexibility. Strikingly, one of the chief means through which Isabel's quest for freedom is hampered is by recourse to the rhetoric and metaphor of painting, as well as the ways of seeing encouraged by the art of portraiture.

Gendered ekphrasis and the hierarchy of the arts

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we recall from chapter 1 that as a young man James was enthusiastic about the critic, but he came to view Ruskin's stern moralism as a serious failing: see especially the novelist's remarks from an 1877 essay in James, *Italian Hours*, 117ff. On Sainte-Beuve: as late as 1880 James described the Frenchman as the ideal critic, arguing that his life and work showed that the critic 'was not the narrow lawgiver or the rigid censor […]; he was the student, the inquirer, the observer […] whose constant aim was to arrive at justness of characterization': *Literary Criticism 2*, 684.

James wrote in "The Art of Fiction" that the 'only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life,' which is 'the same attempt we see on the canvas of the painter' (46). But there is a crucial distinction between a novel like *The Portrait of a Lady* and a painting like *Madame X*: Sargent's portrait represents 'an individual human being, actually existing outside the work,' in Richard Brilliant's phrase, and therefore manifests a 'vital relationship between the portrait and its object of representation'; James's fiction pointedly does not.[48] And yet, 'to call his novel *The Portrait of a Lady* was to equivocate' on precisely this issue, 'since such a title conventionally characterises a painting that both refers and doesn't refer: a painting that appears to designate a particular individual but one whose identity has either been politely concealed or forgotten.'[49] My concern is not with this equivocation, however—not, for example, with the extent to which Isabel Archer is modelled on James's cousin, Minny Temple.[50] Indeed, my focus is not so much the positive construction of an alternative portraiture in the novel – though I will have something to say about this, too – but rather with the text's negative critique of portrait painting and its treatment of women. One of the principal figurations of this critique is when Isabel is positioned next to or near paintings.

Despite its title, 'the novel includes no paintings of its heroine'; what it offers instead, according to Yeazell, are 'two key scenes in which Isabel appears through others' eyes as if seen in a portrait': when she first arrives at Gardencourt and when she is seen from the perspective of Ned Rosier after a prolepsis of several years.[51] In these scenes, though, Isabel's physical traits

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[48] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion, 1991), 8. For a fuller account of this relation see Woodall, *Subject*.
[49] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 320.
[50] This is a mainstay of criticism on the novel, but see especially James's letter to Grace Norton from 28 December 1880 in Henry James, *Letters 2: 1875–83*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 324; Robert C. LeClair, "Henry James and Minny Temple," *American Literature* 21, no. 1 (1949): 35–48; Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Untried Years* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953), 227–38, 322–33; and Lyndall Gordon, *Henry James: his Women and his Art* (London: Virago, 2012).
[51] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 330–1. Several portraits are alluded to in the novel, all of which are used to reinforce certain of the characters' traits, though none are of Isabel: Lydia Touchett says that Isabel looks as 'solemn' as a 'Cimabue Madonna' (219) following Mr Touchett's death; Osmond is 'as fine as one of the drawings in the long gallery above the bridge, at the Uffizi' (260); Osmond declares that he could point to Lydia Touchett's 'portrait' in a 'fresco of Ghirlandaio's' (271). Osmond, moreover, is known to possess several 'early masters,' presumably portraits; but these 'early masters' are only adduced by Madame Merle because they are 'worth a good deal of money' (290), which might make him appear to Ralph's mother, Lydia Touchett, a suitable candidate for Isabel.

are not described at length; rather, the 'portrait-effect' comes from her being framed, in both instances, by a 'doorway' (14, 387). She is, in the first scene, 'a tall girl in a black dress' (14), still in mourning for her recently-deceased parents.[52] Later, she is 'dressed in black velvet; she looked brilliant and noble,' 'framed' by a 'gilded doorway' (387). However, there are in fact two extended descriptions of Isabel's physical characteristics in the novel, two "portraits" of her. Both are offered from the point of view of male characters – first through Ralph, then through Lord Warburton – and both take place in a picture gallery. In these scenes, fiction and the painter's art seem to cooperate: given that there are no other visually-orientated descriptions of Isabel, the presence of paintings appears to provoke a heightened visual attention in the text. In the process, however, the novel emphasises the capacities and limitations of the art of portraiture; at the same time, it suggests that fiction might offer the greater as well as the fairer form of representation.

The first of these scenes sees Ralph and Isabel in a gallery at Gardencourt, the Touchett's grand English manor. The paintings are scarcely illuminated: the lamplight in the gallery 'fell upon the vague squares of rich colour and on the faded gilding of heavy frames' (47); but the pictures remain 'vague squares,' mere flickering reflections, like the light that shines 'on the polished floor of the gallery' (47). Beside the obscure images, Isabel is described as

> thin, and light, and middling tall; when people had wished to distinguish her from the other two Miss Archers, they always called her the thin one. Her hair, which was dark even to blackness, had been an object of envy to many women; her light grey eye, a little too keen perhaps in her graver moments, had an enchanting softness when she smiled (47).

The gallery space itself triggers a heightened visual attention in the prose: because such spaces conventionally require extended and visually-orientated description when treated in writing, the

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The portraits serve, then, to emphasise Osmond's elaborate patience and obsessive collecting, as well as Madame Merle's mercenary desires for Osmond's financial future.

[52] On Isabel's mourning wear see Clair Hughes, *Henry James and the Art of Dress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 48.

text is aided by the art of painting, nourishing its form in contact with its sister art. But there is also an important distance or disjuncture effected between the paintings in the picture gallery and the description of Isabel, one which emphasises the key formal distinction between painting and fiction. The paintings are amorphous while Isabel is precisely described; the images are 'vague squares' while the young lady is 'light'; the artworks remain static in their heavy frames, inviting but not receiving sustained description; in describing Isabel, on the other hand, the prose shifts between different timeframes: it modulates between the past perfect ('had been', 'had wished') and the habitual state implied by 'always,' as well as the past tense peculiar to narratives in which the future is implied (*this happened, but there is more to follow*). In this way, James gives a brief but totalising image of Isabel as she shifts between different attitudes, moods, and periods of life. The novel, this scene suggests, allows for such dynamic portraiture; the paintings on the wall, meanwhile, remain dark and indistinct.

The discrepancy between these two modes of representation is reinforced when this passage is linked to the gender dynamics within the text. Patricia E. Johnson argues that in these scenes 'the narrative positions and frames' Isabel as a portrait: James's 'omniscient narrator denies other viewing positions and employs a monolithic male gaze'.[53] However, in my reading, it is Ralph's gaze which treats Isabel as an art object, not the narrative voice nor the narrative itself.[54] It should be said that there is a more general lack of consensus about perspective in this scene. Roger Luckhurst, for example, argues that the paintings are 'rich squares [*sic*]' because

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[53] Patricia E. Johnson, "The Gendered Politics of the Gaze: Henry James and George Eliot," *Mosaic* 30, no. 1 (1997): 41, 42. Johnson works from the New York Edition and I have therefore taken the discrepancies between the two texts into account in my analysis of the scene. Her reading evidently builds on Laura Mulvey's seminal work on visual pleasure and narrative cinema, arguing for the analogy between cinema and written narrative: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

[54] Critics have long acknowledged the way in which Isabel is positioned as a kind of art object throughout the novel, but see especially Juliet McMaster, "The Portrait of Isabel Archer," *American Literature* 45, no. 1 (1973): 50–66; Johnson, "Gaze,"; and Freedman, *Taste*, 153–8. Ralph's description of Isabel might usefully be considered a form of ekphrasis. The more appropriate rhetorical figure, though, is probably *hypotyposis*, which provides, in Quintilian's classic definition, such a vivid description that 'it seems to be a matter of seeing rather than hearing'): Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 56–7.

Isabel has no aesthetic training at this point in the novel.[55] But in fact, the bulk of this passage is narrated from Ralph's point of view. First, in the case of the 'vague squares of rich colour': the sentence before declares that 'if the light was imperfect it was genial' (*Portrait*, ed. Horne, 47), and there is no apparent break from this perspective in the next clause; this reference to the 'imperfect' light looks back to Ralph's private fear that the 'light was insufficient to show the pictures to advantage,' a fear he had communicated to Isabel; she 'looked disappointed' – again, this is from Ralph's perspective – which led them to make their nocturnal visit to the picture gallery (47). After their arrival, Isabel 'took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there; […] and as she did so, he found himself […] bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her figure. He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances; for she was better worth looking at than most works of art' (47). Once more, this is patently from Ralph's perspective ('he found himself,' 'bending his eyes,' 'He lost nothing'). Further, it explicitly positions Isabel as an art object—or, rather, as an object that is more aesthetically appealing than 'most works of art'. The description of Isabel begins in the very next clause: 'She was thin, and light, and middling tall…'

Thus, Ralph's gaze constructs Isabel as an art object. Moreover, the extended description of Miss Archer communicates information to which Ralph is unlikely to have had access: 'when people had wished to distinguish her from the other two Miss Archers, they always called her the thin one,' the narrative voice declares; but Ralph, in this scene, has only recently met Isabel, and has certainly not seen her socially in Albany, New York, alongside the 'other two Miss Archers'. Thus, Ralph's point of view is indeed associated with the 'monolithic male gaze,' the kind of perspective which, as Linda Nochlin has shown, was consistently on

[55] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xxiv. Unlike the Horne edition from which I am working, Luckhurst's edition provides the revised New York Edition of the text. Further evidence for my claim can be seen when Ralph reflects on Isabel's situation in dull rented rooms in London: he sits next to 'very brown, vague and incoherent' pictures on the wall (*Portrait*, ed. Horne, 146). Ralph, who certainly does not lack an aesthetic education, nonetheless perceives these pictures to be 'vague'; the paintings are used in opposition to Ralph's turn inwards, the 'vague' canvases contrasting sharply with the novel's psychological realism.

display in Victorian painting.[56] But the narrative voice does not use the same strategies. Rather, as I have suggested, it allows for a more dynamic portrayal of Isabel, even if it does describe her in conventionally feminine terms.[57] In this way, Ralph – who is associated throughout the text with art and 'spectatorship' (155), and who gives the 'appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship' (275) to be appreciated from a 'disinterested' position (364) – exhibits a gaze that is intimately linked to the paintings in this scene, and the picture gallery space more generally; the novel itself, on the other hand, interferes with this process through its repeated shifts in perspective.[58] Put simply, it does not turn Isabel into a static work of visual art. The novel does, however, have its own gender biases.

The Portrait of a Lady has an uneasy relation to gendered ekphrasis, which it expresses chiefly through the figure of Ralph. As many critics have noted, Ralph's priorities neatly match those of the novel.[59] When Isabel is described from Ralph's perspective as 'better worth looking at than most works of art' (47), this is in keeping with his general disposition: Ralph has the proclivities of an aesthete, and the 'passive life' he leads caused by his frail health leads him to 'the delights of observation,' makes him 'observantly disposed' (41–2). Indeed, upon Isabel's arrival, he instantly recognises that he might have some entertainment: 'something told him [that] here was occupation enough for a succession of days' (42); and he argues that the 'conscious observation of a lovely woman had struck him as the finest entertainment that the world now had to offer him' (42). After spending some time with her, he declares that a 'character like' hers is 'the finest thing in nature. It is finer than the finest work of art – than a

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[56] See Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1–36.

[57] This effect is heightened in the New York Edition, where Isabel is the 'willowy one': James, *Portrait*, ed. Luckhurst, 58.

[58] Ralph's 'connoisseurship' and its relation to Osmond has often been regarded as James's coded response to Aestheticism: on the subject see especially Sara Stambaugh, "The Aesthetic Movement and *The Portrait of a Lady*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30, no. 4 (1976): 495–510; Sandra Dwja, "Ut Picture Poesis: The Making of a Lady," *The Henry James Review* 7, no. 2–3 (1986): 72–85; Richard Salmon, "Aestheticism in Translation: Henry James, Walter Pater, and Theodor Adorno," in *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics*, ed. Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2000); and James, *Portrait*, ed. Anesko, xlii–xliii.

[59] As Yeazell puts it, critics have 'long recognised that both Osmond and Ralph Touchett are "types of the artist," and that in imagining their effects on Isabel, James is at once deflecting and critiquing his own relation to his heroine': Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 327. See also, as Yeazell herself points out, Freedman, *Taste*, 153–8.

Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral' (65). These are expected references from a young, Oxford-educated man like Ralph, taking in Ruskin's favoured architecture, the later-Victorian vogue for Greek art, and the high status of the painters of the Venetian Renaissance.[60] But pointedly, for Ralph, Isabel Archer from Albany, New York, supersedes them all, though there remains an unsettling ambiguity over whether she is greater than these art objects or whether, for him, she is herself an *objet d'art*.

The reader, too, is made to understand that Isabel will be their 'occupation,' and instructed to take their 'entertainment' through 'observation,' thus linking Ralph's ways of seeing – related, as we have seen, to painting – with the novel itself. For example, the text opens with a description of a languid tea party at which with comic undertones three men discuss how bored they are; Ralph counsels Lord Warburton that 'he ought to take hold of a pretty woman' (10), while Ralph's father, Daniel Touchett, frankly declares that '[t]he ladies will save us': 'Make up to a good [woman] and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting,' he declares (10)—and then, as though on cue, Isabel arrives.[61] Similarly, Ralph's view of Isabel as promising 'occupation for a succession of days' aestheticises and objectifies her, but it also

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[60] By calling Isabel's character 'the finest thing in nature' and placing it above the 'finest work of art,' Ralph explicitly lobbies for "nature" as an aesthetic standard; in true Ruskinian style, this places the "natural" above the artificial, and therefore the natural world above artistic artifice. We recall from chapter 1 Ruskin's advice in the first volume of *Modern Painters* to 'go to nature in all singleness of heart' […] and remembering her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing,' thereby affirming the perfection of nature: Ruskin, *Works*, 13: 624. There may also be intimations of the homoeroticism found in the work of critics like John Addington Symonds, who used his praise of Greek and Venetian art and life to lobby for a renewed understanding of sexuality, most notably in y Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy, the fine arts* (1877) and, later, the privately printed *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891).

[61] This opening scene itself offers a kind of ekphrasis, its own form of landscape painting: Gardencourt and its surroundings are described at length, and the house itself is called 'the most characteristic object in the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch' (4). Isabel notes that her past might be figured as a series of 'landscapes and figure-pieces; the latter, however, would have been the more numerous' (336), but most of it would lack interest compared to her present life. This is what Marianna Torgovnick has called "pictorial prose" and it recurs throughout the text: Isabel imagines herself, for example, 'in the foreground' of an image, being made love to by a nobleman; 'But if she were the heroine of the situation, she succeeded scarcely the less in looking at it from the outside' (109); later, 'The past and the future alternated at their will, but she saw them only in fitful images, which came and went by a logic of their own' (590). These pictorial or spatial terms ('foreground,' 'fitful images') help Isabel to frame the situation but also help the novelist to communicate the way in which her psychology operates. Similar passages feature in chapter 42: 'his words had put the situation before her, and she was absorbed in looking at it' (445); 'Isabel wandered among these ugly possibilities until she completely lost her way […]. Then she broke out of the labyrinth, rubbing her eyes […] her soul was haunted with terrors which crowded to the foreground of thought' (446).

motivates the novel's plot. When he decides to give Isabel a large share of his inheritance to 'put wind in her sails' Ralph's father notes that it seemed 'as if it were for your [Ralph's] entertainment' (193) rather than for Isabel's benefit. In this way, Ralph's seemingly innocuous comments reveal his aestheticizing habits as well as drawing attention to the novel as a form—that is, his claim that Isabel's character is 'finer than the finest work of art' acknowledges the text's position within a myriad artistic mediums and traditions (sculpture, architecture, painting); and in the process, it suggests that *The Portrait of a Lady* (as represented metonymically by Isabel) belongs at the top of the hierarchy. From its outset, then, the novel draws an opposition between itself and other forms, and especially the art of painting; at the same time, it by turns deploys and challenges the practice of gendered ekphrasis we saw in the picture gallery scene with Ralph.

This dynamic of gendered ekphrasis is essentially repeated in the second extended description of Isabel. This scene also takes place in a picture gallery, though this time Isabel is viewed from Lord Warburton's perspective. Thus, she is only described physically from the point of view of men who are romantically interested in her (though Ralph's allegedly 'disinterested' [364] position remains a subject for debate).[62] In the scene with Warburton, Isabel walked 'to the other side of the gallery,

> and stood there, showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids. She stopped in front of a small picture, as if for the purpose of examining it; and there was something young and flexible in her movement, which her companion noticed. Isabel's eyes, however, saw nothing; they had suddenly been suffused with tears (138).

Isabel is presented from Warburton's perspective ('showing him,' 'her companion noticed') and described in (stereo-)typically feminine terms: 'light slim figure,' 'white neck,' 'young and

[62] On Ralph and Isabel see especially Dennis L. O'Connor, "Intimacy and Spectatorship in *The Portrait of a Lady*," *The Henry James Review* 2, no. 1 (1980): 25–35; and Luciano, "Kinship," 196–217.

flexible'. Once more, it can be argued that this kind of looking is encouraged by the picture gallery and the presence of paintings. Isabel's stopping in front of a 'small picture, as if for the purpose of examining it' suggests that it would be almost absurd for her to actually do so—it was only 'as if' she might examine them. In other words, the picture gallery is a site designed in the novel not for the inspection of paintings but for the description of Isabel; at the same time, it is a place that transforms her into a work of art. Indeed, as Johnson points out, this scene shows Isabel as 'seductively complicit' with Warburton's 'viewing' ('showing him') in ways that are 'in keeping with the tradition of the female nude in Western art': citing John Berger's influential account of the nude, Johnson argues that Isabel 'pliantly offers herself for viewing and does not challenge the visual possession of herself, even by returning this gaze.'[63] This may well be the case, though it is complicated precisely because the description is presented from Warburton's point of view. It can be argued, for example, that the supposedly-decisive 'showing him' is merely Warburton's optimistic understanding of Isabel's behaviour, or indeed an act blanched of intention (*when I show you my back, did I mean for you to see it, or did I simply turn around?*). More importantly, and contrary to the scene with Ralph, this passage frames Isabel from Warburton's perspective before shifting to her own point of view. Indeed, if the metaphor of a painted portrait 'alludes to an enclosed form, which the frame ostensibly isolates from the surrounding reality,' then this passage explicitly makes the leap from such an enclosed form – Isabel as object of aesthetic pleasure – to the 'surrounding reality' of her distress and her threatened liberty.[64]

Isabel's 'eyes' function in implicit opposition to Warburton's in this passage. The shift

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[63] Johnson, "Gaze," 41; she has in mind passages from John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), 46–55. There is also a possible historicist objection to this claim—namely, as Lawrence Venuti has pointed out, that arguments like Johnson's depend on 'the unwitting application of a […] dominant or authoritative interpretation of [an] artwork which the critic assumes the literary text should somehow inscribe to the exclusion of other interpretations': Lawrence Venuti, "Ekphrasis, Translation, Critique," *Art in Translation* 2, no. 2 (2010): 132. In this way, Johnson's reading does not take into account the way in which an author in 1880 might have conceived of the nude, to say nothing of the fact that Isabel is, one might reasonably imagine, fully-clothed in this scene.

[64] Donatella Izzo, "*The Portrait of a Lady* and Modern Narrative," in *New Essays on The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42.

occurs across the period which bridges the following two declarative sentences: '…which her companion noticed. Isabel's eyes,' *on the other hand*… Just at the point at which Warburton gazes at Isabel for his pleasure, then – just when he looks in aesthetic appreciation at her 'light slim figure' and 'her charming back' – the perspective transfers to Isabel herself, reveals that she is blind with sorrow: her eyes 'saw nothing; they had suddenly been suffused with tears'. Isabel is upset in this scene because, as she puts it, she 'can't escape [her] fate' (138). She means that marrying Warburton would represent a kind of failure, a betrayal of her sense of independence. 'It is not my fate to give up – I know it can't be' (138), she says.[65] But at this very moment, she 'saw nothing'. This brief reversal of perspective exposes the fantasy of gendered ekphrasis: the text locates one style of portraiture in Warburton's eyes which aestheticises and objectifies Isabel, only to have it subverted by a brief glimpse of her deep distress. In this way, Isabel does not, in Johnson's phrase, 'challenge the visual possession of herself'; but the Jamesian novel, with its apparatus of narrative point of view, nonetheless works to undermine such 'visual possession' by providing a double perspective of the same event.

Hilary Fraser has noted that in a good deal of Victorian fiction written by women 'an encounter with the visual arts is used […] to convey something profound about [a] fictional heroine and more generally about women's lives'.[66] These picture-gallery scenes accord strongly with this pattern, which reinforces James's well-known close relation with his female contemporaries.[67] But what these scenes convey about Isabel is the tragic vision that, try as she

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[65] For a persuasive reading of Isabel's desire not to marry as a means of frustrating and delaying the demands of plot see Bell, *Meaning*, 80–122. For a similar reading in relation to the novel's conclusion see Lee Clark Mitchell, "Beyond the Frame of *The Portrait of a Lady*," *Raritan* 17, no. 3 (1998): 90–109.

[66] Fraser, *Art History*, 43. Fraser's examples include 'Lucy Snowe's encounter with the paintings of Cleopatra and 'La Vie d'une femme' in *Villette*; the unveiling of Lady Audley's portrait at the heart of her boudoir and her mystery in *Lady Audley's Secret*; the challenges posed by ancient statuary and modern painters to Dorothea Brooke on her wedding journey to Rome in *Middlemarch*': ibid., 43.

[67] The literature on James's relation to George Eliot's art, for example, is enormous. As one commentator has put it, 'many critics' since at least F. R. Leavis have regarded *The Portrait of a Lady* as 'in some sense a George Eliot novel': Selma B. Brody, "Dorothea Brooke and Henry James's Isabel Archer," *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies* 20, no. 21 (1992): 63–6. On James's relation to nineteenth-century fiction written by women, contemporary conceptions of feminism, and the novelist's personal relationships with writers such as Edith Wharton and Constance Fenimore Woolson see especially Alfred Habegger, *Henry James and the 'Woman Business'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Victoria Coulson, *Henry James, Women and Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

might, she will continue to be treated as the very portrait of a lady. At the same time, each of these scenes depend on the kind of looking encouraged by painting to justify or naturalise their representational strategies—that is, the visit to a picture gallery prompts, in its way, each description of Isabel. Thus, the metaphor of painting is central to the novel's only extended descriptions of Isabel and is used as a guide for a certain style of prose description. But all of this is located within the framework of gendered ekphrasis, the dynamics of which elucidate the relations between Ralph, Warburton, and Isabel (the men's aestheticizing proclivities, Isabel's desire and inability to evade their gaze and control). This framework condemns certain of the practices of painterly portraiture, associated with the gazing males; in the process, it gestures favourably to the specificity of prose fiction.

Countering gendered ekphrasis

Strikingly, the polarity of this gendered ekphrasis is reversed in scenes that show Ralph alongside Isabel's friend, the brash but endearing American journalist Henrietta Stackpole. Henrietta is a figuration of the New Woman: she has a threatening form of erotic power which betrays, in the words of Carolyn Mathews, James's 'profound anxiety about the changing role of women and about tensions centred on issues of social class and propriety'.[68] For this reason,

[68] Carolyn Mathews, 'The Fishwife in James's Historical Stream: Henrietta Stackpole Gets the Last Word,' *American Literary Realism* 33, no. 3 (2001): 190. Henrietta is also the object of much of James's satire in the novel. For example, despite her background in art criticism – she had 'at one time officiated as art-critic to a Transatlantic journal' (92) – she professes to have no 'sympathy with inanimate objects' (147). As she puts it herself: 'Scenery is not my department; I always need a human interest' (89). Indeed, in the National Gallery, landscapes by Turner prove 'a poor substitute for the literary dinner parties' at which Henrietta had hoped 'to meet the genius of renown of Great Britain' (147). The irony, of course, is that Henrietta the professional art critic does not know how to appreciate painting. This fits in with James's broader anxiety about American journalism in the 1880s: see especially Allan Burns, "Henry James's Journalists as Synecdoche for the American Scene," *The Henry James Review* 16, no. 1 (1995): 1–17; and Richard Salmon, "'What the World Says': Henry James's *The Reverberator*, Celebrity Journalism, and Global Space," *Journal of Comparative American Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 76–89. On the challenges to women working as art critics in the period see Fraser, *Art History*, 10ff. However, it should be noted that Henrietta's shortcomings as an art critic can be read as a Janus-faced satire. In one sense, it represents Henrietta the Philistine, the vulgar American who doesn't 'care about the past' (147); in another, her priorities are the same as the novel's: she needs 'human interest,' not representations of the object-world, and *The Portrait of a Lady* is patently given over to such human interest. James himself would later declare in his 1907 preface to *Roderick Hudson* that, contrary to

and contrary to Isabel, Henrietta consistently disrupts the process of gendered ekphrasis—that is, whenever someone like Ralph attempts to view her as he would view Isabel, Henrietta repels his gaze, or counters through argument his way of perceiving the world. For example, when Henrietta first 'fixe[s] her eyes upon' Ralph he is disquieted:

> there was something in their character that reminded him of large, polished buttons; he seemed to see the reflection of surrounding objects upon the pupil. The expression of a button is not usually deemed human, but there was something in Miss Stackpole's gaze that made him, as he was a very modest man, feel vaguely embarrassed and uncomfortable (87).

Henrietta inverts the dynamics of Ralph's gaze and so of gendered ekphrasis. The effect is so strong that, to Ralph, she appears not entirely 'human'; her eyes become mere objects, 'buttons,' reflecting his gaze but giving nothing away—objects, moreover, that are associated with clothing, nominally a classic feminine sphere. She is therefore figured as a useful everyday object, rather than the kind of pleasure-giving *objet d'art* to which Isabel is compared. Similarly, Henrietta's presence powerfully shifts the valence of scenes which take place in picture galleries. Whereas the kinds of visual attention triggered by the picture gallery led, in the scenes described above, to lengthy descriptions of Isabel's figure – the very pressure of which brought Isabel to tears – this dynamic is reversed when Henrietta appears with Ralph beside paintings and in galleries. Touring a gallery together, for example, Henrietta stands next to a painting by Watteau only to pointedly ignore it; she thinks instead of Ralph's preference for paintings over "life," a habit which she considers unhealthy (92). Not long after, she turns away from a Constable; but her movement is again toward Ralph, at whom she looks 'as if he himself had been a picture' (92).[69] In these scenes, Henrietta turns gendered ekphrasis against Ralph, one of its principal

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a writer like Balzac, he consistently attempted to 'give the image and the sense of certain things' without 'all the substance or all the surface, and so to summarise and foreshorten': James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1048. Note in this passage the novelist's use of the argot of painting such as 'foreshorten' to communicate his own artistic practice.

[69] In fact, characters in the novel systematically *avoid* looking at paintings, and the text itself presents remarkably few ekphrastic accounts. A representative case occurs towards the end of the novel when Isabel pauses 'in front

purveyors, and consequently makes *him* into a kind of art object to be described, explicated, and enjoyed. She inverts and subverts the kind of looking practised by Ralph, just as elsewhere she critiques his idle appreciation of art, declaring: 'I don't see how you can reconcile it to your conscience' (92). In the process, she disturbs the 'discursive and institutional control' which, as Laurie Kane Lew has put it, men exercised over "high" art in the nineteenth century.[70] Henrietta disrupts this practice by literally turning her back on "high" art in this scene; at the same time, she turns Ralph into an object of aesthetic study. In this way, Henrietta opposes such discursive and institutional control, and thereby disrupts both the specific activity of gendered ekphrasis as well as the interpretative frameworks which underwrite this practice.

The novel's critique of portraiture extends to Isabel's own vision of Gilbert Osmond, which is itself the product of gendered ekphrasis.[71] Towards the end of the novel, she comes to realise that, though Osmond has seduced her through his cunning performances – 'everything he did was *pose*' (415), as the narrative voice declares from Ralph's perspective – Isabel had also willing deceived herself. She had contrived a misleading 'portrait' of Osmond; 'She had a vision of him – she had not read him right':

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of a small picture – a beautiful and valuable Bonington – upon which her eyes rested for a long time. But she was not looking at the picture; she was wondering whether if her aunt had not come that day in Albany she would have married Caspar Goodwood' (599–600). Bonington appears as mere background: the painting exists only as a sign of financial value and abstract (as opposed to concretely described) beauty, both of which place a greater emphasis on the work's place within the market than on its aesthetic power, its ability to speak directly to an individual. Strikingly, Isabel notices the work but does not see it: her 'eyes rested for a long time,' but 'she was not looking'. The painting is not even named; it is used simply as a material setting in which the art of fiction can be conducted. Indeed, in this passage Isabel wonders what her life would have been like had the events of *The Portrait of a Lady* not taken place ('if her aunt' Lydia Touchett 'had not come that day' and asked Isabel to come stay with her in England). Thus, Bonington, and metonymically the art of painting, initiates a reflection on the novel itself, just as Henrietta's disregard for Watteau and Constable – notably artists who worked in landscape and genre forms rather than portraiture – gestures towards the negative effects of Ralph's connoisseurship. It is worth noting, too, that in an 1873 work of art criticism, James associated Bonington with 'the brightness and vigor of youth,' something which Isabel has lost by this point in the narrative: James, *CWA*, 1: 62.

[70] Laurie Kane Lew, "Cultural Anxiety in Anna Jameson's Art Criticism," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 36, no. 4 (Autumn, 1996): 831.

[71] Osmond, who Ralph calls 'the incarnation of taste' (363) and who declares that 'one ought to make one's life a work of art' (323), is often seen as James's coded response to the Aesthetic movement. On the subject see especially Stambaugh, "The Aesthetic Movement"; Salmon, "Aestheticism," in *Translating Life*; Freedman, *Taste*; and Kathleen Lawrence, "Osmond's Complaint: Gilbert Osmond's Mother and the Cultural Context of James's *The Portrait of a Lady*," *The Henry James Review* 26, no. 1 (2005): 52–67. On Isabel's poor judgment (or blindness) towards Osmond, see especially Djwa, "*Ut Pictura Poesis*," 76ff.

> A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of portraits. That he was poor and lonely, and yet that somehow he was noble – that was what interested her and seemed to give her opportunity (449).

She had 'read' only a 'certain combination' of his 'features,' out of which she had produced a specious 'portrait'; in her own way, then, Isabel is guilty of gendered ekphrasis, too—that is, she produced an image of Osmond as a poor gentleman waiting to be rescued by a wealthy wife (this is 'her opportunity'). But her mistake is linked to the art of portraiture itself. The image of Osmond which she had constructed was static, fixed; she was not prepared for the portrait to shift and to change form.[72] The crux of this shift in her perception is that, at first, she thought that Osmond would welcome her independence of mind and spirit; but she comes to see that the 'real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all' (454). Thus, Isabel's portrait of Osmond was just as misleading as that which represented her as the 'picture of a gracious lady' (387). This 'picture' is a fixed image created by one of the male characters – the passage is recounted from Ned Rosier's perspective, who has come to court Osmond's daughter, Pansy – and is belied soon after by Ralph's desperate recognition that Isabel, the 'free, keen girl' we met at the start of the novel, had become Osmond's 'material to work with' (414).[73] By interpreting her 'portrait' of Osmond as his "true" character, Isabel was unprepared for this kind of transformation.

In "The Art of Fiction," James wrote that the novelist 'competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys the meaning' and 'the

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[72] James himself spoke about Osmond in similar terms when his brother, William, suggested some changes to the character: 'it may be that the later numbers of the story have already justified my first portrait of him. I think on the whole he will be pronounced good – i.e. horrid': James, *A Life*, 130.

[73] This transition illustrates the novel's central irony—namely, that Isabel marries Osmond in part because he seems to offer her the very freedom he takes away. James wrote in his notebooks in March 1879 that the 'idea of the whole thing is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, natural, clear-sighted thing, finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional': Henry James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13. Strikingly, Ralph bemoans Isabel's fate in similar terms: '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!' (607). This might be seen to reinforce the claim, made above, connecting Ralph's priorities with those of the text.

substance of the human spectacle' (53). This is in part what Yeazell has in mind when she describes the novelist's portrait-envy: his focus on the surface that reveals depth, the 'look' that 'conveys the meaning'. However, this surface is shown throughout *The Portrait of a Lady* to be consistently misleading, from Ralph and Warburton's image of Isabel as aesthetic object to Isabel's own portrait of Osmond. Portraiture in prose allows for such shifts in interpretation. The key difference between a painted and a fictional portrait, then, is that the latter can change over time; this shift can reveal a character like Osmond for what he really is, or for what he becomes in the course of the text. The novel, ultimately, can unite the two forms of the self articulated by Madame Merle and Isabel, cited in the introduction to this chapter: the outward 'expression of one's self' – 'One's self – for other people' – like the way one acts or the buttons on one's clothing as well as 'just the other way' (211), the self that is internal and resides in sensations, emotions, and intellect.[74] Thus, although paintings represent their subjects with an 'immediacy unavailable to the art of the novelist,' in Yeazell's phrase, fiction has the decisive advantage of making explicit the kinds of psychological effects which painting can only suggest.[75] In prose, one can inhabit another individual's point of view; a painted portrait, on the other hand, remains something to be gazed *at*, rather than providing a new position to gaze *from*.

This would seem to anticipate James's later novels and their use of restricted point of view. In confining themselves to what Peter Brooks has called an 'extreme perspectivalism,' James's late fiction can be taken to manifest a kind of epistemological pessimism—that is, these novels seem to suggest that we can never truly known someone else, that we construct portraits of each other which are ultimately provisional, and which we are forced to revise once we realise the inaccuracy of our initial interpretation.[76] But this in fact reinforces the novel's power,

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[74] As Sandra Djwa has noted, 'this somewhat exaggerated opposition' generates the 'dialectic of the novel,' which highlights the 'difference between the "apparent" and the "real" meaning of an impression generated by an individual who is perceived as a work of art': Djwa, "*Ut Pictura Poesis*," 75.
[75] Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 314.
[76] Brooks, *Paris*, 51.

because the text provides just this opportunity: it offers its readers the capacity to constantly revise their understanding of a given individual, and it dramatises these shifts in interpretation through the relationships between its characters. It is revealing, then, that in his 1907 preface to *The Portrait of Lady*, James called Isabel's fireside vigil in which she recognises her self-deception – in which she realises that her 'portrait' of Osmond was misleading – 'obviously the best thing in the book'; but he noted, too, that it was 'only a supreme illustration of the general plan' (640).[77]

This general plan, I have been arguing, was sustained by and in part built around the distinction between painted and literary portraiture. James continued to reflect on the relation between the two forms in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In the next chapter, we shall see how the novelist extended his discussion to take in not just painting but also other arts, including sculpture, as well as other literary forms, most notably drama. By the time he wrote *The Tragic Muse*, his position on artistic relations had begun to harden. Although his 1890 novel continues the arguments conducted in "The Art of Fiction" and suggested in *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Tragic Muse* is clearer on the subject than any of James's previous novels. It represents one of his strongest statements on the value of fiction. It portrays, above all, the novelist's mature theory of artistic relations, a theory which he had been reflecting on and working towards from the beginning of his career, and which figured fiction as the supreme form in the hierarchy of the arts.

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[77] James noted, however, that this general plan might provide the impression of a lack of finish. He wrote: 'the obvious criticism' would be that it 'is not finished – that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation'—that is, he anticipated the kind of critic who would consider Isabel as little more than a 'great blot in the centre of a carefully painted picture'; but the criticism was misguided, he argued, because the '*whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity – it groups together. It is complete in itself': James, *Notebooks*, 15; quoted in Parkes, *Shock*, 35. This notion of artistic unity was articulated in the 1907 preface to *Roderick Hudson* – another way in which the novelist's practice anticipated his theory – in which James argued that 'relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so': James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1041.

3. Actor, painter, audience: reframing 'art and "the world"' in *The Tragic Muse*

The 1880s proved difficult for James. *The Portrait of a Lady* was a commercial success that cemented his status as a major writer.[1] But *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* (both 1886) – two sprawling ambitious novels which, exhaustingly, were serialised at the same time – were poorly received and financially unrewarding.[2] Afterwards, interest from publishers seemed to dry up. Despite submitting a host of stories for magazine publication, James only published one work of fiction in 1887. In January 1888 he complained to his friend, the editor and novelist William Dean Howells, that he remained 'irremediably unpublished'.[3] For his next long novel, *The Tragic Muse*, James's publishers offered only a £70 advance on the grounds of his unprofitability, a major step down from the £500 and £400 he had received for *The Bostonians* and *The Princess* respectively.[4] Fiction no longer seemed to pay; the late-Victorian theatre, meanwhile, was booming: spying a gilded opportunity, from 1890 onwards James left fiction behind and dedicated himself to drama.[5] This ill-fated theatrical excursion has been richly mythologised, from Leon Edel's 'slow-motion account of James's disastrous sortie in the theatre' in his multi-volume biography of the novelist to David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004), which uses the failure of James's play *Guy Domville* (1895) as its narrative climax.[6] It is rarely

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[1] See James, *Portrait*, ed. Anesko, lxiii–lxiv.

[2] On the subject see especially Marcia Jacobson, *Henry James and the Mass Market* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1983), chapters 2 and 3; and Anesko, *Authorship*, 78–118.

[3] Anesko, *Lives*, 266. However, as Anesko points out, quoting Leon Edel's account of the letter, this 'mournful complaint was that of an impatient rather than of an unpublished and unpopular author': quoted in Anesko, *Friction*, 121. Indeed, later that year, James published eight short stories and one novel, *The Reverberator* (1888).

[4] Henry James, *The Tragic Muse*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 1995), xii.

[5] After completing *The Tragic Muse*, James confessed to Howells: 'It isn't the love of art and the pursuit of truth that have goaded me into such miry ways […] it is the definite necessity of making, for my palsied old age, more money than literature has ever consented or evidently *will* ever consent to yield me': quoted in Anesko, *Authorship*, 141.

[6] I quote from Millicent Bell's account of Edel's work, which remains the best critique of the biography: Millicent Bell, "Henry James: The Man Who Lived," *The Massachusetts Review* 14, no. 2 (1973): 405. Edel narrates James's theatrical experience in *Henry James: The Treacherous Years 1895–1901* (1969). Cólm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), which opens with the failure of *Guy Domville*, was published in the same year as Lodge's novel.

remarked upon, however, that when James gave up the novel in pursuit of dramatic success he also ceased his practice as a regular art critic. He published only two short pieces between 1890–97, confiding to a friend in 1892 that he had 'ceased to feel [painting] very much'.[7] *The Tragic Muse* was published at a crossroads in James's career, then. And strikingly, at a time when the novelist was reflecting deeply on the future of his art, it foregrounds both painting and drama.

James would later describe *The Tragic Muse* as a conflict between 'art and "the world"'.[8] The 'world' here is specifically the world of politics: one of its central characters, Nick Dormer, must choose between becoming a painter or becoming an MP, which is also the choice between marrying or remaining a bachelor; likewise, Miriam Rooth must choose between a career on the stage and marriage to an aspiring diplomat, Peter Sherringham. The broad schematic of this conflict recurs in James's tales of the 1880s and early 1890s. In these stories, artists must choose between a commitment to their work and the demands of the world, the latter of which is most often represented by married life.[9] In *The Tragic Muse*, however, there is a conflict not only between art and the world but between art and art—that is, between different forms and mediums of artistic expression. The text negotiates the tensions between sculpture, painting, literature, and drama, while discoursing on the qualities proper to each medium, thereby mixing fiction with more traditional (art, literary, and dramatic) criticism.

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[7] Quoted in Marc Simpson, *James and American Painting*, 55. This is a striking reduction in the novelist's output, after having published more than 50 reviews and works of criticism between 1872–89. However, James was already losing interest in art criticism by the early 1880s, publishing only seven reviews in the whole decade. There are two possible explanations for this shift. First, that he was no longer moved by painting, as his confession to Norton suggests. Second, that he felt himself better placed to pursue the art of fiction following the success of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The first hypothesis is the more likely given that there is no equivalent reduction in his literary critical work, with reviews and essays appearing steadily throughout the decade. For James's works of art criticism in the early 1890s – one essay on the caricatures of French artist Honoré Daumier (1808–79), the other on the American painter and illustrator Charles S. Reinhart (1844–96) – see James *CWA*, 1: 457–75 and 1: 478–85.

[8] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1103.

[9] Marriage in these tales metonymically resumes a host of other social obligations such as dining out or having a job, though in some cases it gestures towards homosexuality. This dynamic recurs in stories such as "The Lesson of the Master" (1888) and "The Author of Beltraffio" (1884), and is literalised in "The Private Life" (1893), in which a famous poet is revealed to have a dark double: one of these figures remains in his chambers composing poems of genius, while the other dines out nightly. We recall from chapter 1 that this poet is likely based on Browning.

This generic amalgam led contemporary critics to view the novel itself as an extended piece of criticism. The critic for the *Overland Monthly* (October 1890), for example, claimed that the characters 'discourse much and admirably on art, dramatic, pictorial, and general, and an interest in these subjects is necessary for full delight in the book,' while the reviewer for *Critic* (August 1890) noted that James's 'rare and exquisitely polished skill as an *essayist* [emphasis added]' were vividly on display. The critic for *Godey's Lady's Book* (also August 1890), meanwhile, wondered why James selected 'the cumbersome machinery of the novel for the expression of his thought'.[10] For these reviewers, the author of *The Tragic Muse* was more critic than novelist, more essayist than storyteller. Recent scholarship, however, has seen the novel not just as discoursing upon but also dramatizing competing forms of representation. William Storm, for example, has highlighted James's 'complementary and offsetting use of dramatic, narrative, and pictorial depictions,' while Adam Sonstegard has linked the standards of aesthetic fidelity represented by painting and photography in the text to romantic fidelity and political loyalty.[11] Nonetheless, these critics focus only on the relation between art and "the world" as represented by politics. In doing so, they do not question the relations outlined in the novel between art and "the world" *beyond* politics—that is, they fail to identify the links articulated in *The Tragic Muse* between artist and audience, producer and consumer. In the text, drama is frequently reduced to the desires of its audience; painting depends on patronage; and "serious" novelists remain unread. Thus, these disparate mediums are figured not only through their different representational strategies but also by the ways in which they respond to the pressures of their audiences. The novel thereby draws attention to the fact that 'the mode of expression

[10] Hayes, *Reviews*, 239, 229, 228. This view of the novel's instrumental aspects was shared by later critics. Leon Edel, for example, called the novel 'cold and discursive,' while Quentin Anderson described it as 'mechanical and loose': quoted in Judith Funston, "'All art is one': Narrative Technique in Henry James's *Tragic Muse*," *Studies in the Novel* 15, no. 4 (1983): 344.

[11] See William Storm, "The 'Impossible' Miriam Rooth: Performance, Painting, and Spectatorship in *The Tragic Muse*," *The Henry James Review* 28, no. 1 (2007): 73; Adam Sonstegard, "Painting, Photography, and Fidelity in *The Tragic Muse*," *The Henry James Review* 24, no. 1 (2003): 27–44.

characteristic of a cultural production always depends on the laws of the market in which it is offered,' as Pierre Bourdieu has put it.[12]

This is striking for two reasons. First, because although critics have long recognised James's anxiety about the place of literature in the marketplace, it has not been sufficiently acknowledged in *The Tragic Muse*.[13] Second, because the novel is one of James's clearest interventions into the debate concerning Aestheticism.[14] As Regenia Gagnier puts it, Aestheticism sought to 'negate the means-end rationality of bourgeois everyday life by theorizing art as an autonomous, "useless" realm,' in part by establishing artistic production and reception as individual rather than collective.[15] James's novel challenges this Aestheticist position by refusing to divorce art from the pressures of the market. In this way, the text calls attention to the fact that the 'autonomous, "useless"' art object may not have a use-value, but it does have an exchange value. In other words, the text subverts the Aestheticist position by consistently restating the relation between art and the market. It does so by re-establishing the collective nature of artistic production and reception, thereby demonstrating that art remains implicated in and to a certain extent subject to 'the laws of the market in which it is offered'. Although the novel repeatedly regrets this fact, it also manifests a hope: instead of catering to the market – code, throughout this chapter, for the dreaded but vaguely-defined middle classes – one can instead attempt to enforce one's own taste.[16] This is what James himself advocated

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12 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010), xv.

13 The best general work on the subject remains Anesko's *Authorship*. On the topic in *The Tragic Muse* see Anesko's chapter "Accommodating Art and the World: The Primary Motive of *The Tragic Muse*," in ibid., 119–39.

14 First pointed out by D. J. Gordon and John Stokes in "The Reference of *The Tragic Muse*," in *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*, ed. John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), the subject has received a great deal of attention. See, for example, Salmon, "Translation"; Eric Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mendelssohn, *Culture*; and S. I. Salamensky, "The Man of the Hour": Oscar Wilde, Performance, and Proto-Modernity in Henry James's *The Tragic Muse*,' *The Henry James Review* 32, no. 1 (2011): 60–74. For an account of James's response to Aestheticism which highlights his different responses to the movement in painting and literature see Wendy Graham, "Henry James and British Aestheticism," *The Henry James Review* 20, no. 3 (1999): 265–74.

15 Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 6.

16 On the power of the middle-class audience in the period see especially Janet Wolff and John Seed, eds., *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge:

in his correspondence. In February 1890, while *The Tragic Muse* was still being serialised, James decried the desires of the public to his sometime-confidante, the novelist Florence (better known as Mrs Hugh) Bell; but he offered something of a solution to the problem: 'Give them what one wants oneself,' he declared, 'it's the only way'.[17]

James, I argue, wanted something specific. *The Tragic Muse* constructs a hierarchy of the arts which depends precisely on the extent to which the artist is subject to their audience: painting, for example, is seen to be higher than drama because the painter has more autonomy. This is broadly in keeping with the hierarchy described by Bourdieu. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a hierarchy within the literary field was established which figured the prestige of a form as inversely related to its economic rewards.[18] In other words, the more money one could earn from a medium, the less likely one was to be considered a "serious" artist by one's peers, if not by one's audience. Poetry was both the most prestigious form and the least well remunerated; theatre was the least prestigious because of its mass audience and thus enormous potential economic profit; the novel, meanwhile, served as an intermediate and intermediary form.[19] As we have seen throughout my thesis, James reflected deeply on the place of fiction within an artistic hierarchy, and on the capacities of each medium and form. In his early short stories he considered what painting could achieve that fiction could not; in *The Portrait of a Lady* he showed that the novel could compete with and even exceed the art of portraiture. By the time he wrote *The Tragic Muse* he was engaged in a concerted effort to place fiction at the top of the hierarchy of the arts. And following the paltry advance offered for the novel by his English publisher, Macmillan, the role of the market in artistic production seemed particularly urgent. Responding to his publisher's offer, James declared: 'Unless I can put the

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Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[17] Quoted in James, *Muse*, ed. Horne, xvi.

[18] Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*, especially 196–204.

[19] On the relative prestige of discrete art forms see especially Wendorf, *Images*; Byerly, *Realism*; Brylowe, *Romantic Art*; Collier and Lethbridge, *Artistic Relations*. On the way these art forms and genres related to gender see especially Parker and Pollock, *Ideology* and Chadwick, *Women*.

matter on a more remunerative footing all round I shall give up my English "market"—heaven save the market! and confine myself to my American'.[20]

There are, however, few instances of overt reflection in *The Tragic Muse* on the art of fiction. For this reason, I claim that James's work implicitly inserts fiction within this hierarchy by showing the ways in which the novel eludes the fate of the other arts, both in its strategies of representation and in its relation to the market.[21] In this way, James's reflections on painting and drama form a part of his broader theorisation of fiction. And although *The Tragic Muse* manifests a sincere anxiety about the fate of literature in the modern marketplace, it also suggests that the future of the form resides precisely in taking advantage of this market relation: 'Give them what one wants oneself' entails producing to one's desires, but offering it to 'them' – the market – nonetheless.

Between dinner and the suburban trains

Miriam Rooth is the actor *par excellence*. She is always performing, always in the act of performance. As Sherringham suggests, 'representation [is] the deep substance' of her personality.[22] Her performative nature is represented in the novel through a variety of different artistic mediums or lenses: she appears on or near the stage, on or near the painter's canvas, and in photographs. For William Storm, James uses these different artistic lenses to stage a debate concerning the novel's 'own methods of representation – narrative description, dramatic and theatrical scene, and oil portraiture – with actress Miriam Rooth standing as the central

[20] Quoted in Anesko, *Authorship*, 127. In Anesko's account, this dispute led directly to James procuring the services of a literary agent: ibid., 127–8.
[21] For an alternative reading of the absence of a 'genius of letters and of an ideal text' in the novel see Nelly Valtat-Comet, "The Absent Writer in *The Tragic Muse*," in *Henry James's Europe*, 193.
[22] Henry James, *Novels 1886–1890: The Princess Casamassima, The Reverberator, The Tragic Muse*, ed. Daniel Mark Fogel (New York: Library of America, 1989), 1038. All further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses within the text. Fogel uses the text of the three-volume Macmillan edition which appeared in 1890.

subject, and indeed the focal point, in this exchange'.[23] *Pace* Storm, I argue that the differences between these forms are chiefly figured in the novel not through their representational discrepancies – the way in which each medium relies on its own language, methods, and tools – but rather via the idea of the audience, and specifically what an audience desires from a work of art. In other words, the central distinction between the arts articulated in *The Tragic Muse* is not their means of representation but their implied audience. As we shall see, the novel frequently draws attention to the fact that the audience of each medium influences the conditions of the art's production, and consequently both its form and content. In this way, the text refutes any claim to a "pure" art, because artistic achievement will always be constrained by the art object's status as commodity, by its implication in a system which assigns the artwork an exchange value based on the demands of the market.

For many of the novel's characters, it is the audience which determines the formal aspects of a work of art. Miriam, for example, argues that painting has the advantage over acting because the painter can do as he pleases 'in patient obscurity' while the actor is 'pitchforked into the *mêlée*' (1226). On its surface, this is a comment about the relative immediacy of theatre. But it also highlights the way in which the actor is constrained by the desires of the public, is forced to cater to their dreary or merely repetitive wishes: 'I think I'm disgusting,' Miriam says, 'with my successful crudities' (1226). The success of these 'crudities' inspires fear in the artist. Miriam is afraid to play Shakespeare's Juliet because, if she succeeds, the audience will then 'want Juliet forever, instead of my present part' (1226). Thus, the '*mêlée*' constrains Miriam to the will of the audience, both in the character of her individual performances and in the repertoire to which she is restricted: 'I foresee that I shall be condemned for the greater part of the rest of my days (do you see that?) to play the stuff I'm acting now' (1226). This throws into

[23] Storm, "Spectatorship" 74. It is worth pointing out, however, that Storm's presentation of this conflict often ignores the literary aspect of these artworks and their interactions—that is, the fact that each artistic medium described in *The Tragic Muse* is a literary figuration of a discrete form (in other words, the ekphrasis of a photograph will never be a photograph, no matter how convincingly it is described).

ironic relief the novel's concluding remarks, in which Miriam's 'triumph' as Juliet is described as marking 'an era in contemporary art' (1248). In other words, Miriam's fears become reality: she is 'condemned' nightly to resume her 'triumph' as Juliet—'forever'. However great the representation, then, the artist is bound to, and by, her era.

This contrasts with Nick Dormer who, in Miriam's mind, has the privilege of 'unsociable pegging away,' the very unsociability of which gives him the freedom to 'do as many things' as he likes (1225–6). The painter can patiently innovate in relative obscurity, while the actor must perform for an audience with perennially narrow desires, or so Miriam believes. In this account of things, the theatre is a public art in the public sphere and therefore subject to the public's desires; painting, on the other hand, is a private affair, at least as far as the painter is concerned. But Miriam's argument is predicated on Nick becoming a sort of gentleman-painter, a figure who is not necessarily successful in the art market but who does not depend on commissions or illustrations to make his living. Her youth blighted by penury, she is mistaken in her conception of Nick's position. This mistake emerges in part, the text suggests, from her racial background.

In the nineteenth century, actors were often associated with Jews (as well as, famously, prostitutes).[24] And in *The Tragic Muse*, it is implied that the Jewishness of Miriam's father played a key role in determining Miriam's career: 'the Hebraic Mr. Rooth, with his love of old pots and Christian altar-cloths, had supplied in the girl's composition the aesthetic element, the sense of colour and form' (854). Mr Rooth's position as consumer and collector, then – his being on the other side of the art market, as it were – provides Miriam with the 'aesthetic element' required to be an artist. Following the racial logic of the text, this convergence of 'Jewish art and Jewish

[24] See, for example, the Jewish actors in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), or Sibyl Vane's Jewish theatre-manager in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For more on the topic see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 464–9, and Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991). On the link between all three subjects – Jewishness, theatricality, and prostitution – see Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question," in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

commerce' dictates, in Joseph Litvak's words, Miriam's 'professional itinerary'.[25] But Mr Rooth's 'old pots' do not compare in Miriam's mind to the opulence in which Nick has been raised. Her reasoning is misguided, however. In fact, one of the key aspects of Nick's narrative is his relative poverty in relation to other members of the political class. Regardless of which form of representation he chooses – painting or politics – he must rely on patronage: Nick needs Julia Dallow's support to run for parliament, and he requires the fortune he will inherit from his long-time benefactor, Mr Carteret, to guarantee his political career. But he will win this inheritance only on the condition that he marry Julia and remain an MP. His fortune depends, then, on his remaining loyal to his class and to the institutions of marriage and parliamentary politics.

To Nick's mother, Lady Agnes, there is no real choice in the matter. She is stark about the role of money in public life: she considers Nick's borough as belonging to Julia (868) and describes money bluntly as 'an instrument of power' (872). This is because to Lady Agnes 'Julia was money, Mr. Carteret was money, and everything else was poverty' (1083), especially an artistic career. This contrasts with Miriam's situation. For Mrs Rooth, art is an escape from a different kind of relative poverty: Miriam chooses to become an actor in part to 'escape' becoming a governess (783). Miriam's pursuit of art is permissible because of her class and ethnic position; Nick, however, has a higher calling owing to his higher class, or so Lady Agnes believes. Her view is dictated by what Nick calls a 'queer old superstition': 'that art is pardonable only so long as it's bad—so long as it's done at odd hours, for a little distraction, like a game of tennis or of whist' (714). That is, so long as it is a gentleman's avocation, an amateur occupation, rather than a professional pursuit. This is in keeping with the narrative of Aestheticism advanced by Jonathan Freedman, in which the movement emerged in part in opposition to the commodification of art—I'll return in a moment to the notion of disinterestedness this

[25] Joseph Litvak, "Actor, Monster, Novelist: *The Tragic Muse* as a Novel of Theatricality," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 29, no. 2 (1987), 162.

implies.[26]

The pursuit of art is to Lady Agnes reserved for people like Miriam. For Mr Carteret, meanwhile, 'the pencil' and 'the brush' are not 'the weapons of a gentleman' (1073). (Strikingly, they are both nonetheless 'weapons'.) And it is because of these fixed class positions that Sherringham wonders whether he can marry Miriam, a mere '*fille de théâtre*' (920). In this way, different classes are associated with appropriate occupations; invariably, though, art is no career for a respectable bourgeois or aristocrat. Miriam herself recognises this. Indeed, it is the very perversity of Nick's choice that gives her a thrill: 'M.P. in the corner of a picture is delightful,' she says (1101). But she is quick to add that 'the artistic life, when you can lead another – if you have any alternative, however modest – is a very poor business' (1101).

In the end, Nick chooses painting over politics. Indeed, his decision to abandon political representation is figured through the art of painting itself: his last testament to the political life is a painting of Julia, a 'noble portrait of a lady which was the final outcome of that arrangement' (1255)—that is, his marriage, his 'arrangement' with her that guaranteed the financial support of Mr Carteret and thus his career in parliament. For Miriam, the choice of painting grants Nick the twin advantages of unsociability and obscurity, and she believes that this divorce from the public's desires will guarantee him artistic freedom. However, maintaining his independence as a painter will prove difficult, as the aesthete Gabriel Nash points out. Nash praises Nick's 'disinterestedness,' though warns him that he might 'paint the bishops and become a social institution. That is, you will if you don't take great care' (1230, 1233). Painting too proves a secular affair, even when one paints the clergy. In this way, Nick is subject to pressures comparable to those he suffered in political life. As D. J. Gordon and John Stokes have put it, because the painter is required to 'convince or move their audiences,' he is 'in turn possessed by his audience,' and the politician is faced with the same issue: he 'depends on

[26] See Freedman, *Taste*, 131ff.

possession (money and property),' and is 'also dependent on his audience'—dependent, that is, on convincing and moving the crowd.[27] In painting, Nick may become a 'social institution'; in politics, he was subject to the demands of Julia and Mr Carteret, parliament and matrimony.

Disinterestedness, Aestheticism, and the theatre

Both Nash and Miriam praise a version of disinterestedness as a means by which to detach the artist from their audience. This is a kind of Kantian disinterestedness which places a certain kind of artistic pursuit above or apart from the sensuous masses. Such disinterestedness is, according to Bourdieu, one of the principal ways in which the literary field established its autonomy in the nineteenth century.[28] This process produced a rupture between two forms of art, one which chiefly accrued symbolic capital by catering to a restricted audience, the other serving a more general public.[29] In doing so, this divide introduced the conflict between a 'popular "aesthetic"' and its 'negative opposite,' 'the Kantian aesthetic'—that is, an opposition between disinterestedness ('the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation') as against 'the interest of the senses' (associated with popular art).[30] *The Tragic Muse* makes clear that such a notion of disinterestedness can only be attained through financial security: both Nash and Miriam agree that disinterestedness is abandoned when the artist must court an audience to win their living. For Nash, this degrades art to an intolerable degree, as we shall see. But the audience remains paramount: the artist must work to please if she wants to survive in the marketplace.

In an important essay, Gordon and Stokes showed the ways in which *The Tragic Muse* intervened in two issues active in the 1880s, the first concerning Aestheticism, the second about

[27] Gordon and Stokes, "The Reference," 158.
[28] Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*, especially 185–91.
[29] Ibid., 204.
[30] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 33.

the nature of the theatre. The two come together in an extended debate between Nash and Sherringham about drama. The theatre splits in two here: 'Sherringham's concern is for *acting*, Nash's for what the actor has to work with'—that is, the audience.[31] Sherringham argues that the drama is a cultivation of taste, while for Nash the theatre is 'the lowest of the arts' because it is most subject to the desires of the public (740). In other words, it is impossible to cultivate the audience's taste when the artist is obliged to give the crowd what they want. Nash's view is in keeping with the theory described by Bourdieu and outlined above in which a hierarchy of forms within the literary field was established in the nineteenth century, with the prestige of a form – its potential 'symbolic profit' – proving inversely related to its economic rewards.[32] Nash seeks to support such a hierarchy by nominally basing his claims on the formal qualities of a given medium. But his argument in fact considers the formal characteristics of the drama only insofar as they reflect the desires of the 'modern audience,' the '*omnium gatherum* of the population of a big commercial city' (747). He imagines this audience

> at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling, and with all the other sordid speculations of the day, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot, before eleven o'clock (747–8).

This vision of the 'sweltering mass' collapses distinct class positions: the audience is the "middle class" *tout court* without further socio-economic distinction.[33] Further, Nash does not suggest what kind of theatrical event this group is attending. They could be 'timing the actor' at a vaudeville performance or 'timing the author' of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (first performed in 1892, just two years after the publication of *The Tragic Muse*). Tellingly, Nash frames the 'taste' of the

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[31] Gordon and Stokes, "The Reference," 94.
[32] Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art,* 196–204.
[33] On this definition of the middle class and its relation to the mass market see Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 2ff and Jacobson, *James and the Mass Market*, chapter 1.

'modern audience' in sensual and affective terms: they are 'squeezed' and 'flocking' like an animal mass, affectively 'stultified' and 'disappointed'—distant, that is, from the disinterestedness of the intellect. They are, moreover, 'gorged,' which further equates the taste of the body with a nominally "low" taste in the arts. These verbs all pertain to the audience's actions: the dramatist is subject to the audience, whose actions affect the author and the actor, as opposed to the other way around. Ultimately, this jeremiad looks back to Ruskin's rhetoric ('hideous hotels and restaurants,' 'stultified with buying and selling'), looks forward to high modernist articulations of artistic corruption wrought by the market, and is in keeping with a broadly Aestheticist position.[34]

Like many an aesthete, Nash targets the apparently retrograde influence of the middle classes.[35] His attack on these classes and their values is equated with their sensuality, and it turns on the effect they have on artistic production in their capacity as audience. He asks: 'What would you think of any other artist – the painter or the novelist – whose governing forces should be the dinner and the suburban trains?' (748). For him, the train, the dinner (the bodily appetite), the 'big commercial city' – bywords for industrial modernity – all work together to destroy the conditions in which one might patiently and disinterestedly appreciate art. They consequently degrade the work of art itself:

> What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared with what the novelist does! (748).

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[34] On the links between Ruskin, modernism, and Aestheticism see Giovanni Cianci and Peter Nicholls, eds., *Ruskin and Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

[35] Nash is, for example, seemingly in sympathy with Oscar Wilde, a figure with whom he is often identified, as we shall see, and who, in the words of Regenia Gagnier, privileged an Aestheticism which protested 'Victorian utility, rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress—in fact, against the whole middle-class drive to conform': Gagnier, *Idylls*, 3.

Once more, the relation between the "middle classes" and the world of art is described through sensual, affective language ('gross,' touch,' 'crudity'). It is this sensuality which, much to Nash's disdain, ostensibly prevents this audience from attaining to a disinterested view of the work of art. The constraints imposed on the artist by the public – 'dinner and the suburban trains' – lead Nash to produce a hierarchy of the arts which locates fiction at the top: 'What crudity compared with what the novelist does!'. Such a hierarchy is in keeping with James's conflictual model of artistic relations in which he seeks to secure the dignity and superiority of fiction by pointing out the shortcomings of painting (or, in this case, drama). For this reason, a further analysis of the links between James and Nash's attitudes is warranted. This analysis will draw out the ways in which their views meet on the artist's audience and consequently the hierarchy of the arts.

The link between Nash and James has long been debated. Frequently, this link has been framed through the novelist's relation to Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Eric Haralson, for example, writes that by 'common consent, from early reviews to recent criticism, Gabriel Nash is the "Oscar Wilde figure" of *The Tragic Muse*'.[36] David Garrett Izzo, meanwhile, has called Nash 'Pater as interpreted by Oscar Wilde,' a chimerical arch-aesthete patently opposed to James himself (Izzo's essay appears in a work entitled *Henry James against the Aestheticist Movement*).[37] And indeed, Nash is often presented as a figure of fun within the novel, an unmoored and amoral aesthete who provides the text with topical interest and offers James a target for his anti-Aestheticist ire. For example, Nash advocates a Paterian conscious intensity (974), argues that one must ignore the 'ugly' and 'encourage the beautiful' (724), and praises Miriam not for what she does but for what she is (994), thereby employing what Richard

[36] Eric Haralson, "The Elusive Queerness of Henry James's 'Queer Comrade': Reading Gabriel Nash of *The Tragic Muse*," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 191. See also J. Hillis Miller, "Oscar in *The Tragic Muse*," *The Arizona Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2006): 31–44.
[37] Quoted in Lyons, "Intelligence," 113, n. 21; David Garrett Izzo, *Henry James against the Aestheticist Movement: Essays on the Middle and Late Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 229.

Salmon has shown to be a classic Aestheticist opposition.[38] Michèle Mendelssohn, on the other hand, suggests that Nash 'stands for Aestheticism's identity-crisis and represents the very confusion the movement was subject to in the late 1880s and early 1890s,' which plausibly accounts for Nash's complexity as well as James's ambivalent relation to his character.[39] I argue, however, that Nash's tirades represent a sophisticated form of irony: Nash is so clearly a caricature, so evidently an intervention into the debate concerning Aestheticism, that James's own views pass almost unnoticed in Nash's mouth.

Nash's anxiety about the detrimental effect of the audience is echoed in James's contemporary correspondence. In February 1890, while *The Tragic Muse* was still being serialised, the novelist complained to Mrs Hugh Bell about the desires of the public. They want, he wrote,

> simply bottomless *niaiserie* – look at Mr. Smith's bookstalls & you'll see. Give them what one wants oneself – it's the only way: *follow* them & they lead one by a straight grand highway to abysses of vulgarity.[40]

In this account, the artist's desires are explicitly in conflict with those of his audience, just as Nash and Miriam suggest. This is due to the pernicious effects of mass culture, the 'abysses of vulgarity' which James identifies with W. H. Smith 'bookstalls'—bookstores, that is, which serviced a readership who spent a good deal of time on suburban trains.[41] This cultural pessimism is shared by the diplomat Sherringham, who comes to believe that **'**the actor's art, in general, is going down and down, descending a slope with abysses of vulgarity at its foot**'**

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[38] Salmon, "Aestheticism," in *Life*, ed. Chew and Stead, 289.
[39] Mendelssohn, *Culture*, 117.
[40] Quoted in James, *Muse*, ed. Horne, xvi.
[41] On the cultural changes effected by the railway see especially Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrial of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). On the railway and its connection to popular fiction see especially Nicholas Daly, "Railway novels: sensation fiction and the modernization of the senses," *ELH* 66, no. 2 (1999): 461–487; Laura Marcus, "Oedipus Express: Trains, Trauma and Detective Fiction," in *The Art of Detective Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); and Paul Raphael Rooney, "Yellowbacks: How WH Smith Brought Reading to the Masses," in *Railway Reading and Late-Victorian Literary Series* (London: Routledge, 2018). On James and rail travel see chapter 3 of Alicia Rix, *Transport in Henry James* (PhD diss., University College London, 2014).

(779). James opposed this mass culture to an art which conforms to his own desires, to 'what one wants oneself'. Nash similarly argues that one ought to write for oneself. But he is comfortable with the idea of a restricted audience: 'If someone likes it here and there, if you give a little impression of solidity, that's your reward; besides, of course, the pleasure for yourself' (820). Nash and James ought not to be simply united. But it is nonetheless clear that Nash is not, as Steven Jobe has claimed, 'decidedly un-Jamesian'.[42] Indeed, the distancing between artist and public advocated by Nash is typical of James's approach to authorship later in his career.[43] Strikingly, it is reiterated at length in the preface the novelist wrote to *The Tragic Muse* for the New York Edition (a work which itself proved a commercial failure).[44]

In the preface, James sets the private artist against the consuming public: 'under the rule of its [art's] sincerity, its only honours are those of contraction, concentration and a seemingly deplorable indifference to everything but itself'.[45] That is, the artist betrays art itself if he produces work which accords too readily with the public's desires. Throughout the preface, James continues to speak of the public in dismissive terms: 'I must long have carried in my head the notion of a young man who should amid difficulty – the difficulties being the story – have abandoned "public life" for the zealous pursuit of some supposedly minor craft'.[46] Public life is treated as a nebulous concept hardly deserving its quotation marks, and this attack on the public is sustained in an analysis of celebrity. James suggests that he sought in his novel to dramatise 'the most salient London "social" passions, the unappeasable curiosity for the things of the theatre; for every one of them, that is, except the drama itself, and for the "personality" of the performer (almost any performer quite sufficiently serving) in particular'.[47]

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[42] Steven H. Jobe, "Representation and Performance in *The Tragic Muse*," *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910* 26, no. 2 (1994): 35. Jobe is right to say, however, that the two differ fundamentally in their attitude to theatricality: see ibid., 35–6.
[43] See Anesko, *Authorship*, 2ff.
[44] On the subject see especially ibid., 141–62; and Carol Holly, "The Emotional Aftermath of the New York Edition," in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*, ed. David McWhirter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 167–84.
[45] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1106.
[46] Ibid., 1105.
[47] Ibid., 1105.

In other words, the audience cares little for the delights of dramatic form but instead focuses on the person of the actor. Ultimately, in his professed wariness to submit to the 'vulgarity' of the "public," James's views bear a striking resemblance to those of Nash, even if he does not deploy the same wicked rhetoric.

James, then, shared in Nash's scorn. Despite the novelist's professed hostility to the public, however, *The Tragic Muse* was also an attempt to extend his audience at a time when his readership had proportionally contracted, deterred by his 'increasingly unconventional style and dissolved in the rising flood of newer, cheaper periodicals and their crop of lowbrow popular serials'.[48] This helps to explain the topical nature of Nash the aesthete and Miriam the actor: they recalled respectively Aestheticism and its famous figures like Wilde along with actors such as Rachel Félix (1821–1858) and Mary Anderson (1859–1940). These figures and subjects spoke to the issues of the day, and so might have helped to extend James's readership. Mary Anderson, for example, was notable for igniting a debate about the desirability and limitations of a naturalistic acting style, a controversy which was framed in terms of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*.[49] This performance style features in the novel when Miriam confuses her first audience due to a lack of formal training: she speaks 'with a rude monotony' and lacks the 'soft, communicative art' of her mentor; she is subsequently told: 'stay at home, shut yourself up and hammer at your scales' (788). As for Félix, she was recognised both for her charisma and her Jewishness, much like Miriam.[50] Miriam might also be linked to another Jewish actor: she could 'degenerate,' as Litvak puts it, 'into that other, presumably "great" Jewish precursor, Sarah Bernhardt,' an actor whom James described as having 'the advertising genius; she may, indeed,

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[48] Adam Seth Lowenstein, "Surprises that struck the hour": *The Tragic Muse* and the Modernizing of the Jamesian Serial,' *The Henry James Review* 32, no. 2 (2011): 140.

[49] Diderot's *Paradoxe* was originally published in French in 1830. But when it was translated into English in 1883 it was discussed with fervour throughout the decade and beyond. On the subject see especially Graham Ley, "The Significance of Diderot," *New Theatre Quarterly* 11, no. 44 (1995): 342–54; and Gordon and Stokes, "The Reference".

[50] On Miriam's Jewishness, see especially Sara Blair, "Henry James, Jack the Ripper, and the Cosmopolitan Jew: Staging Authorship in 'The Tragic Muse,' *ELH* 63, no. 2 (1996): 489–512. For James's other fictional uses of Jewishness see especially Liesl Olson, "'Under the Lids of Jerusalem': The Guised Role of Jewishness in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 4 (2003): 660–86.

be called the muse of the newspaper'.[51] By gesturing towards Miriam's famous forebears as well as contemporary theatrical controversies, the novel was designed to speak to its moment. But it failed to win James his coveted and despised audience. This failure can in part be attributed to the public world that *The Tragic Muse* 'comes from and points to,' a world of "'serious" papers, reviews and quarterlies. It was, indeed, a serious and important world, and definable because it was small and unified through class, culture, function'.[52] Small, though, it remained, despite James's desires to give a mass audience what 'one wants oneself'.[53]

Nash argues that the dramatist 'shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is restricted to so poor an analysis' (747), in a large part thanks to the narrow desires of the viewing public. He prophesies that with success Miriam will 'draw forth the modernness of the age,' the 'vulgarity' of which 'would rise to the grand style, like that of a London railway station' (1091). Once more, he connects theatre's degeneration with the modern, industrial landscape and its transport links which mobilise the middle classes. And again, Sherringham shares this desperate view of the actor's future: 'Every one speaks as he likes, and audiences never notice; it's the last thing they think of' (841). In the end, Sherringham believes that it is 'the death of an actor to play to big populations that don't understand his language' (843). His critique of the theatre is therefore linked explicitly to its modernity. Similarly, he imagines the dramatic universe which Miriam's mentor Madame Carré must have inhabited in her youth as a lost theatrical paradise: Sherringham had 'hardly known a keener regret for anything than for the loss of that antecedent world' (779). In this way, the young diplomat and the aging aesthete agree. The 'big population' of the modern city and the mass audience it produces destroys theatrical art; and the author participates in all this by giving the audience what they want.

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[51] Litvak, "Actor, Monster, Novelist," 152; quoted in ibid., 152.
[52] Gordon and Stokes, "The Reference".
[53] This is in contrast with Wilde who, as Gagnier puts it, 'enjoyed the social "spectacle,"' and was therefore able to court an audience which he mocked in his works: while James 'sat in his box and derisively predicted the audience's approbation of plays he did not admire (he was too nervous to attend his own premiere of *Guy Domville*), Wilde sauntered onto the stage with a cigarette and good-naturedly ridiculed everybody's performance': Gagnier, *Idylls*, 105. In other words, Wilde was paid by the middle classes to insult them to their faces, while James merely insulted them.

Miriam, too, comes to regard the drama as 'a very poor business': for her, it 'comes last in dignity' (1101) because of the extent to which it is subject to the desires of the public. Last in dignity: just like James and the other characters, Miriam comes to accept a hierarchy of the arts which places theatre at the bottom in terms of prestige precisely because of its relation to a mass audience. Miriam's anxiety accords with the economic facts of the period. The theatre won the largest share of the literary market at the beginning of the nineteenth century, despite the variety of 'fragmented and specialised forms of theatre' on offer; and this dominance only increased in the Victorian period.[54] Miriam, then, accepts the same hierarchy described by Bourdieu. This hierarchy contrasts with what Steven Jobe has called James's 'ideal conception' of the theatre. By 1890, Jobe argues, James was 'firmly convinced that the theater in its ideal conception provides a transcendent public space offering not merely "the sensation of the moment" but "a new wisdom," a new authority'.[55] But what *The Tragic Muse* makes clear is that this conception is indeed 'ideal' and remains unrealistic. The characters agree – and James's preface suggests – that, restricted by her audience and thus her medium, the dramatist and the actor are willing participants in modernity's tawdry pageant. For this reason, they come last in dignity in the hierarchy of the arts. The painter, on the other hand, seems relatively free to resist the modern audience. But the text reveals this apparent freedom to be an illusion, too, thanks in part to painting's relation to the theatre.

Painting, drama, and the public

In his preface to *The Tragic Muse*, James declares that he sought in his novel 'complete pictorial fusion, some such common interest between my first two notions as would, in spite of their

[54] Gill Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations: Viewing the Actress in British Art and Theatre, 1768–1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4; Michael Richard Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–27.
[55] Jobe, "Representation," 40.

birth under quite different stars, do them no violence at all'.[56] The novelist refers to Tintoretto's 1565 *Crucifixion* as a model for this kind of 'pictorial fusion'. In that painting, Christ is figured aloft on the cross, at the top of the canvas, his heavenly light illuminating the thronging varied crowd below, all of whom are spaced and posed to send the gaze back to Christ. In this 'sublime' image (as James called it), the figures are united in a 'common interest,' the narrative of the crucifixion. But in *The Tragic Muse*, Nick and Miriam are indeed separated, are 'born under quite different stars,' insofar as they come from different backgrounds and practise different art forms. They nonetheless have two clear common interests. First, their flight towards art and away from competing institutions such as politics and marriage. Second, their pursuit of excellence in their chosen field. Despite this fact, James's preface ignores or elides the way in which the two arts might be connected—that is, the way in which painting and the theatre mutually inform and reinforce each other.

In the late eighteenth century, the theatrical or "celebrity" portrait began to feature prominently in public exhibitions, a practice which started at least with the inception of the Royal Academy show in 1769 and which continued throughout the nineteenth century, as we shall see. Such portraits engaged the exhibition viewer in what Gill Perry has called 'an interactive form of spectatorship, matching "performances" in paint with "exhibitions" on stage'.[57] At the same time, actors were routinely enjoined to 'study the works of the most eminent painters and sculptors,' as one contemporary actor-critic suggested, so that they might learn more about their own art: as Perry puts it, actors were encouraged to view the stage as 'a kind of tableau which can be styled and art-directed'.[58] Miriam Rooth follows this advice, visiting exhibitions in search of inspiration. In galleries and museums, 'under the suggestion of

[56] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1107–8. This despite having a 'mortal horror of two stories, two pictures, in one': ibid., 1107. The 'two notions' are, of course, Nick and Miriam.
[57] Perry, *Flirtations*, 19, 20.
[58] Quoted in ibid., 20. For Perry's gloss see also ibid., 20.

antique marbles or when she [stands] before a Titian or a Bronzino,' she declares: "'I could look just like that, if I tried'" (858).

Painting and drama had a close practical relation, then, and the title of James's novel reinforces this pact. In the first instance, it calls to mind Joshua Reynolds's *Mrs Siddons as The Tragic Muse* (1784), though the painting itself is never alluded to within the text. (Nash does, however, suggest that Nick is in danger of becoming 'another Sir Joshua, a mere P. R. A.!'—though only in the revised New York Edition.)[59] It also invites comparison with Jean-Léon Gérôme's (1824–1904) 1861 depiction of Rachel Félix as the same mythical figure.[60] This portrait is alluded to in the novel though not described: Miriam looks at 'Gérôme's fine portrait of the pale Rachel, invested with the antique attributes of tragedy' (950). Alongside these pictorial representations of famous actors, there may also be echoes of Sargent's *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889), which James saw in November 1889 while *The Tragic Muse* was in serialisation – he called it an 'absolutely magnificent portrait' – and which testified to the continued relation between painting and the theatre in the late nineteenth century.[61] Superficially, the allusion to Gérôme's painting and the shadow of Reynolds's canvas reflect the artistic, political, and social divisions between Britain and France dramatised within *The Tragic Muse*.[62] But it also highlights the cooperation between portraiture and drama in the text

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[59] James, *Muse*, ed. Horne, 350. Horne uses the text of The New York Edition. In the original three-volume Macmillan edition from which quotations in this chapter are drawn (as reproduced in *Novels 1886–1890*), Nash says that Nick will 'become a fashionable painter, a P. R. A!' (1089). For a recent reconsideration of Reynolds's portrait see Heather McPherson, "Picturing Tragedy: *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* Revisited," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 3 (2000): 401–30. For other portraits of Sarah Siddons see *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson, Shelley M Bennett, Mark Leonard, and Shearer West (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999).

[60] On Rachel Félix, see especially John Stokes, "Rachel's 'Terrible Beauty': An Actress Among the Novelists," *ELH* 51, no. 4 (1984): 771–93; and Rachel M. Brownstein, *Tragic Muse: Rachel of the Comédie-Française* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

[61] See James, *A Life*, 216. On Ellen Terry see especially Gail Marshall, "Ellen Terry: Shakespearean Actress and Critic," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2004): 355–64. On Sargent's portrait see Kilmurray and Ormond, *Complete Paintings*, 1: 188–92.

[62] Nick, for example, calls attention to this division with regards to painting: walking with Julia, he pauses and says, "'Delightful English pastoral scene. Why do they say it won't paint? […] It will in France; but somehow it won't here'" (895). Elsewhere, the Salon is compared directly to the Royal Academy show: "'I like them better in London—they are much less unpleasant,'" says Grace Dormer; "'We certainly make the better show,'" replies Lady Agnes (710).

and in Victorian culture at large, twin spectacles which served to mutually reinforce each other's status, power, and allure. At the same time, it helps to construct the 'publicly perceived identities' of the actress – as 'flirt,' as 'whore, comic coquette' or 'tragic heroine' – three roles Miriam is variously made to play throughout the novel.[63]

This cooperation between the arts manifests itself in *The Tragic Muse* through the way in which Miriam is constructed as a theatrical performer. Conspicuously, she is not presented in the act of performance on stage, even though she is 'always acting' (1100). When Sherringham, for example, observes her in the theatre, the novel focuses on his reaction to her performance and thereby abstains from a description of her acting itself. Moreover, when Sherringham surprises Miriam in rehearsal, he thinks of her 'like the finished statue lifted from the ground to its pedestal' (932–3), and this recourse to sculpture obscures or evades a description of drama itself.[64] Significantly, however, Miriam is often depicted as an actor through another art, that of painting. In this way, she has, like the novel's title, little to do with the mythic model of Melpomene, the muse of tragedy; rather, she is figured within the broader context of artistic models borrowed from disparate mediums and united in James's fiction. This makes *The Tragic Muse* a 'privileged place for observing the confrontation between the two modes' of the dramatic and pictorial, as William Goetz has put it, with Miriam serving as the nexus between them.[65] Goetz, however, like other critics such as Storm, privileges the 'confrontation' between the two modes and their disparate representational strategies. This is at the expense of what unites them, or at least what the text claims unites them—namely, the fact that both arts are subject to the demands of the market, and their concomitant investment in the value of each partner art. By its very cooperation with theatre, then, painting is made

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[63] Perry, *Flirtations*, 8.
[64] On the positioning of Miriam as a statue and its wider theatrical significance in the period see Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[65] Quoted in Storm, "Spectatorship," 78. See William R. Goetz, "The Allegory of Representation in *The Tragic Muse*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 8, no. 3 (1978): 158.

complicit in the faults of drama, outlined above. In other words, painting, too, is made a "modern" art subject to the dreaded "modern" audience.

The intricacy of the relation between the two arts can be seen in James's treatment of Gérôme's portrait. Miriam is compared directly to Rachel, in part thanks to her Jewish heritage (741). In the *Comédie-Française*, where Rachel's portrait hangs, Sherringham looks from Miriam 'to the vivid image of the dead actress' and thinks that 'his companion suffered little by the juxtaposition' (951); and Miriam herself desires to become 'the English Rachel' (843).[66] The comparison with Gérôme's painting seeks to endow Miriam with the authority of Rachel's celebrity. At the same time, it reinforces Miriam's links with the French theatrical tradition: she begins her career in Paris before moving to London, after Sherringham convinces her to perform 'in the language of Shakespeare' (789). But the comparison also makes Miriam into a spectacle, a 'vivid' aesthetic 'image' comparable to, even reminiscent of a portrait. This produces a distancing effect: Miriam is compared to the portrait of an actor portraying a mythical figure; in this way, these forms or levels of representation ensure that the "real" Rachel remains obscure, which simultaneously obfuscates any notion of Miriam's "real" character. Perry notes that the 'theatrical portrait in role is itself a representation of a staged or pseudo event'; it is therefore 'twice removed from the "real" person, substituting the painted reconstruction for the masquerade on stage'.[67] At the same time, however, it is an attempt to 'reveal a recognisable individual with a lived history and presence'.[68] In comparing Miriam to this representation of representations, the novel's tragic muse is subject to a *mise en abyme* of mediation. This transforms her into a figure of pure performance and in turn positions her 'lived history' as just another act. The novel accentuates this effect through its descriptions of Miriam's private

[66] James visited the actor Jeanne Julia Bartet (1854–1941) in her *loge* at the *Comédie-Française* in early 1889, and seems to have translated this event in to Sherringham's visit with Miriam. The relevant notebook entry suggests an equivalence through the use of an em dash between Sherringham's observation of Miriam and James's personal impression: 'Sherringham's visit to the Comédie Française with Miriam,—my impression of Bartet, in her *loge*, the other day in Paris': James, 48.
[67] Perry*, Flirtations*, 21.
[68] Ibid., 21.

character: her role as daughter, friend, or lover are declared to be the 'fictions and shadows; the representation was the deep substance' (1038). Crucially, all this occurs without the use of ekphrasis – Gérôme's portrait is not described – and this is done, I think, to keep Nick's portrait of Miriam as the ekphrastic centre of her representation.

The value of painting

Nick's portrait of Miriam helps to establish the young man as a talented painter and the young woman as an actor on the threshold of a spectacular career. As with Miriam's performances on stage, however, the text at first seems to demur from representing the image itself. Instead, we begin with Sherringham's impression of the portrait: 'it was strong, brilliant and vivid and had already the look of life and the air of an original thing. Sherringham was startled, he was strangely affected—he had no idea Nick moved with that stride' (1034). But then, unlike Gérôme's Rachel, the narrative voice describes Nick's Miriam:

> Miriam was represented in three-quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward, with one of her legs crossed over the other, her arms extended and foreshortened, her hands locked together round her knee. Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. She had a grand appearance of being raised aloft, with a wide regard, from a height of intelligence, for the great field of the artist, all the figures and passions he may represent (1035).

Miriam's pose is 'original' in that it differs from that of both Sarah Siddons and Rachel Félix in their respective representations. The description of James's actor communicates her distance from these figures and from the other characters, but also from 'life,' which 'she seemed to look down at' from the vantage point of art. Similarly, her being raised aloft is akin to her being on a (figurative or literal) stage, but also suggests her being raised aloft by the artistic 'intelligence' (through her own dramatic capacity and through Nick's representational power).

This is proper to the 'great field of the artist,' who may represent 'all' that they choose; Sherringham, meanwhile, can only gape and gasp 'at the composition of the thing, at the drawing of the moulded arms' (1035). He remains an appreciative spectator, cut off from the producer's privileged point of view. But he is capable, nonetheless, of recognising the strange cleavage in Miriam's character as she appears on stage: she is a 'beautiful, actual, fictive, impossible young woman, […] who was exalted and heroic beyond all human convenience, and who yet was irresistibly real and related to one's own affairs' (1180). She is simultaneously a living contemporary ('actual,' 'irresistibly real') and a figure representative of art itself ('fictive,' 'exalted and heroic'), a divide which Nick's portrait at once registers and enacts.

Strikingly, the direction of Miriam's gaze in the portrait remains ambiguous. This can be read in relation to Nick's first encounter with Miriam, in which he declares that he "'should like to paint her portrait; she's made for that'" (783). Nick imagines Miriam as 'made' for representation, for being an object of aesthetic attention—put simply, for being looked at or watched. But he says this 'partly because he was struck with the girl's capacity as a model, partly to mitigate the crudity of inexpressive spectatorship' (783). That is, his 'inexpressive spectatorship' is crude only because Miriam is not yet a portrait; once she has been represented – once she has been transformed into an art object – the act of looking loses its crudity, becomes assimilated into purely aesthetic pleasure. This reveals an implicit distinction between what Bourdieu calls common or profane perception, which is often sexualised, as against the perception of the studio [*perception de l'atelier*], which neutralises the sexual charge of the female figure.[69] Indeed, throughout the text, sexual force is dissolved in the practice of art. As Philip Horne has pointed out, for example, when Julia arrives at Nick's studio to find Miriam 'intimately installed with him,' the scene is 'not what the cliché of farce makes it appear, a discovery of painter and actress in flagrant post-coital *déshabille;* what is flagrant is that Nick and

[69] Bourdieu, *Manet*, 136.

Miriam are absorbed together in the practice of art'.[70] The absence of an ekphrasis of Miriam's gaze, then, disarms a possibly sexualised reading of her portrait. Consequently, it reinforces the economy of exchanges between theatre and painting in the text. Miriam is 'made' to be an art object – as actor, model, whatever – who will provide a specifically aesthetic pleasure to the viewer, while Nick's gaze negates or denies Miriam's sexuality only in the act of painting her.

Miriam's business partner, the actor Basil Dashwood, is acutely aware of the exchange between theatre and painting. Although he praises Nick's portrait, he criticises it for 'not yet being finished and its not having gone into that year's Academy' (1218). For Dashwood, the value of the painting will only be established once it has been sent to the proving ground of the Academy, an act which will help to consolidate Miriam's celebrity. Dashwood is one of a range of 'patrons, mentors, and family members' who, in the words of Sara Lyons, 'stage-manage' Nick and Miriam, leaving them open to becoming 'exploitable as slick commodities'.[71] Dashwood's attitude to Nick's portrait seems to confirm this image of Miriam as commodity, as does Miriam's view of the 'dignity' of her own art, discussed above. But if Miriam truly suffers this fate, it is only with the help of Nick's painting. In this exchange, the painter simultaneously commodifies the actor's celebrity to increase the value of his own work, while also taking advantage of the existing commodity status of the celebrity. Indeed, were Nick's portrait to be accepted by the Academy it would secure his status as painter—that is, his depiction of a famous actor would grant him the institutional imprimatur which would confirm his position as professional artist as opposed to amateur dauber. Ultimately, then, Nick's portrait of Miriam is the coproduction of a commodity.[72]

Nash says that in the act of performance Miriam becomes simply 'the visible image, the picture on the wall' (994). The strong relation between painting and drama in the text makes it

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[70] James, *Muse*, ed. Horne, xxvii.
[71] Sara Lyons, '"You Must Be as Clever as We Think You': Assessing Intelligence in Henry James's *The Tragic Muse*,' *Modern Philology* 115, no. 1 (2017): 126.
[72] On James's broader critique of what Richard Salmon has called "the culture of publicity" see Richard Salmon, *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

all the more striking that James is 'very careful not to commit either the narrator or Nick to a theoretical positon about painting'.[73] Neither to a theoretical position nor to a style: we never learn what *kind* of painter Nick is, nor more generally how he handles his craft, except for the fact that his portrait has 'the air of an original thing,' as Sherringham puts it. Even when Nick's painting is at centre-stage, so to speak, its illusionistic, representational power is foregrounded—that is, Miriam's pose takes precedence, rather than the composition or even the palette of Nick's portrait. This highlights the model's contribution to the construction of the image. And indeed, as we shall see with Nick's portrait of Nash, *The Tragic Muse* suggests that the painter requires a suitably stimulating model to produce a compelling image. Moreover, this emphasis on illusionism is broadly in keeping with the way in which James tends to describe portraits in his art criticism, presenting a resolutely literary analysis of the art of painting which treats 'the painting as pretext to literary dissertation,' as Bourdieu puts it.[74] James dedicates much of his profile of Sargent, for example, to an ekphrasis of the dress and comportment of the figures in *The Lady with the Rose* and *El Jaleo* (both 1882), referring only briefly to the painter's craft (and even then only in vague terms such as 'broadness and boldness').[75] Likewise, Miriam's portrait is described precisely as though it were the actor's double, a perfect illusion created using only a few painter's tricks such as foreshortening. In this way, Nick's art both cooperates with the theatre and, in a sense, serves as an auxiliary to the theatrical figure *par excellence*, Miriam Rooth.

The text's consciousness of the commodity-status of paintings – its implication in a system of producers and consumers – is reiterated through Nick's portrait of Nash. Nick commences his portrait by seeing 'all sorts of pleasant and paintable things' in Nash, but is soon disturbed to discover that 'he had never *seen*' his friend before, that he could only recognise 'the indefinite and the elusive' in his model (1234). This image of Nash is a literalised version of

[73] Gordon and Stokes, "The Reference," 144.
[74] Bourdieu, *Manet*, 131.
[75] James, *CWA*, 1: 418–22.

what Rachel Teukolsky describes as the 'detached aesthetic spectator, an abstract and rather ghostly individual'.[76] The problem with Nick's portrait is that it draws this 'abstract,' disinterested aesthete into explicit relation with the concrete workings of the market: 'From being outside the universe he was suddenly brought into it, and from the position of a free commentator and critic, a sort of amateurish editor of the whole affair, reduced to that of humble ingredient and contributor' (1235). Nick's painting constrains the previously free-floating Nash to being a mere representation, a fixed figure in the human comedy, and therefore just another character in James's drama. Tellingly, in describing the portrait, Nash is no longer 'free,' because he is fixed in the form of the painting-as-commodity, the status of which had been established through Miriam's celebrity portrait. Consequently, he cannot maintain his disinterested pose, which is destroyed both by the act of representation and by the implicit value of that representation.[77] In other words, by literally inserting Nash into the art-market, Nick's representation annihilates the aesthete's pretention to disinterestedness. This is paralleled by the way in which the relation between painting and the theatre destroys Nick and Miriam's claims to artistic disinterestedness.

The logic of this relation is carried over into the debate between painting and politics articulated in the novel. Nick begins by placing the representation afforded by politics at the top of the hierarchy of human activity. At the National Gallery, he calls painting into question:

> Its weakness, its narrowness appeared to him; tacitly blaspheming he looked at several world-famous performances with a lustreless eye. That is, he blasphemed if it were blasphemy to say to himself that, with all respect, they were a poor business, only well enough in their small way. The force that produced them was not one of the greatest forces in human affairs; their place was inferior and their connection with the life of man casual and slight (1137–8).

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[76] Teukolsky, *Eye*, 135.

[77] Not to mention the fact that the aesthete's disinterested pose was already 'somewhat belied by the commodity culture that supported his lifestyle, an accumulation of status that was dependent upon the very bourgeois culture aestheticism set out to critique': ibid., 136.

Nick seeks to prove that painting is 'inferior' to politics, thereby justifying his own entry into what he calls the 'clumsy system' (1138). The notion of blasphemy is apt: Nick responds to the Aestheticist drive to turn art into a kind of religious practice by reversing the usual dichotomy between the sacred of art and the secular of politics. He desacralises art by seeing it, like Miriam, as a 'poor business'. This suggests both the relative poverty of painting and calls to mind the profit and loss inherent in the world of business, the relation between producer and consumer, supply and demand. There is, then, a greater force in 'human affairs,' the grand system of political representation; Nick consequently resolves at this point to pursue politics wholeheartedly.

On a second visit to the National Gallery, however, Nick's scepticism is surmounted and the hierarchy is reversed. The 'great portraits of the past' are no longer a 'poor business'. Instead, as Nick 'stood before' them,

> the perfection of their survival struck him as the supreme eloquence, the reason that included all others, thanks to the language of art, the richest and most universal. Empires and systems and conquests had rolled over the globe and every kind of greatness had risen and passed away; but the beauty of the great pictures had known nothing of death or change, and the ages had only sweetened their freshness. The same faces, the same figures looked out at different centuries, knowing a deal the century didn't, and when they joined hands they made the indestructible thread on which the pearls of history were strung (1222).

In terms reminiscent of Pater's portrait of the *Mona Lisa* ('She is older than the rocks among which she sits'), 'the great pictures' triumph over empires and 'systems and conquests' because of their permanence, because they do not experience 'death or change'.[78] Political systems are doomed to transience while art triumphs through sheer duration. In this way, art records change but does not partake of it: it achieves a transcendence ('knowing a deal the century didn't') while at the same time recording the passing of history (the 'thread on which the pearls of history

[78] Pater, *Renaissance*, 70.

were strung'). This is the only instance in the novel in which the artist is no longer subject to the whims of any specific audience. But such freedom is only won through posterity; the living artist must live with – though not necessarily for – the market.

After Nash's departure, Nick imagines that his portrait of the aesthete 'had a singular air of gradually fading from the canvas,' and he sees in this an echo of Hawthorne's magic-picture narratives such as "Edward Randolph's Portrait" (1837) or "The Prophetic Pictures".[79] For Nick, 'the moral of the Hawthorne tale would be that this personage would come back on the day when the last adumbration should have vanished' (1236). However, this fading might also be a subtle indication of Nick's artistic talent, a canny way of revealing just how valuable an artist he might prove. Nick sees the Master-paintings in the National Gallery as 'the things that were the most inspiring, in the sense that they were the things that, while generations, while worlds had come and gone, seemed most to survive and testify' (1222).[80] But faced with his own attempt, Nick 'recalled with a certain fanciful awe the unusual seriousness with which he [Nash] had ranked himself among imperishable things' (1236). Thus, the fading canvas can be read as a testament to both Nash and Nick's artistic impermanence, as well as a comment on Nash's arrogance. Though this might be an oblique criticism of Nick's ability, he is nonetheless redeemed by his willingness to pursue painting all the same. In Nash's case, the condemnation is clear: he can seek to escape from the market, but only at the price of disavowing art altogether. Given James's famous faith in the power of art—in for example, his last letter to H. G. Wells: 'It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance'—the novelist would no doubt

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[79] For more on James's relation to these Hawthorne stories see Brodhead, *Hawthorne*, 125ff.

[80] It is worth noting that in *The Tragic Muse* it is portraits and not landscapes that last. As we have seen throughout this thesis, James maintained a distinction between the two forms, summing up his position in 1887: 'there is no greater work of art than a great portrait': James, *CWA*, 1: 427. It is the representation of 'the life of another' (874) that merits art its high place, what Sherringham calls 'the almost aggressive bravery' of art which can 'so triumphantly, so exquisitely render life' (1037). Landscapes are good only to suggest the picturesque, as when, at Rambouillet, Sherringham and the Rooths found 'luncheon and, in the landscape, a charming sense of summer and of little brushed French pictures' (861). And because the text represents 'the life' of Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth the novel implicitly conflates the 'great portraits' and the representational power afforded by the art of fiction. As we saw in chapter 2, *The Portrait of a Lady* stages to similar effect comparisons between Isabel Archer and great works of art.

disapprove of Nash's decision.[81] Instead of giving up on art because of the constraints of the market, the artist must instead give the *omnium gatherum* 'what one wants oneself'.

Novel reflections

One of the striking things in a text which discourses 'much and admirably on art, dramatic, pictorial, and general' (as the critic for *Overland Monthly* put it in October 1890) is the relative absence of discussion concerning the art of fiction. This might be attributed to external factors such as James's growing interest in the theatre, or his move away from professional art criticism. Indeed, *The Tragic Muse* might even be considered a kind of preparation for the theatrical turn: prior to dedicating himself to drama, James set about describing and discussing its merits, its demands, and its constraints in the form he knew best, the novel. Nevertheless, the absence of reflection on the art of fiction in the text is itself revealing. James conspicuously leaves the novel unaddressed in his elaborate treatment of the hierarchy of the arts. This naturally raises the question: what is the place of fiction in all this? Such curiosity is only reinforced by the material fact of the book—that is, while the characters debate the relative merits of the theatre and painting, the reader remains, book in hand. I argue that *The Tragic Muse* treats the place of the novel implicitly in relation to the other arts. By considering the relative merits and limitations of painting and drama, the text also reflects on the art of fiction and its own role in the marketplace, as well as its place within the hierarchy of the arts.

The Tragic Muse suggests that the novel can accommodate other art forms via ekphrasis as well as through certain techniques notionally borrowed from theatre and painting. In the preface James argues that he conceived of the novel in 'scenic conditions' – that is, in scenes which alternate from one aspect or strand of the narrative to another – 'which are as near an

[81] James, *A Life*, ed. Horne, 555.

approach to the dramatic as the novel may permit itself'.[82] Likewise, he claimed to seek 'the successfully *foreshortened* thing,' thereby appropriating the language of painting to describe his literary technique.[83] Such comparisons are present in the novel, too. One of Miriam's plays, for example, mirrors the action of the text: 'The curtain was rising on the tragic climax of the play' (1253). Elsewhere, Lady Agnes leaves Nick standing 'in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, the grand composition of which Nick, as she looked back, appeared to have paused to admire' (752). In this way, the text assimilates terms and suggests techniques from other arts, redeploying them for its own purposes. Although the novel does on occasion self-consciously signal or consider its own construction – the narrator, for example, notes that the reader might be able to learn more about Miriam 'if it were open to us to regard this young lady through some other medium than the mind of her friends' (986) – for the most part, as we have seen, the text reflects implicitly on the art of fiction by explicitly considering the other arts. Thus, the absence of discourse concerning the art of fiction in the text in fact underwrites its higher position within the hierarchy of the arts: fiction comprehends the other arts and unites them for its own purposes.

This is allied to a broader theoretical point. As Bourdieu puts it, by making persistent reference to other works of art, the text 'asks to be referred not to an external referent, the represented or designated "reality," but to the universe of past and present works of art'.[84] *The Tragic Muse* therefore seeks to be compared to theatre and painting, both in terms of form and implied value. However, these two art forms are shown to be dependent on each other and on their audiences, and thus to have comparatively low levels of artistic autonomy. But the admission of these failures does not 'render the novelist's own art more suspect,' as Alison Byerly puts it; on the contrary, 'like the informant who fingers a fellow criminal, the novelist accommodates our sophisticated doubts about representation by forcing someone else to take

[82] James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 1112.
[83] Ibid., 1110.
[84] Bourdieu, *Distinction* xxvii.

the fall'.[85] Put simply, by pointing out the shortcomings of these other arts, *The Tragic Muse* lowers the status of painting and theatre within the hierarchy of the arts; at the same time, it places the novel above these arts by implying that fiction does not suffer from these failures, can perhaps even transcend them.

A similar logic to the one outlined by Bourdieu and Byerly underwrites the novel's talk of "the world". We have already seen the ways in which the world of politics is equated with other forms of representation in the text. But the effect of such an equation is heightened when politics or "the world" more generally is compared directly to drama or painting. Sherringham, for example, hopes to convince Miriam to marry him by promising her adventures in 'the world,' offering 'realities' instead of 'fables':

> The stage is great, no doubt, but the world is greater. It's a bigger theatre than any of those places in the Strand. We'll go in for realities instead of fables, and you'll do them far better than you do the fables (1189).

Sherringham is close to proclaiming all the world a stage, but he apparently fails to take the lesson. He believes that there is a strict division between "the world" and drama, and that the acting ends once one leaves the theatre; Miriam's relentless performance, however, counters this vision. She also counters Sherringham's gendered logic – that Miriam ought to give up her career in favour of his – by suggesting that the terms can be reversed: 'Stay on *my* stage,' she says, 'come off your own' (1190). But here the discussion also reflects on the novel itself. These conversations have a metafictional effect: by calling attention to the stage *qua* representation or 'fable,' they equate the world of the text with the world beyond the text; in other words, Sherringham's 'realities' are put on the same plane as the reality inhabited by the reader. The corollary is that the novel, too, becomes 'a bigger theatre' than 'those places in the Strand'.

[85] Byerly, *Realism*, 7.

Thus, with its vast stage and range of players, fiction is positioned as superior to drama because of its capacity to contain a wider, greater reality than the mere 'fables' of the theatre. Moreover, the fact that Miriam will 'do' these 'realities' 'far better' than she "does" the 'fables' suggests that the 'realities' themselves have a fictional quality, that they are themselves a kind of performance to be "done". This reinforces the argument made in the novel concerning politics, which, as we saw above, is subject to the same pressures as the theatre, and which requires a similar performative ability. Ultimately, this acts to further conflate such 'realities' with reality itself; in doing so, the text makes a wider claim for the representational capacity of the novel over and above that of the theatre. Considering the close relations between the painting and drama maintained in the novel, the same can be said of Nick's chosen art.

This argumentation is carried over into other metafictional moments such as when Nick accuses Nash of talking 'like an American novel' (1089). This appears to be a straightforward metafictional device, one that calls attention to the text as text. But it is nonetheless revealing when compared to other instances of artistic reference within *The Tragic Muse*: Nick's jibe characterises the novel in the same way that the characters speak of paintings, plays, and 'the world' itself. In this way, it simultaneously points to the unreality of the text – Nash talks like a witty but artificial 'American' fiction, not unlike James's novel as conceived by certain of his critics – while paradoxically making a claim for its very reality: Nash talks 'like' an American novel, a fact which is odd or amusing, Nick implies, because he is a "real" person and should not speak like a character in a book. This minor moment, apparently incidental and frivolous, acquires a deeper force when related to the myriad instances in the text in which the arts are compared. Such a comparison implicitly connects painting and drama with the art of fiction, and this implicit connection is ultimately a contest. In describing the constraints to which the different art forms are subject, the novel situates these arts within a hierarchy that locates fiction over and above the other arts.

This contest is reaffirmed with regards to Nash's portrait. Early in the text, Nick describes at length his experiences with Nash at Oxford. But Sherringham complains that this verbal 'portrait of the complicated Nash' is 'lamentably dim' (757). In other words, Nick has not captured the mercurial complexity of the aesthete's character, foreshadowing his eventual failure to represent Nash in oils. As we saw in chapter 2, James seems to have believed that fiction has an advantage over painting in this regard. The novel can show characters both in successive states – developing from one thing into another through time, following Lessing's classic theory – but also vacillating between two opposing positions, which suits Nash very well indeed.[86] In this way, the canvas cannot hold Nash's portrait but fiction can, even if in doing so it foregoes the immediacy available to the painter's art.[87] This capacity of the novel enables James to represent Nick as an embodied version of the conflict between painting and politics. There are 'two men in him, quite separate' (881), each of which seeks to establish his own hierarchy, a process literalised in Nick's trips to the National Gallery.

This pattern of competing comparisons recurs throughout the text, and extends from painting and drama to the art of sculpture. The novel opens, for example, with the Dormers gazing at the sculptures on display in 'the garden, as it is called […] the central court of the great glazed bazaar where […] are ranged the figures and groups, the monuments and busts, which form, in the annual exhibition of the Salon, the department of statuary' (703).[88] The visual sense is immediately foregrounded as the reader is invited to "look" closely at the scene and its characters:

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[86] See Lessing, *Laocoön*, chapter 16.

[87] This concern with immediacy is most effectively charted, as we saw in chapter 2, in Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 314.

[88] This 'great glazed bazaar' is the *Palais de l'Industrie* which held the Salon between 1857–97. James only reviewed one Salon as a professional art critic, though he nevertheless kept abreast of Salon affairs, most notably following the scandal caused by Sargent's *Madame X* (1884). James wrote about the Salon of 1876 for the *New York Tribune*, noting that the 'ground-floor at the Palais de l'Industrie is converted by the Salon into a garden, reasonably blooming under the circumstances, and dotted with the contributions of sculpture,' including a work by Sarah Bernhardt: James, *CWA*, 1: 192. The novelist declared that, though it was 'hardly more than a fair average Salon,' it would 'yet leave a lively impression of cleverness upon [its] Anglo-Saxon visitors': ibid., 179.

> The spirit of observation is naturally high at the Salon, quickened by a thousand artful or artless appeals, but no particular tension of the visual sense would have been required to embrace the character of the four persons in question (703).

The Salon context, with its glances towards the visual arts, positions the ensuing description as an ekphrasis of Nick's family.[89] "Ekphrasis" is the appropriate term because of the ways in which the Dormers are explicitly compared to or made analogous with the artworks around them: 'As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds, they too constituted a successful plastic fact' (703). Their 'plastic fact' encourages the reader to make inferences about their class, status, relation, and attributes. Lady Agnes, for example, has

> a high forehead, to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish—it glittered even when seen at a distance; a nose which achieved a high, free curve; and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person (704).

Her 'high forehead,' 'high' curving nose, and the attitude of her head when she laughs (disengaged from 'possible entanglements') all indicate a person of high status, class, and "breeding". The 'polish' of her skin, meanwhile, suggests a marmoreal beauty, a polished personal culture, and a lack of emotional range. These class associations are reinforced by the 'looped silken canopy' of her 'crinkled flaxen hair,' which appeared 'like the marquee of a garden party' (705). Such descriptions would seem to encourage a comfortable analogy between fiction and the visual arts—in this case, sculpture. Indeed, the Dormers are described in terms which make them appear as figures in a contemporary art review:

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[89] We saw in the previous chapter how such gallery spaces encouraged in *The Portrait of a Lady* a shift in the novel's representational strategies. This process is repeated throughout James's work, from the opening of *The American* which takes place in the Louvre to Millie Theale's encounter with a Bronzino portrait in *The Wings of the Dove*. For the best overview of this general process see James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). For specific instances of this action in James's fiction see especially Winner, *Visual Arts*, chapters 3, 4, and 6; and Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, chapters 2 and 5.

> The fresh, diffused light of the Salon made them clear and important; they were finished productions, in their way, and ranged there motionless, on their green bench, they were almost as much on exhibition as if they had been hung on the line (703–4).

The ekphrasis of the Dormers hangs them on the line, displays them in the same way as favoured paintings were exhibited at the Salon (at eye level, in line with the eye). But the novel immediately sets about troubling the inferences drawn from this ekphrasis. At the end of the opening chapter, for example, the narrative voice notes that the 'foreign observer whom I took for granted in beginning to sketch this scene would have had to admit that the rigid English family had, after all, a capacity for emotion' (712). In other words, the reality of these characters will belie the fable of their image, a fact of which the novel is actively aware: 'We shall see quickly enough how accurate a measure it [the description] might have taken of Nicholas Dormer' (705). In this way, the characters in the text defy stasis; they must be represented by the art of fiction rather than a visual or plastic art. The text thus constructs these static images precisely to disturb them. The novel itself will show the ways in which these characters are not 'finished productions' but are instead in motion, in conflict, disharmonious with and among themselves and with the world around them, a vision of things which, as we shall see in the next chapter, will prove central to *The Ambassadors*.

The Tragic Muse points to the shortcomings inherent to the stasis of painting and sculpture, but shows that these two arts can be useful to the novel. Tellingly, the chapter at the Salon ends with Grace Dormer looking 'around her to see if at this moment they [the family] were noticed. She discovered with satisfaction that they had escaped' (712). They had escaped the too static, too reductively suggestive sculptor's eye as represented by the inert image of her family; they have entered instead the shifting labyrinth of the novel. Once more, the text is aware of this discrepancy. Responding to questions posed about the characters' future, for example, the narrative voice declares: 'The reader shall learn these things in time, if he care enough for them' (716). Shall learn these things 'in time': after opening in the Salon and

describing the Dormers in relation to sculpture, the text highlights its own capacities over and above that of the visual arts. In this way, these instances differ from conventional novelistic narration precisely because of the consistent reflection on and comparison with the faculties and limitations of the other arts.

Although the text vaunts the novel's unique capacities, it also manifests an anxiety concerning the fate of literature in the modern marketplace. It does so in part by implying that, because the theatre and painting are subject to the demands of their audiences, the novel also suffers from such conflict; the novel, too, must anticipate and satisfy the desires of its readership. As we have seen, this anxiety appeared in James's contemporary correspondence and is mirrored in *The Tragic Muse*—in, for example, Nash's comments about the *omnium gatherum*. But it appears most clearly in the fact that Nick's portrait of Nash gradually fades from the canvas "'without a trace," like a personage in a fairy-tale or a melodrama' (1236). This is not only, as suggested above, an indication of artistic impermanence. Critics such as Eric Haralson, for example, have seen the fading of Nash's image as a sign of his queer elusiveness.[90] Sarah Lyons, on the other hand, argues that Nash's disappearance may be read 'as a symbol of the attenuation of the novelist in a debased, spectacle-driven culture'.[91] However, this argument depends on figuring Nash as a novelist, something which he explicitly disavows: 'Literature, you see, is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays such mischief with one's style that really I have had to give it up' (725). That is, the 'attenuation' to which Lyons refers had already been enacted by Nash long before Nick painted his portrait. Crucially, though, Nash abandoned literature precisely because it demanded that he satisfy the demands of his readers. These reflections are refracted through Nash's Aestheticism. The 'abject concessions' are specifically stylistic, which means that the writer ought to produce for the happy few, which is reward enough—'besides, of course, the pleasure for yourself' (820),

[90] Haralson, *Queer Modernity*, 74–6.
[91] Lyons, "Intelligence," 128.

as he puts it. This seems like an easy jest at the expense of the aesthete: Nash pursues disinterestedness to such an extreme that he ultimately produces nothing. But when this attitude is related to James's own production – when Nash's 'abject concessions' are linked to James's disdain for the 'abysses of vulgarity' represented by popular art – it becomes the expression of a sincere anxiety about the future of 'literature' and its survival in the face of market imperatives.

In discussing fiction in the shadow of the other arts, in whispers and by implication, the novel subtly reveals the ways in which it, too, struggles under the same pressures as painting and drama. Each is subject to the market; each must fight to achieve aesthetic autonomy. However, because painting and drama are shown to have relatively low levels of autonomy in relation to their respective markets, fiction, it is implied, has more autonomy, can comprehend and even exceed the other forms. It therefore ought to supersede painting and drama in a hierarchy of the arts. In the end, though, this can be viewed as an internal battle, a struggle within the family, with each art fighting for prime position. Because the novel is indeed saturated with warnings, threats, and indictments of a larger, external struggle: the struggle between art and the world. Miriam, for example, instructs Nick to 'give up the base, bad world' to pursue his painting. The painter ripostes that it is 'the base, bad world that pays,' that earns one's daily bread. Miriam assents, but counters by saying that, if it is the world that pays, then one ought to 'make it pay, without mercy—squeeze it dry. That's what it's meant for—to pay for art' (988).

4. Painting, fiction, and 'the real lapse of time' in *The Ambassadors*

Writing in his journal in 1905, Arnold Bennett gave a damning verdict of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*: though admirable in places, the book was 'not *quite* worth the great trouble of reading it'.[1] This formed part of the broader, frustrated response to James's elaborate late style. H. G. Well's caricature in *Boon* (1915) is the most famous example. For Wells, reading James's later works was like watching a 'hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea,' so disparate were the means and the end, the effort and the reward.[2] But long before *Boon*, James was used to such complaints.[3] After the publication of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), his brother William sent him a cantankerously affectionate letter about the 'perverse' success of his novel style: 'I read with interest to the end (many pages, and innumerable sentences twice over to see what the dickens they could possibly mean) and all with unflagging curiosity to know what the upshot might become'.[4] A similar response greeted *The Golden Bowl*, with one critic pining 'regretfully [for] *Daisy Miller* and the days when Mr. James was not apparently convinced that the essence of art was prolixity'.[5] The novelist himself thought that there was an obvious force behind these dismissive reactions. In December 1902, he wrote to Howells decrying the 'big blatant *Bayadère* of Journalism' which had destroyed the '*faculty of attention*' in the 'anglosaxon mind': 'we live,' James declared, 'in a lonely age for literature

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[1] Gard, *Heritage*, 373.

[2] H. G. Wells, *Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil and the Last Trump* (London: Unwin, 1915), 101. For Wells, the characters in James's novels 'bring enormous brains to bear upon the minutest problems of existence': Wells, *Boon*, 118. It was Wells, however, who recommended *The Ambassadors* to Bennett.

[3] As Maud Ellmann has noted, 'attacks' on *The Ambassadors* and James's late style more generally 'tend to be framed in mercenary terms' of budget and restraint, and contrasted with a notionally 'restricted economy'. This observation leads Ellmann to a neat parallel between the negative critical response to James's late style and Woollett's capitalist spirit in *The Ambassadors*: Ellmann, *Nets*, 48–9.

[4] Gard, ed., *Heritage*, 317.

[5] Ibid., 379. Other commentators agreed that James had become prolix, though they disagreed about the effect. While some complained of the novel's 'unduly minute' analysis and saw the text as 'flawed by some of his obscurest later mannerisms,' others reveled in its 'perfect' 'atmosphere' and attributed James's novel style to 'his original genius arrived at maturity': ibid., 378, 377, 380, 390.

or for any art but the mere visual'; in this context it was only natural that readers should shy away from the difficulties of his demanding literary art.[6]

James, then, might have anticipated Bennett's 'great trouble' with *The Ambassadors*. In fact, he had a ready response for readers who struggled with his so-called "major phase," the string of supersubtle novels he published between 1902–4.[7] In 1903, soon after the publication of *The Ambassadors*, James advised the author, social reformer, and society hostess Millicent Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland on how best to take his new novel: slowly. He told her to read just five pages a day – 'be even as deliberate as that' – and to keep up with the text 'step by step'. His reasons were clear:

> I find that the very most difficult thing in the art of the novelist is to give the impression of the *real lapse of time*, *the quantity* of time, represented by our few poor phrases and pages, and all the drawing-out the reader can contribute helps a little perhaps the production of that spell.[8]

James elsewhere manifested a concern for the representation of time. In his 1907 preface to *Roderick Hudson*, for example, he suggested that, because of its 'inadequate' time-scheme, the novel could almost be considered a failure: events in the text move 'too fast' and occur 'too punctually,' he argued, shortcomings which threaten the integrity of the entire work.[9] We can take James at his word, then: he considered it very difficult indeed to give the 'impression' in fiction of the '*real lapse of time*'—difficult, that is, but not impossible.

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[6] James, *A Life*, 377, 377–8.
[7] Since at least F. O. Matthiessen's *Henry James: The Major Phase* (1946), scholarship has accepted a tripartite division of James's career. The early period gave way to the middle years – named for James's own 1893 short story – before the novelist arrived at his major phase which consisted of *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Recently, however, critics have sought to challenge this schema, chiefly by proposing a fourth phase centred around his late work of travel writing, *The American Scene* (first published as a book in 1907) and what Oliver Herford has called James's "late personal writings": see especially Posnock, *Curiosity* and Herford, *Retrospect*.
[8] James, *Letters 4*, 302–3. Despite her campaigning for social reform and her work as a memoirist, novelist, playwright, journalist, and editor, it was as hostess and member of the Souls that James chiefly treated Sutherland-Leveson-Gower. It is this society figure that appears in Sargent's portrait of her, *Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland*, painted in 1904.
[9] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1047.

This time-consciousness would seem, in some ways, to account for the convolutions of the later style, just as Proust's snaking illuminations have been linked to his narrator's search for lost time.[10] However, many critics have seen James's style in *The Ambassadors* as indebted to the art of painting, specifically Impressionism; and they have tended to focus on issues of point of view raised by Impressionist painting rather than on James's concern for the representation of time. Adeline Tintner, for example, argued that the novel enacts a 'version of Impressionism' because it is related from the perspective of a single observer, the protagonist Louis Lambert Strether.[11] More recently, Peter Brooks has suggested that the text manifests a 'commitment to an extreme perspectivalism' that is derived in part from Impressionist painting.[12] Meanwhile, critics such as Jesse Matz and Daniel Hannah have turned from painterly Impressionism to literary Impressionism. For Matz, literary Impressionism 'makes surfaces show depths, make [*sic*] fragments suggest wholes, and devotes itself to the undoing of such distinctions'.[13] Likewise, for Hannah, the visual impression is an 'ambivalent play with surface and depth': thus, by mediating between notional extremes through literary style, the literary Impressionist suggests a 'perceptual totality'.[14] Broadly speaking, then, accounts of the novel which concentrate on Impressionism in painting tend to rely on the place of the observer relative to

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[10] This connection is a mainstay of criticism on Proust, but see especially the classic statements on the subject by Leo Spitzer, "Le style de Marcel Proust," in *Etudes de style*, trans. Alain Coulon, Eliane Kaufholz, and Michel Foucault (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 397–473; Georges Poulet, "Marcel Proust," in *Etudes sur le temps humain: Mesure de l'instant* (Paris: Plon, 1968), 299–335; and Roland Barthes, "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 277–90. The first volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu* met with a response similar to the perplexed frustration that greeted James's late works. Famously, the reader for the Fasquelle publishing house provided a report on Proust's first volume, *Du Coté de chez Swann*, that declared: 'reading cannot be sustained for more than five or six pages […] there will never be a reader hardy enough to follow along for more than a quarter of an hour, the nature of the author's sentences doing nothing to improve matters': quoted in Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 129.

[11] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), chapter 7. Elsewhere Tintner argues that Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) is a 'pictorial source' for James's own *Ambassadors*: *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes: Thirteen Artists in his Work* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), chapter 7.

[12] Brooks, *Paris*, 51. For Brooks, this 'extreme perspectivalism' emerges not just from Impressionist painting but also from James's engagement with the works of Flaubert. See also Brooks, *Vision*, chapter 9, for further suggestive links between the Impressionist approach to perspective and restricted point of view in fiction.

[13] Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, 1.

[14] Hannah, *Public*, 34; Matz, *Literary Impressionism*, 1. Hannah builds on Matz's argument by positioning James within the 'late-nineteenth century's confused private-public ground'—'confused,' that is, by the growth of publicity and the emergent society of the spectacle: Hannah, *Public*, 12.

what they perceive; critics who focus on literary Impressionism, on the other hand, emphasise the dynamics of the observer's perception as such.[15]

Although these have been the dominant critical positions, they nonetheless pose their own problems. Framing the later style as indebted to Impressionist painting, for example, depends on a kind of return of the repressed. Because by the start of the twentieth century, James had for the most part abandoned his explicit engagement with the art of painting. In fact, by the early 1890s, he confessed that he had ceased to 'feel [painting] very much'; in the same period, his work as an art critic all but ended: he produced only 4 pieces of art criticism between 1891–1900.[16] His next and final essay on the subject was a 1909 article in memory of his friend, the art historian and critic Charles Eliot Norton.[17] Treating James as a literary Impressionist has its advantages, then, given the novelist's growing detachment from the world of painting. However, it overlooks James's use of the rhetoric of painting in *The Ambassadors*, as well as several important references to painting and painters in the novel, most notably in Book Eleven. It also ignores the ways in which these references and this rhetoric are in the text contrasted to fiction as a form of representation, as we shall see, which goes against Matz's claim that literary

[15] Though as is well known both these issues were active in painterly Impressionism itself. Indeed, they led in part to the famous "crisis" of Impressionism when, among other issues, Impressionist painters disagreed about whether their work should privilege the supposedly raw, uncorrected vision of an individual artist or whether it should ground itself in scientific developments in, for example, the field of optics. For an overview of the subject see House, *Impressionism*, chapter 6. For a study grounded in the career of a single painter – Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), one of the key figures associated with the creation of Impressionism who in the 1880s sought a more scientific basis for his work and found it in Seurat's Neo-Impressionist theory – see Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). This confusion is part of the difficulty in the study of literary Impressionism, which was often 'animated' by painterly Impressionism and shares many of its concerns, as Adam Parkes has put it; it is often difficult to sufficiently distinguish literary Impressionism from what Parkes calls 'visual Impressionism': Adam Parkes, "Naturalism, Realism, and Impressionism," in Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, eds., *Late Victorian Into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 191.

[16] James's confession appears in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton quoted in Marc Simpson, *James and American Painting*, 55.

[17] James's 1909 tribute to Norton was entitled 'An American Art Scholar,' thereby privileging both Norton's relation to the world of art and the work he had done for his nation. His other articles were on exhibitions at the short-lived New Gallery (1888–1910) and the Royal Academy, as well as works on specific painters including an account of the life and art of Honoré Daumier and, in 1897, a review of paintings by the recently deceased Sir Frederic Leighton (d. 1896) and Ford Madox Brown (d. 1893).

Impressionism 'disallow[s] the kind of distinctions Lessing (and the subsequent record of sister arts differences) tends to make.'[18]

My focus in this chapter is on Book Eleven of *The Ambassadors*.[19] In the previous Book, Strether had been chastised for failing in his embassy: he was first unable and then unwilling to convince Chad Newsome, heir to a successful Massachusetts manufacturing business, to return to America; consequently, Strether seeks respite from his mission by fleeing for the day to the French countryside. I focus on Book Eleven for two reasons. First, because – as we shall see throughout this chapter – this section has received the bulk of scholarly attention, owing in part to its major role in the novel's plot. Second, because James himself assigned this section a privileged place in his design of the text. In his original proposal for the novel, sent to the publishers Harper & Brothers in September 1900, he declared that Book Eleven was 'really the climax – for all it can be made to give and to do, for the force with which it may illustrate and illuminate the subject – toward which the action marches straight from the first'.[20] This section is indeed the narrative climax of the tale because it resolves the enigma of Chad Newsome's romantic life and reveals the source of his newfound sophistication, mysteries which had puzzled Strether since his arrival in Paris. But it is also representative of the dynamic at work throughout the novel, a dynamic which Ian Watt described as a 'progressive yet artfully delayed clarification' of sensations, relations, and events.[21]

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[18] Matz, *Literary Impressionism*, 248. Matz does, however, argue in his conclusion that in his understanding Impressionism manifests 'contradictory tendencies' – 'the tendency, on the one hand, to blur the differences between the two arts, and on the other hand ultimately to emphasise it' – but he does not resolve this paradox: ibid., 248, 249.

[19] *The Ambassadors* has a complex publishing history, with passages and even whole chapters omitted at various stages. It has even excited an ongoing controversy about the correct order of chapter 28 and 29. For a polemical account of this (possible) error and the text's publishing history more generally see Jerome McGann, "Revision, rewriting, rereading; or, 'An error [not] in *The Ambassadors*'" in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*, ed. David McWhirter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 109–22. I work in this chapter from the 1909 edition of the novel, both because it represents James's final version of the text and because it fully reflects, along with the prefaces for the New York Edition, what I consider to be the novelist's mature theory of artistic relations, most notably in the distinctions it draws between painting and fiction.

[20] James, *Notebooks*, 574.

[21] Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication," *Essays in Criticism* 10, no. 3 (1960): 266. Watt's description was published several years before his own first use of the term "delayed decoding," which the critic later used to describe Conrad's practice in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) of showing first Marlow's impressions of an event and then only later offering an interpretation of that event: Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*

I begin by showing the ways in which Strether aestheticises the world around him with recourse to the art of painting. This aestheticizing of reality is achieved through landscape painting rather than portraiture, and therefore contrasts with *The Portrait of a Lady* as I described it in chapter 2.[22] I proceed to analyse how this aestheticization of everyday life is disrupted. Specifically, I suggest that the laying bare of Strether's aestheticised reality – the breaking of his illusion – makes an implicit claim for the authority of the novel. The final sentence of the preface to *The Ambassadors* argues that 'the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms'.[23] This claim seems to respond to a perceived challenge: the target is other 'literary forms' which involve representation, and so the challenge may come, for example, from drama. But as we have seen throughout my thesis, James considered one of the advantages of the novel its ability to comprehend and instrumentalise other art forms, and especially the art of painting. This conflict, I argue, helps to account for the manner in which the climax of *The Ambassadors* takes place. In the first instance, it enfolds an extended kind of criticism which explicitly contrasts painting with fiction, but which is in a sense subcutaneous: this criticism is always first and foremost under the skin of the action and the text's wider thematic concerns. In the process, this conflict helps to explicate aspects of James's style in the novel. For example, in the passages which are concerned with or reflect the influence of painting, anaphora and asyndeton pervade. These rhetorical devices hold disparate time periods in the same grammatical sphere and so mirror the purported stasis of painting; but these devices dissipate, like Strether's confusion more generally, as his painterly illusion dissolves. If Impressionist painting has often been

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 169. Maud Ellmann's recent account of *The Ambassadors* echoes Watt's criticism. For Ellmann, the novel is as 'dilatory' as its hero: Ellmann, *Nets*, 48.

[22] This emphasis on landscape painting is striking because, as we have seen throughout this thesis and as Ruth Bernard Yeazell has recently reaffirmed, James tends typically to focus on portraiture: Yeazell, "Portrait-Envy," 309–355.

[23] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1321. The centrality of Paris in the novel has frequently been highlighted by critics, but see especially Dorothea Krook, *The Ambassadors: A Critical Study* (New York: AMS Press, 1996). For a perceptive account of Strether's reading of French literature concerned with Paris see Allen W. Menton, "Typical Tales of Paris: The Function of Reading in *The Ambassadors*," *The Henry James Review* 15, no. 3 (1994): 286–300.

understood as the art of the instant, then the novel, James's work suggests, is the art of duration. In a final section, I place the dynamic I describe in Book Eleven within the broader framework of *The Ambassadors* as a whole, showing the ways in which Book Eleven really is, as the novelist suggested, the climax 'toward which the action marches straight from the first'.

Strether through the Claude glass

James sold *The Ambassadors* to Harper & Brothers as 'the picture of a certain momentous and interesting period, of some six months or so, in the history of a man no longer in the prime of life'.[24] From the start, Paris was central to this 'picture'. James began with what he called 'one of the platitudes of the human comedy, that people's moral scheme *does* break down in Paris'.[25] Strether duly finds himself 'mixed up with the typical tale of Paris,' and his 'moral scheme' is challenged upon arrival.[26] He brings with him, however, another clichéd association. For Strether, France is 'the great art-school,' 'the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters'; it is 'practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated' (91, 374). Such a conception heralds illusion: the myth of Greece, which had nourished imperial ambitions as much as Paterian pleasure, remains a myth. In this way, Strether has more than a name in common with one of Balzac's young men.[27] Like so many of them, he arrives from the provinces wondering whether he, too, will be transformed by the rich

[24] James, *Notebooks*, 543.
[25] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1312.
[26] Henry James, *Novels 1903–1911: The Ambassadors, The Golden Bowl, The Outcry*, ed. Ross Posnock (New York: Library of America, 2010), 391. Posnock reproduces the 1909 New York Edition text of the novel, though with the misplaced chapters first pointed out by Robert E. Young restored to their correct position. All further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses within the text.
[27] I refer to Balzac's *Louis Lambert*, an *étude philosophique* first published in 1832. Lambert is striking for his precocious, prodigious intelligence: he is lamented by the cénacle in *Illusions Perdues* (1837–43) as '*le plus grand esprit de notre époque*': Balzac, *La Comédie*, 3: 498. Considering Strether's intellectual fumbling throughout the novel – for example, the fact that he remains virtually oblivious to Maria Gostrey's persistent advances – there may be some irony in James's choice of the name. On the other hand, this might sell Strether short. After all, he evidently possesses a keen anthropologist's eye and the habit of extended analysis; unfortunately for him, though, his analysis is frequently misguided and often incorrect.

Parisian air; like so many of them, he holds tenaciously to his illusions. Significantly, he sustains them with help from the art of painting.

Towards the end of the novel, Strether leaves Paris in search of the picturesque. His days in Europe 'numbered,' the middle-aged ambassador from Woollett, Massachusetts, goes 'forth under the impulse – artless enough, no doubt – to give the whole of one of them to that French ruralism with its cool special green, into which he had hitherto looked only through the little, oblong window of the picture frame' (374). Artless enough: and yet, Strether's conception of the French countryside is wholly conditioned by art; specifically, he has in mind a canvas by the French landscape painter Émile Lambinet (1813–77) which he had seen in his youth and which, in the 'maroon-coloured, sky-lighted inner shrine' of a gallery on Boston's Tremont Street, he had thought of buying: it was 'the only adventure of his life in connexion with the purchase of a work of art'; it remained 'the picture he *would* have bought' (374). Strether is aware of the painting's minor quality. He knows that, were he to see it again, 'he should perhaps have a drop or shock'. For this reason, he 'never found himself wishing that the wheel of time would turn it up again, just as he had seen it' (374). But it 'would be a different thing,' he suggests, 'to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour' (374)—to recreate the moment at which he had first seen the painting. If such a 'restoration' were possible, the painting would regain its force; it would be combined with the totality of Strether's experience: of Boston, of his youth, of the whole moderately thrilling 'adventure'. And for a moment, the 'far-away hour' (a term which neatly collapses time and space) is indeed "restored" in his mind:

> the dusty day in Boston, the background of the Fitchburg Depot, of the maroon-coloured sanctum, the special-green vision, the ridiculous price, the poplars, the willows, the rushes, the river, the sunny silvery sky, the shady woody horizon (374–5).

The passage proceeds through different stages and types of Strether's remembered "reality," from the nominal present of his afternoon in the French countryside to the past of 'the dusty

day in Boston' to another, timeless space, that of Lambinet's canvas. The movement, then, is from present experience to the memory of Tremont Street to a further, different memory, a different life, almost: the world of art. These different times and spaces are held in the same grammatical universe through asyndeton, granting them a kind of equivalence, and through an equalising stillness which comes with the apparent absence of a controlling tense (the long list of subordinate clauses is all nouns, adjectives, and definite articles). These clauses are, however, subordinate to the claim that 'it would be a different thing […] to assist at the restoration'; but this conditionality is undermined by the fact that these things are indeed restored in Strether's mind—that is, they become as much a psychological fact as his vision of the landscape which he constructs in the passages below.

Thus, mundane Boston with its dust and depots exists happily alongside the Tremont Street gallery, itself untroubled by the world of the painting it contains. In spite of this equivalence, the passage enacts a kind of *gradus ad Parnassum*: Boston, with its modern transport and industry – the Fitchburg depot was built c. 1845 to serve the growing network of railroads in Massachusetts – gives way to the so-called 'sanctum' of art, which is still connected with trade ('the ridiculous price') but which houses the 'special green vision,' for which it is granted the sacredness of 'sanctum' and the romance of 'maroon,' a colour which retains a tint of its French origin.[28] Finally, in the world conjured by Lambinet's painting, trade and even modernity itself are banished in favour of an image of "nature". But this is the natural world as viewed through an 'oblong gilt frame' (375), Strether's very own Claude glass. In other words, "nature" domesticated and transformed into culture. Whatever difference there might be, however, between the Fitchburg depot and Lambinet's poplars is obscured by their grammatical cohabitation. Indeed, the only suggestion that the type of reality being described has shifted is

[28] In *Walden* (1854), Thoreau recounts his purchase of a shack from a labourer who worked on the construction of the Fitchburg railroad. The railway line itself comes to represent the perils of industrial modernity: 'though a crowd rushes to the [Fitchburg] depot, and the conductor shouts "All aboard!" when the smoke is blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few are riding, but the rest are run over': Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. Stephen Fender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

contained in the dual adjectives employed to qualify 'sky' and 'horizon'. Ultimately, then, there is nothing to suggest that the novel has transitioned from bare physical description ('dusty day') to psychological associations and memory (the coloured 'sanctum') and, finally, to ekphrasis. This means that the trees and the sky and the river form an integral part of the 'far-away hour': they are inseparable, almost indistinguishable from the 'dusty day in Boston'. In this way, there can be little meaningful distinction drawn between the world of Strether's memory and the "world" of the painting, between the novel's reconstruction of a memory and an ekphrastic image. This equivalence between painting and the rest of Strether's memory anticipates the drama of Book Eleven, in which his immediate experience – his enjoying an afternoon in the French countryside – is constructed through the image of the Lambinet. This image is disturbed only by the presence of Chad Newsome, the young man Strether has been dispatched to bring home, and Madame de Vionnet, the woman with whom Chad has been conducting a clandestine affair. Moreover, this equivalence resumes the dynamic at work throughout the novel, in which Strether's trite or naïve expectations of Parisian life – most of which emerge from the world of art – are continuously subverted by the reality around him.

Strether boards a train from Paris in search of a notional 'French ruralism,' an image of the remembered Lambinet. When he finds a location that conforms to his conception, he "restores" and transforms this image into a new reality. He finds 'the suggestion – weather, air, light, colour and his mood all favouring – at the end of some eighty minutes; the train pulled up just at the right spot' (375). The railway once more connects him with his image of art, this time functioning as an escape from the metropolis. Such an escape implies a flight from the constraints of business and its values—in other words, from Woollett, Mass. But Strether treats art, too, like a business: he steps off the train 'as securely as if to keep an appointment' (375); he is ready, then, to take possession in the French countryside of his very own Lambinet. But he recognises, nonetheless, that the painter and the school that he represents are all but

forgotten, that his 'appointment was only with a superseded Boston fashion' (375): Lambinet and the Barbizon School.

In 1871, E. Adam Doll and Joseph Dudley Richards opened a gallery at 145 Tremont Street, Boston.[29] The Doll and Richards Gallery chiefly promoted the Barbizon School, a group of artists who, from their base near the Fontainebleau forest in France, pioneered from 1830 onwards a more naturalistic, less Romantic treatment of landscape painting: they loosened their brushwork, painted *en plein-air*, and experimented with new manners of production, such as completing canvases in a single sitting.[30] The School proved popular on the American market and, thanks in part to the efforts of Durand-Ruel, this popularity only grew from the 1860s on.[31] In the process, Barbizon exercised an important influence on American landscape painting. In the 1850s, William Morris Hunt – who trained with Jean-François Millet (1814–75), one of the founding members of the Barbizon School – helped bring Barbizon techniques to the United States; soon after, a group of American artists self-consciously working in the Barbizon style came to be known as the American Barbizon School.[32] James himself recalled in *A Small Boy and Others* that as a young man growing up in the 1860s and 1870s the Barbizon School 'summed up for the American collector and in the New York and Boston markets the idea of the modern in the masterly'.[33] For a time, the novelist was enthusiastic about Barbizon. Indeed, Peter Collister argues that this enthusiasm fostered James's initial apprehension towards Impressionist landscapes.[34] In 1872, James idiosyncratically placed members of the

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[29] See Treadway, "Gallery," 12–14. Several critics have noted that the gallery is a plausible model for Strether's 'maroon-coloured sanctum,' but the first to have done so was John Sweeney, who was also the first editor of James's collected art criticism: James, *Painter's Eye*, 43.

[30] On the subject see especially Jean Bouret, *The Barbizon School and Nineteenth-Century French Landscape Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) and Steven Adams, *The Barbizon School and the Origins of Impressionism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994).

[31] See Simon Kelly, "Durand-Ruel and '*La Belle École*' of 1830," in *Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market*, ed. Sylvie Patry (London: National Gallery, 2015).

[32] On the subject see Bermingham, *Mood*.

[33] James, *Autobiographies*, 205.

[34] James, *CWA*, 1: xliv. Collister suggests that, along with the Barbizon School, further prohibiting factors included James's indebtedness to Ruskin and Taine; his childhood exposure to the academic French tradition; and his love of seventeenth-century Flemish and Dutch art.

Barbizon School in a broader 'French school' which included Delacroix alongside Troyon, Rousseau, and Daubigny; although he did so to contrast the 'aesthetic gifts of the French mind' with the comparatively artless American, James was nonetheless impressed enough by the school (or its reputation) to call a painting by Théodore Rousseau (1812–67) 'noble and perfect'.[35] As for Lambinet, it is likely that the novelist saw his work at the Boston Athenæum in 1875.[36] However, James wrote at length only once about the Barbizon School. By 1888 he recognised that the School represented a 'superseded fashion'; by then, Impressionism struck him as manifestly 'the art of the future'.[37]

It is fitting, then, that at the turn of the century Strether should feel nostalgic for Barbizon and Lambinet. The School was being forgotten and Lambinet was minor. This contributes to the touching irony of Strether's tale: his only 'adventure' in the world of art concerned a slight figure in a 'superseded' school.[38] It is fitting, too, that Lambinet should be one of the few painters named in the text, despite several of the other characters inhabiting an artistic milieu (Little Bilham, for example, 'had come out to Paris to paint', while Gloriani – who in *Roderick Hudson* is an 'American sculptor' who 'drove a very pretty trade in sculpture of the ornamental and fantastic sort' – appears in *The Ambassadors* as a 'distinguished sculptor' [104, 148]).[39] It is fitting, that is, because Strether mediates his own unabashedly minor history via a small piece of the aesthetic past.

For Viola Hopkins, however, Lambinet hardly matters. She argues that 'any other minor landscapist' would have served 'just as well': had James chosen a better-known painter such as Corot or Millet – founding members of the Barbizon School – the novelist would have been

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[35] Henry James, "Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 29 (January 1872): 115–18. Collister asserts that the work in question is Rousseau's *Coucher de soleil sur la plaine de Chailly à Barbizon* (c. 1855): James, *CWA*, 1: 22 n7.
[36] Henry James, "Notes," *Nation* 20 (June 1875): 106–9. Lambinet is not named directly but belonged to the collection of Quincy Adams Shaw on display at the Athenæum: see James, *CWA*, 1: 109 n.2.
[37] Ibid., xliv. It is worth pointing out, however, that the quotation is drawn from James's 1888 novel *The Reverberator* and ought to be read in the context of that fiction.
[38] Although Lambinet was not strictly a member of the Barbizon School, James placed him along other members of the School in *A Small Boy*: see James, *Autobiographies*, 205. For more on the painter see "Lambinet, Émile Charles," *Benezit Dictionary of Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[39] James, *Novels 1871–1880*, 236.

constrained to convey their 'popular styles'; with Lambinet, James can instead convey a 'general impression'.[40] In this way, Lambinet means freedom. The novelist does not have to produce or reproduce a specific canvas or adhere faithfully to a given style; instead, he can represent the *idea* of landscape, rather than any landscape in particular. There are, nonetheless, other reasons why James might have chosen Lambinet. For example, the French verb *lambiner* means to dawdle, which is exactly what Strether does throughout Book Eleven; the verb also carries the connotation of dragging one's feet and so wasting time, which might relate to Strether's comparatively late aesthetic and moral awakening.[41] More importantly, Hopkins's argument is troubled when the novel is put in relation with Impressionism proper, rather than with a 'general impression'—I return to the issue of Impressionism in the next section of this chapter.

Strether finds in the countryside outside Paris a recollection of Lambinet. What is more, he finds an image of the France that the painter represents, a fantastic France that to him was 'practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated' (374). France, in other words, as Tradition – which, as we saw in chapter 1, James considered conspicuously absent in America – and as Art. But it is a form of art that Strether finds himself 'freely walking about in':

> The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river – a river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name – fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them; the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was white and the church on the right grey; it was all there, in short—it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet. Moreover he was freely walking about in it. He did this last, for an hour, to his heart's content, making for the shady woody horizon and boring so deep into his impression and his idleness that he might fairly have got through them again and reached the maroon-coloured wall (375).

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[40] Viola Hopkins, "Visual Art Devices and Parallels in the Fiction of Henry James," *PMLA* 76, no. 5 (1961): 565.
[41] James spoke French exceptionally well and would certainly have known the term, which has been in use since at least the seventeenth century, is present in the seventh (1879) and eighth (1932–5) editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, and is still current. On the use of French in *The Ambassadors* see Eileen T. Bender, "'The Question of his Own French': Dialect and Dialectic in *The Ambassadors*," *The Henry James Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 128–34. For a penetrating account of the novelist's use of French more broadly see Daniel Karlin, "'Our precious *quand même*': French in the Letters of Henry James," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 78 (2013): http://journals.openedition.org/cve/945; DOI: 10.4000/cve.945, accessed December 22, 2019.

The composition of the Lambinet creates an imagined landscape for Strether, one which he can turn into reality—or, rather, he makes the painting *become* reality. Once more there is a strange equivalence in space and time, and once more it is communicated through asyndeton; but now it is supplemented by anaphora: 'it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet'. Strether 'freely' walks about in his 'impression' to such an extent that he might have 'reached the maroon-coloured wall' of the gallery, despite being across the Atlantic. But because this scene satisfies perfectly his desires ('it was what he wanted'), Strether remains an observer—that is, the countryside is transformed into landscape, a scene shaped for aesthetic pleasure. This landscape is an aesthetic figuration in which Strether plays no real part. He remains essentially distant, even absent. In this way, the ekphrasis of Lambinet makes reality of fantasy: 'composition' stands in for nature, 'varnish' takes the place of sky, and a whole village is resumed with a single stroke of 'white'. Strether thus produces a dreamland of France that is half-memory, half-art, and pure image. It is for this reason that the river must not be named: Strether wants only the map, the image, with the names of the locations effaced; were it to be given a name, it would be part of the territory, part of the too-real "real world". He wants, quite literally, to dream: the idea that the other Americans like his friend Waymarsh 'had really gone' meant that 'his tension was really relaxed,' a fact which 'fairly, for half an hour, sent him to sleep; he pulled his straw hat over his eyes […] and lost himself anew in Lambinet' (376).

The logic of this aesthetic construction of reality is recapitulated throughout the section. Strether hopes that, by the end of the afternoon, he 'should sufficiently command the scene to be able to pick out just the right little rustic inn for an experiment in respect to dinner'—washed down, naturally, with 'authentic wine' (375, 376). The "authenticity" of the wine is demanded by Strether's 'command' of the 'scene,' his mastery of the image. Elsewhere he sees a village 'that affected him as a thing of whiteness, blueness and crookedness, set in coppery green, and

that had the river flowing behind of before it—one couldn't say which' (378).[42] Strether here aestheticises the scene through the rhetoric of painting (the village was 'set in coppery green,' appeared as a crooked blur of white and blue, all of which, in the language of art appreciation, 'affected him'). His aestheticizing of the countryside – his turning it into landscape, a vision of landscape painting – leaves him untroubled by the apparently confused and confusing perspective ('one couldn't say' whether the river was 'behind or before' the village). This sense of aesthetic possession permeates Strether's experience. For example, he 'admired, had almost coveted, another small old church, all steep roof and dim slate-colour' (379); Strether thus covets the image, seeks to command the scene from his position as observer.

The significance of painting in this section would appear to be rivalled by the recurring metaphor of drama. For instance, when the narrative voice declares that 'this had been all day at bottom the spell of the picture—that it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky' (379). But in fact, the metaphors of the two arts work together to produce Strether's 'picture'. The landscape is brought to life in a kind of cosmic drama: the trees and the river become 'characters' who had, 'without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him' (379). Nonetheless, these figures remain in the frame, are bound by Strether's memory of the Lambinet. Indeed, the 'rustle' of the trees offers one of the few verbs in the passage not connected with sight. In this way, 'scene' and 'stage' become synonymous with subject and frame. This process is effected grammatically: when Strether encounters the hostess of his chosen inn, 'the picture and the play seemed to melt together' (380), conjoined in the sentence (through 'and,' as well as the repetition of the definite article), mingled literally through the verb

[42] This kind of 'perceptual distortion' was a common effect of late- and post-Impressionist painting, as one recent critic has noted, and may have animated certain of Proust's descriptions in *La recherche*: Darci Gardner, "Landscape and Perceptual Distortions in Proust," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 48, no. 1–2 (2019–20): 134–6. Gardner cites as a representative case Monet's *Les Quatre Arbres* (1891) as interpreted in Karin Sagner-Düchting, ed., *Monet and Modernism* (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 40, 52. For a more comprehensive account of the techniques which lead to such distortions in Monet see John House, *Monet: Nature into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 45–63 and 75–108.

'to melt,' and united in the envelope of Strether's perception ('seemed' along with several others indicators of free indirect style). Painting and drama work together here to achieve the same end, just as they do in *The Tragic Muse*. Thus, far from being rivals, painting and drama co-author Strether's happy image, his persistent and comfortable illusion.

Throughout Book Eleven, then, Strether enjoys an ekphrastic fantasy. Nonetheless, his vision is occasionally troubled. For example, it is almost undermined when he 'conversed with rustics who struck him perhaps a little more as men of the world than he had expected' (379). Strether, however, regains his equilibrium via the rhetoric of painting. He recognises that, despite the oddly urbane 'rustics,' he 'had meanwhile not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame': 'the frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please; but that was just his luck' (379). The suggestion in a passage above that the 'oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines' is therefore misleading. The frame has merely been enlarged, has 'drawn itself out': Strether steps in to his Lambinet and takes possession of the image; but he maintains the requisite distance that comes from treating the world as an aesthetic object: puzzling perspectives and suave 'rustics' are neatly brushed over, kept safely in the frame. In this way, painting nurtures and even underwrites Strether's aesthetic fantasy in Book Eleven. The intervention of fiction, however – understood in terms of plot, its progression in time, as well as through a certain fictional self-consciousness – soon disturbs this happy image.

From pre-Impressionism to Impressionism proper?

Strether steps in to the frame, bores 'so deep into his impression' of the Lambinet as to inhabit it, to construct and reconstruct it. This connection between the canvas and Strether's 'impression' has prompted critics to link the novel to Impressionist painting. Charles Anderson, for example, argues that Strether's view of the French countryside has little to do with

Lambinet; rather, he suggests that the passages in which Strether evokes his rural idyll are verbal transcriptions of Monet's *La Seine à Vétheuil*.[43] (Anderson appears to mean Monet's *Vue de Vétheuil*, also known as *Vétheuil sur Seine*—both canvases were painted in 1880.[44]) Critics such as Millicent Bell and Marianna Torgovnick, on the other hand, argue that Book Eleven represents not the transcription of a given Impressionist painting but instead 'the process' of Impressionist 'viewing,' as Bell puts it: the transformations in Strether's perception – his constructing a scene from Lambinet only to have it disturbed by the intrusion of Chad and Madame de Vionnet – can be seen as 'a correlative for the way we pass from the sensation of the moment to understanding'.[45] Thus, Strether's excursion begins with a 'preimpressionist [*sic*] idea of landscape' and ends with an 'Impressionist' movement from 'sensation' to 'understanding' or from 'impression' to 'knowledge'.[46]

These arguments suffer from a vague conception of Impressionism and "pre-Impressionism," the latter of which is meant to incorporate the various traditions of French landscape painting prior to the 1860s.[47] Bell's notion of a 'preimpressionist idea of landscape,' for example, does not acknowledge the ways in which members of the Barbizon School such as Corot anticipated Impressionist technique.[48] Anderson, on the other hand, does not sufficiently distinguish pre-Impressionism from Impressionism (though he does rightly, I think, declare that, in comparison with the major Impressionists, the Barbizon painters 'appear much more romantic than naturalistic').[49] Nonetheless, there are clear parallels between James's

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[43] Charles R. Anderson, *Person, Place and Thing in the Novels of Henry James* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 273–84.
[44] For a list of Monet's Vétheuil paintings see Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: biographie et catalogue raisonné*, 5 vols. (Lausanne and Paris: Wildenstein Institute, 1974–1991), 5: 294. For *La Seine à Vétheuil*, the painting to which Anderson refers, see entry 599 in Wildenstein, *Monet*, 1: 370. For what I propose to be the canvas in question, *Vue de Vétheuil*, see entry 609 in ibid., 374. These paintings represent only two of over forty works by Monet at, near, or of Vétheuil and environs, most of which feature the Seine in one way or another.
[45] Bell, for example, declares that Strether's 'surrender to the immediate […] may be called Impressionism,' but does not define Impressionism beyond this: Bell, 349.
[46] Ibid., 349; Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 184.
[47] Bell, *Meaning*, 331.
[48] See Adams, *Barbizon*, 10ff.
[49] Anderson, *Person*, 269.

description and Monet's *Vue de Vétheuil*—the rowers, for example, or the white church rising above the poplars (see fig. 1). Moreover, Strether's apparent confusion of perspective quoted above ('one couldn't say' whether the river flowed 'behind or before' the village [378]) lends some weight to Anderson's link between Monet's painting and James's depiction of Strether's day out in the country. Indeed, in the late 1870s, Monet had taken to using 'similarly weighted touches […] in different spatial planes, creating visual equivalences between hillside and houses, hillside and reflections,' as John House has put it, which led the 'whole surface' of Monet's canvases to have a 'remarkable homogeneity'.[50] Anderson's argument, however, depends on the fact that James had in fact encountered the painting. The critic suggests that James 'might well have seen this painting on visits to Paris'.[51] But *Vétheuil sur Seine* was exhibited only once in Paris during the novelist's lifetime, at a joint exhibition with Rodin at the *Galerie Georges Petit* in the summer of 1889. James was indeed in Paris that year, but he was too late for the show—he arrived on the 24th October and left 1st December.[52] what is more, the painting probably belonged to Richard Wagner's second wife before making its way, after a brief sojourn with Durand-Ruel, to a private collector in Berlin.[53] James refused the offer of an introduction to Wagner when the two were in Naples at the same time and they never subsequently met, making it unlikely that the novelist would have found himself in the company of Madame Wagner's collection.[54] Both Anderson and Bell, then, offer fragile foundations on which to base a reading of the text.

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[50] House, *Impressionism*, 162.
[51] Anderson, *Person*, 274.
[52] On the Monet and Rodin exhibition see http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/resources/educational-files/rodin-and-monet, accessed December 22, 2019. On James's travels see James, *A Life*, 217.
[53] Claude Monet, *Ansicht von Véthueil*, 'Ausstellungen,' 'Provenienz,' http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=965707&viewType=detailView, accessed December 22, 2019.
[54] Emma Sutton, "Too Close for Comfort: Henry James, Richard Wagner, and *The Sacred Fount*," *Nineteenth Century Music Review* 6, no. 2 (2009): 3–17.

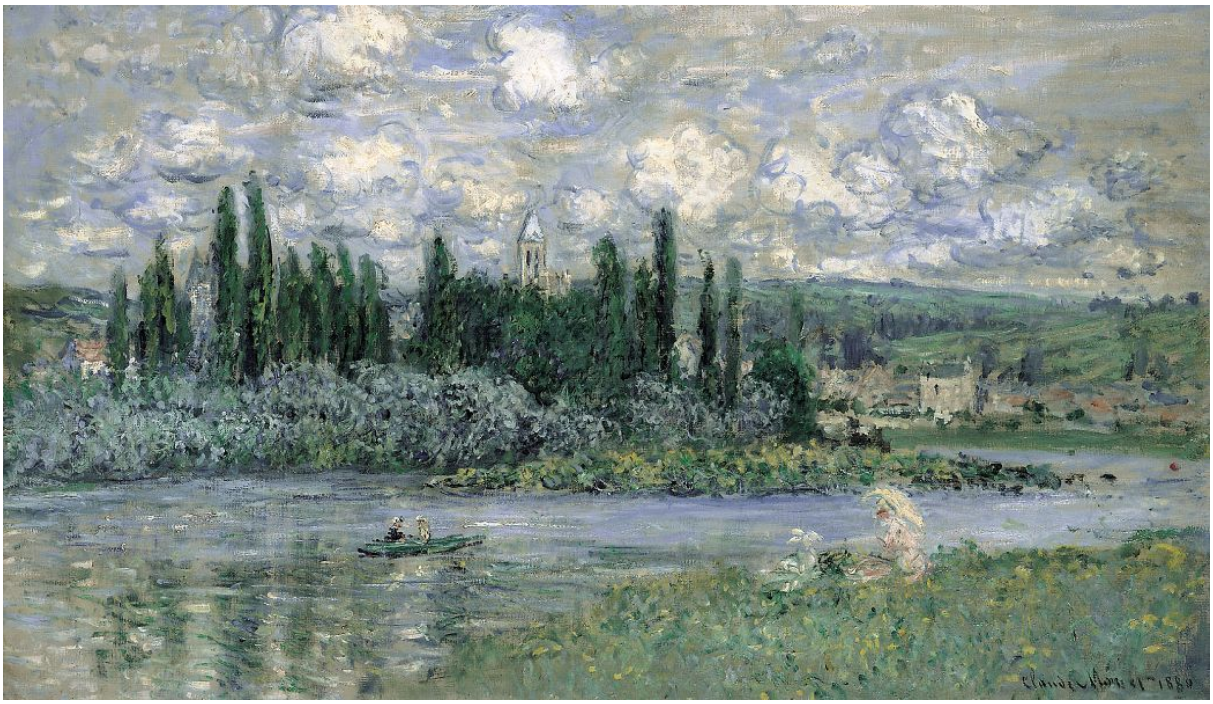

Fig. 1. Claude Monet, *Vue de Vétheuil* (1880). Oil on canvas, 60 x 100 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Photo credit: Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.

Torgovnick argues reasonably that by the twentieth century James had come to associate 'certain distinct qualities' with Impressionism, such as a 'dynamic relationship between perceiving subject and perceived object'.[55] This may be true; but where my argument is

[55] Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 179. Torgovnick's understanding of James's attitude to Impressionism may be correct, although her conception of a transition from '"impression"' to 'knowledge' is, like Bell's description of a passage from 'sensation' to 'knowledge,' more consistent with literary Impressionism than painterly Impressionism. Moreover, her account of the 'dynamic relationship' between 'perceiving subject and perceived object' accords strongly with the influential formalist-modernist account of modernist painting and Impressionism associated above all with Clement Greenberg. In other words, it is a reading based on a dominant interpretation of Impressionism rather than James's own interpretation. As Lawrence Venuti has pointed out, arguments like these depend on 'the unwitting application of a […] dominant or authoritative interpretation of [an] artwork which the critic assumes the literary text should somehow inscribe to the exclusion of other interpretations': Venuti, "Ekphrasis," 132. Indeed, the formalist-modernist understanding of Impressionism has been challenged precisely on the grounds that it in fact attests to the lasting influence of Impressionism's contemporary critics on later theorisations of painting—for example, the use of 'flatness,' 'decoration,' and 'opticality' to determine the 'essence' of modern painting, as Michael Fried puts it in his summary of Greenberg's position: Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19. Greenberg argued in 'Modernist Painting' (1960) that Manet's canvases were 'by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painting' the first modernist paintings: Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–69* , ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4: 86. This emphasis on 'surface' is often thought to have been originally sketched by Zola in his defence of Manet in the 1860s. Carol Armstrong, for example, writes that 'In many ways, it is Zola's view that underlies Greenberg's positioning of Manet as the father of modernism': Carol M. Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 31; see also Émile Zola, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 112–20 and 137–70.

concerned, I contest the ways in which she uses Impressionism to contrast "art" and "life" in James's work. Torgovnick associates James's use of painting in Book Eleven with Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'—namely, the view that 'art is static and knowable and safe, while life is dynamic, and unknowable, and, therefore, dangerous'.[56] If there is indeed a moral lesson communicated in Book Eleven, this is it. In Tony Tanner's version of the argument, Strether learns that it is 'impossible to regard the real world as one would a painted canvas—because genuine moral problems obtrude'.[57] It is unclear whether Tanner means that moral problems cannot be treated in paintings, or that moral problems are not posed in the act of looking at paintings—both claims are tenuous. Nonetheless, his basic point is that one cannot treat life like a 'painted canvas' because paintings are static, fixed at one point in time, while life is always changing, is always in flux. Thus, Strether cannot bathe in the same river twice, not even in his imagination. When framed as a divorce between painting and life, this Heraclitean vision of experience also mirrors Lessing's argument about the differences between the static immediacy of visual art as against the extension in time of poetry.[58] As we have seen throughout my thesis, James's work is in sympathy with both positions—that is, the difference between the stasis of the visual arts as opposed to the dynamism of writing, as well as the discrepancies between painting and life. However, in articulating these arguments, critics have tacitly accepted James's suggestion that the novel can represent life. Tanner, for example, suggests that Strether's mistake is to treat life like a 'painted canvas'. But "life" here in fact means novelistic

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In his limited engagement with Impressionist art, James nowhere gives the sense that he shares Zola's vision of such painting, let alone his critical terminology. On James's explicit response to Impressionist art see especially Brooks, *Paris*, 31–2, 66 and Viola Hopkins Winner, "Aestheticism and Impressionism," in *Henry James and the Visual Arts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970). Torgovnick is rightly sensitive, however, to critics such as Peter Stowell who make 'too strong' a connection between 'the Impressionist method and the ambiguity of perception typical of Strether's moral education': Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 179; Peter Stowell, *Literary Impression, James and Chekhov* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

[56] Torgovnick, *Pictorialism*, 182.

[57] Tony Tanner, "The Watcher from the Balcony: Henry James's *The Ambassadors*," *Critical Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1966): 50. Richard Poirier offers a more cautious version of the same basic point when he suggests that the novel shows Strether's 'efforts to transform things he sees into visions, to detach them from time and from the demands of nature, and to give them the composition of *objets d'art*. The novel is about the cost and profit for such acts of imagination': Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 124.

[58] See Lessing, *Laocoön*, chapter 16.

representation of experience, which *is* Strether's life (insofar as he possesses it). In this way, critics have, consciously or not, accepted James's own terms: that fiction can represent, even reproduce life itself.

Contrary to these critical positions, I argue that in *The Ambassadors* the conflict is not between types of painting or specific painted images—between pre-Impressionism and Impressionism proper, Lambinet and Monet. Rather, the issue relates to James's attitude toward the nature of painting itself. James consistently theorised the novel in contradistinction to painting, and used painting as a negative example in order to guarantee the prestige of the art of fiction. This same dynamic is at work, I claim, in the representation of Strether's experiences throughout Book Eleven, and ultimately in the novel as a whole. I do not dispute, however, the high place accorded to "life" in the text by these critics, especially as it is used to signal the moral and ethical import of the issues raised in *The Ambassadors*. Indeed, James's novel is signally concerned with Socrates's fundamental ethical question: what is the right conduct of life?[59] Strether's counsel to the painter Little Bilham – 'live all you can; it's a mistake not to' (162) – is only the clearest articulation of this concern.[60] Nevertheless, my argument attends to the ways in which James's attitude to painting and its various figurations in his work were part of a broader debate conducted by the novelist concerning the relations between painting and fiction. In the process, it reveals the sleight of hand by which James equated "life" with the art of fiction, an equation subsequently taken up by a multitude of readers. In this way, I aim to rebalance the critical view of the novel: while I accept the ethical seriousness of the text, I emphasise the ways in which this ethical attention is imbricated within an ongoing contest in James's works between painting and fiction.

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[59] Plato, *Republic*, 352d.

[60] As is well known, this scene is based on an anecdote recorded by James in his notebooks on October 31, 1895. In James's telling, William Dean Howells had advised Jonathan Sturges to immerse himself in life: 'You have time. You are young. Live!': James, *Notebooks*, 140–2.

What disturbs Strether's ekphrastic fantasy? The capacity of the novel to unfold in time. With this capacity comes the ability to produce the sharpest shifts in interpretation: once Strether's illusion is disturbed, the metaphor of painting withdraws, and its place is taken by a renewed attention to the fictional qualities of his situation. This transition occurs at the end of chapter three of Book Eleven, in which Strether awaits service at a local inn. The hostess informs him that he will be served alongside two other guests who have not yet arrived. In the meantime, Strether considers his surroundings:

> The valley on the further side was all copper-green level and glazed pearly sky, a sky hatched across with screens of trimmed trees, which looked flat, like espaliers; and though the rest of the village straggled away in the near quarter the view had an emptiness that made one of the boats suggestive. Such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars (381).

This conforms to the rhetoric of painting outlined above: the 'copper-green level' valley, the apparently 'flat' and 'glazed' (as opposed to the earlier 'varnish') sky bear the stamp of Strether's contented ekphrasis. This is landscape as idyll, as an image which gives pleasure and is pleasingly 'suggestive,' sets 'one afloat' on a river of romantic associations. This agreeable image, however, is swiftly interrupted by the boat-borne intruders, but the exact stimulus is deferred until the next chapter: the final line describes the moment at which Strether 'saw something that gave him a sharper arrest' (381). This 'arrest' is 'sharper' than the one he had received from his ekphrasis, in part because it concerns his friends Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and in part because it marks the point at which the text leaves behind the aesthetic fantasy offered by the art of painting in favour of the revelations and sharp shifts of interpretation afforded by the art of fiction. The figure of the river, then – that classic symbol of time's swift flow – reflects one of the principal themes of the novel: namely, the aging Strether's confrontation with a world of experience that has all but passed him by; at the same time, it points to the fundamental

distinction between painting and fiction as James's understood it—that is, the stasis of painting as against the nominal movement of fiction.

The transition between painting and fiction in the novel is portended by the fact that the 'whole episode' of Strether's excursion was to remind him of Maupassant (376). This allusion not only shifts the terms from painting to literature – from the minor Lambinet to the major miniaturist, Maupassant – but also presages an ironic (or at least bathetic) twist in the narrative. The expectation of such a shift is reinforced by Strether's 'sense of a book in his pocket' (375) as he commences his journey. He takes pleasure and comfort in this 'sense,' figuring it as the ideal complement to his languid idyll; it marks a significant change for the ambassador, whose pockets had previously been filled with items related to his embassy—with letters (73), for example, from Chad's mother, Mrs Newsome, the absent presence that looms over Strether's conscience throughout the text. As in many Maupassant stories, however, the facts will soon undermine the fantasy—and it is this transition that is distinctly literary.

In chapter four of Book Eleven, immediately after his 'sharper arrest,' Strether sees a boat 'advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol' (383). This image makes him realise that something had been missing from the picture. The lovers prove 'exactly the right thing':

> It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure (383).

Strether turns his Lambinet landscape into a genre painting: he sees the figures as individuals only insofar as they balance and complete the composition by filling a too-empty area ('fill up the measure').[61] As with his vision of the natural world, Strether elides the specificity, the

[61] It may be relevant to the scene, however, that the phrase 'to fill up the measure' is often associated with Matthew 23:32, 'to fill up the measure of sin.' There are, it should be noted, abundant references in James's fiction to the bible, up to and including his titles (*The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* are drawn from Psalm 55 and

individuality of these people; he treats them as objects, as a mere means to obtain aesthetic pleasure. But Strether soon gets his comeuppance for such objectification, because the lovers are, in fact, Chad and Madame de Vionnet; what is more, they will be joining Strether for dinner. And although the reader may have already come to suspect the identity of the two lovers, their passage into the picture is depicted from Strether's position as 'spectator': 'They came slowly, floating down, evidently directed to the landing-place near their spectator and presenting themselves to him' (383). In the act of 'presenting themselves,' their features gradually become clearer; in the process, aspects of their relationship begin to emerge. The 'air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent—that this wouldn't at all events be the first time' (383). Throughout this passage, then, details gradually accrue, consolidate, and shift before they crystallise into a new image.

These details, however, are necessarily implicated within a time scheme: they are links in a grammatical chain, part of a series of scenes or events that constitute individual chapters and are contained in Books and, ultimately, the book itself, as well as data recorded and contained in the envelope of Strether's consciousness and represented through free indirect style. Moreover, and contrary to the stasis of painting, the centrality of time is foregrounded in this recognition scene. Madame de Vionnet, for example, 'had taken in something as a result of which their course had wavered, and it continued to waver while they just stood off' (383). The past perfect of 'had taken in' is held in stasis by the continuity carried by 'continued'; this 'little effect' was 'sudden and rapid, so rapid that Strether's sense of it was separate only for an instant from a sharp start of his own': the rapidity of the effect is mirrored in Strether's own sharp instantaneous 'sense'; because he 'too had within the minute taken in something'—taken in, that is, that he knew the lady with the parasol (383). In this way, Strether gradually comes to

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Ecclesiastes 12: 6–7 respectively). For an early survey on the subject see Robert L. Gale, "Religion Imagery in Henry James's Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3, no. 1 (1957): 64–72. For a later, more catholic account of James's relation to the subject see Hazel Hutchinson, *Seeing and Believing: Henry James and the Spiritual World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For an alternative, more Catholic account see Edwin Sill Fussell, *The Catholic Side of Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

identify the lovers. The man who held the paddles becomes 'a young man in shirt-sleeves'; the lady with the pink parasol becomes 'a young woman easy and fair' (383); eventually they are granted their proper identities, their own proper nouns. But this recognition is part of a deliberately slow process:

> It was too prodigious, a chance in a million, but, if he knew the lady, the gentleman, who still presented his back and kept off, the gentleman, the coatless hero of the idyll, who had responded to her start, was, to match the marvel, none other than Chad (383).

Chad's name comes at the end of a tortuous series of subordinate clauses, delayed and deferred by no fewer than eleven commas (in a sentence with only 48 words). Thus, when the young man's name is finally revealed, it arrives with the force and certainty of fate: it was 'none other than Chad'. In this way, the momentum of Strether's thought is arrested only once the sensations he experiences in viewing the lovers are set within a novel and recognisable context, a process reflected by the intricacies of James's style. In the course of this development, however, the frame provided by painting is shown to be at best misleading, at worse false; the 'coatless hero of the idyll' is no hero and this is no idyll: Strether is forced summarily to recognise that the relation between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is not nearly as innocent as he had thought.

Throughout this passage, then, the immediacy of the image that had been 'wanted in the picture' (383) is variously undermined, supplemented, and enhanced by the capacity of fiction to unfold in time as the novel places an individual at a specific moment, but then shows that moment to be part of an extended process. Immediacy versus process, surface as against a notional depth: this is familiar language from the territory of the visual arts, from Lessing onwards. More recently, critics such as Daniel Hannah have described the visual impression as

an 'ambivalent play with surface and depth'.[62] For Hannah, this aspect of the impression is central to the 'interpretative shifts' that occur in the novel.[63] His analysis, however, fails to address the claims that James makes in *The Ambassadors* and elsewhere concerning the differences between the mediums of painting and fiction. The key difference, as I have suggested, is that fiction can produce the 'impression' of time: it is time that underwrites any transition from the immediacy of the senses to a form of knowledge; it is fiction as process – as the art *par excellence* which conveys time – that ensures that this scene of anagnorisis becomes a dramatic representation of the psychological processes involved in recognition itself. In this way, Strether's excursion is a succession of moments that are indeed discrete, may in fact be analogous to a pattern of Impressionist 'viewing'; but these moments resolve into a larger process, a longer *durée*. James saw this process as possible only through the medium of fiction. Like the hero of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he recognised that recreating time is the privilege of the novelist.[64] As he suggested to Millicent Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, the greatest difficulty in fiction is to 'give the impression of the *real lapse of time*, *the quantity* of time'.[65] Such an impression is impossible in the art of painting, at least as James seems to have understood it.[66] But although it is the 'very most difficult thing in the art of the novelist,' as he put it, it is not impossible.

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[62] Hannah, *Public*, 34.
[63] Ibid., 38.
[64] Tadié, *Proust*, 294.
[65] James, *Letters*, 302–3.
[66] Romantic painting, however, like Baroque art before it, was often associated with the impression of movement, if not the '*real lapse of time*'. Delacroix's contemporary critics, for example, saw motion in his painting – Baudelaire, for instance, praised the '*turbulence*' of his composition – and the painter himself prized the impression of movement in works such as Rubens's *Hippopotamus and Crocodile Hunt* (1615): Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes II*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Pléiade, 1976), 754; Eugène Delacroix, *Journal I*, ed. Michèle Hannoosh (Paris: José Corti, 2009), 337. These effects are commonly attributed to Delacroix's rough finish, scumbling, and his famous *flochetage*: Lawrence M. Porter, 'Space as Metaphor in Delacroix," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 1 (1983): 29. James, however, did not comment on this effect in his writing about Delacroix, nor in his sporadic comments on that other artist whose works famously give the impression of movement, Turner. Later artworks painted in James's liftetime such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2* (1912) also give a strong impression of movement and thus the illusion of a passage in time, an effect that has often been framed in relation to experiments in photography, most notably those of Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904): on the subject see for example Penelope Haralambidou, "Drawing the female nude," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 3 (2009): 350–2. James, however, paid little attention to developments in painting after the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, from the evidence of one tantalising passage in *The American Scene*, it seems that the novelist had to wait till 1904 to appreciate the 'wondrous examples of Manet, of Degas, of Claude Monet, of Whistler' that had chiefly been

Fiction as a mode of representation is therefore used in contradistinction to the art of painting, and this is further highlighted in the text through several metafictional gestures. When Strether recognises the surprised lovers, the meeting is declared 'too prodigious, a chance in a million' – it was 'as queer as fiction, as farce' (383) – declarations which emerge through free indirect style ('Strether became aware, with this, of what was taking place…' [383]). Similarly, when Madame de Vionnet pretends that their meeting is innocent, Strether divines that 'fiction and fable' were 'in the air' (386). Through these metafictional acts, the novel tries to secure its own credibility – tries to counterbalance any perceived attack on suspended disbelief – precisely by highlighting the fact that the situation is novelistic: *how amusing that this real situation should seem like a fiction!* the text seems to declare. The situation being 'as queer as fiction' might seem to further undermine this credibility; but because it is couched in the form of a simile, it in fact insists on the metaphorical value of the statement. Likewise, 'fiction and fable' permeate the scene, tip Strether off to the real relation between Chad and Madame de Vionnet. However, this does not necessarily point to a reality beyond the text, to a notional "life"; rather, it reveals a relation that Strether had failed to discern precisely because his perception had been blinkered by his aestheticization of everyday life, a habit underwritten by the art of painting in general and by Lambinet in particular.

Strether's aestheticization of the world around him is interrupted, after which point he realises that 'he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing,' whereas now he 'found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things' (389). In this way, Strether's openness to the surface of things may support the novel's relation to Impressionism, as well as indicating a way of seeing that is unique to painting. But if it does so, it takes the form of a critique: a

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painted between 1860–90: James, *Travel Writings*, 393. Moreover, as Susan Griffin has argued, James appears to have had a limited understanding of developments in painting at work in the 1880s and after, and was unable or unwilling to distinguish between Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art: Griffin, *Eye*, 142. The emergent art of filmmaking, meanwhile – the birth of which is traditionally tied to the unveiling of the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe* in 1895, the same year as James's failure in the theatre – is a more conspicuous candidate for rivalling or excelling fiction in its representation of time. But it is for good reason that *Henry James goes to the Movies*, ed. Susan M. Griffin (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002) focuses on adaptations from James: the novelist himself seems to have been utterly uninterested in the burgeoning art of cinema.

passive openness to sense impressions and the resistance to interpretation that this entails is shown to be foolish; in the end, trying to 'suppose nothing' leads Strether into another form of illusion—that the relation between Chad and Madame de Vionnet was innocent. For this reason, the fact that Strether's illusion is disturbed through a moment that proves 'as queer as fiction' is significant. This situation is placed directly in opposition to the art of painting and the ways of looking at the world that it encourages, while at the same time reinforcing a notional link between fiction and "life". The transition, then, is not from Lambinet to Monet, from pre-Impressionism to Impressionism. In fact, it is from the illusion of painting to a situation that, despite being as 'as queer as fiction,' is positioned as "life" itself.

The text might therefore seem uneasy about Strether's aestheticizing tendencies. Indeed, he suffers in Book Eleven a diminutive form of Emma Bovary's fate. As Jacques Rancière has put it, Emma is guilty of the 'aestheticization of everyday life' and is consequently punished.[67] For Rancière, this is because there are two ways to handle 'the equivalence of art and nonart [*sic*],' art and life: there is 'the artistic way,' which 'consists in putting it in the book only, in the book *as a book*. The wrong way, the way of the character, consists in putting that equivalence in real life.'[68] Like Emma, Strether puts this equivalence in to 'real life': he aestheticises the world around him by treating his environment as a painting; in the process, he experiences his own form of punishment. James's solution to the problem, however, is less radical than Flaubert's, not least because Strether escapes with his (albeit fictional) life. In James's text, the problem is not necessarily that Strether aestheticises reality, but that he does so through the art of painting; instead, he should have seen, thought, and responded like a

[67] Rancière, "Killed," 239. Rancière argues that Flaubert's conception of style engenders this distinction: the real content of *Madame Bovary* is the sensations and phenomena that are described and not the plot or the desires of the characters. James in general and *The Ambassadors* in particular do not, I think, share this position; they are, I believe, committed to a psychologism that runs counter to Rancière's reading of Flaubert.
[68] Ibid., 238.

novelist. The novelist is, after all, the figure who supposes 'innumerable and wonderful things' about human relations, the person on whom nothing is lost.[69]

Widening the frame, navigating the river: Book Eleven in context

How does the dynamic at work in Book Eleven relate to the rest of the novel? From the moment Strether arrives in Europe, he begins to aestheticise reality. He learns to pay more attention to visual phenomena and to fit these phenomena into an aesthetic framework: he steadily improves his ability to do so through his experiences in Paris; and this process culminates in the action of Book Eleven, where such an aesthetic framework is ultimately found wanting.

Strether arrives in Europe as Woollett's resident aesthete. He has some knowledge of traditions in French painting, literature, and drama, and even edits the local 'Review' (63). But despite his aesthetic proclivities, he retains something of the notional Woollett curse: he appears apparently uncomfortable with his aesthetic orientation, and he pays remarkably little attention to the visual world around him. When he first meets Maria Gostrey, for example, he 'gazed with unseeing lingering eyes' (29) at his surroundings; when he takes out his watch he 'looked at the hour without seeing it' (33); when he looks into the 'windows of shops' he sees nothing save for the fact that they were 'not as the shops of Woollett' (29).[70] Gradually and with assistance, however, he becomes attuned to visual phenomena. Strether soon finds himself 'given over to uncontrolled perceptions' (54). This insight is provoked by a 'trinket' which hangs

[69] In "The Art of Fiction," James declares that, among the few pieces of advice he would offer to an apprentice novelist, he would 'certainly say to the novice, "Write from experience, and experience only"'; but that he 'should feel that this was a rather tantalising monition if I were not careful immediately to add, "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!"': James, *Literary Criticism 2*, 53.

[70] For a reading of Strether's adventure in relation to the 'windows of shops' – that is, in the context of changing consumer practices – see Miranda El-Rayess, *Henry James and the Culture of Consumption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130–9.

from a red 'velvet band' (54) around Maria Gostrey's neck, and which gives Strether pause: Maria's perfume and the band and the trinket all provide 'so many touches to he scarce knew what positive high picture' (53). The canvas is stretched, and Strether is ready to paint. The 'touches' and 'the picture' commence his aestheticization of reality through the art of painting. From then on, the fluid, vague outlines of Strether's imagined 'picture' gradually take form and clarify until, at the end of the novel, he can perceive perfectly the 'high clear picture' (393) of Paris, of Chad's relation to Madame Vionnet, and of his own experience. But he must first pass through hazy intimation and obscure suggestion, such as during the 'late sessions' at Chad's place, when 'men dropped in and the picture composed more suggestively through the haze of tobacco' (134)—that is, the 'picture' composes itself 'more suggestively' but remains fugitive and indistinct, hidden behind a shifting veil. Later, in Book Eleven, the image crystallises, becomes rich and well-defined. But as we have seen, in that Book Strether is revealed to have treated too 'suggestively' the picture, to have constructed a fantasy; it is only after suffering this confusion that he can truly learn to see, that he can penetrate the veil; it is only after learning to construct such images that they can be cast aside. In this way, the novel builds towards its intended climax in Book Eleven not only through the central mysteries of its plot – the source of Chad's newfound sophistication and his reasons for electing to stay in Paris – but also through the ways in which Strether perceives the world (that is, the way in which his perceptions are represented through free indirect style and with frequent recourse to the rhetoric of painting).

Strether's aesthetic training is supported throughout the text by two key figures, Maria Gostrey and Little Bilham. Maria was explicitly designed to be a *ficelle*, a character who, like the thread of legend, would guide Strether and the reader through the labyrinth of events: James declares in his preface that she is 'an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity'.[71] However, in fulfilling

[71] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1317. Because Maria Gostrey is a *ficelle*, she is also, I think, the principal instrument of James's irony in the text. She provides Strether with just enough information at any given moment to refute his understanding of a given situation. She thus modifies his view sufficiently to keep him moving through the maze

this role, she inadvertently contributes to the troubling of Strether's perceptions. First, and in the most obvious sense, she troubles him emotionally and erotically: her 'velvet band,' for example, leads directly to Strether's 'uncontrolled perceptions,' his mental muddle as he tries to account for the ways in which the band 'added, in her appearance, to the value of every other item—to that of her smile and the way she carried her head' (54). Crudely put, he is troubled because he finds Maria attractive, which in part reveals the aspect of Strether which has hitherto shunned aesthetic pleasure. As the novel progresses, he learns to control these perceptions; his development in this arena is marked by his response to Madame de Vionnet's daughter Jeanne, whom he encounters in Gloriani's garden. Jeanne is a cultivated, beautiful, aristocratic young Frenchwoman, and Strether finds her 'unmistakeably pretty—bright gentle shy happy wonderful' (164). Although the adjectives crowd and busily hum, the change is clear: Strether seems no longer so troubled by the image of a beautiful woman; he is, in any case, aware of how Jeanne strikes him. He does not find himself stammering before 'he scarce knew what positive high picture'; he can figure the picture for himself.

Beyond her personal charms, Maria Gostrey exercises a yet more profound influence over Strether's perceptions when she implores him: "'Don't make up your mind'" (133). She thereby encourages Strether to respond as the mood strikes him, to keep himself open to the Parisian spectacle and its myriad possibilities. Thus, Strether gradually frees himself from his Woollett-imposed constraints, allows himself to undergo 'the process of feeling the general stirred life of connexions long since individually dropped' (78). It should go without saying that Maria Gostrey is in no sense to blame for Strether's perceptual mistakes. Indeed, he is for the most part well-served by her advice; but his 'feeling the general stirred life' of long 'dropped' 'connexions' has the unintended consequence of leading, via 'short gusts of speculation,' to

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of Paris, but she never goes so far as solve the central mystery of the tale, in part because this would in effect end the tale. Maria Gostrey, then, is simultaneously an 'aid to lucidity' and the means through which the novel delays answering the central enigma of the text, the secret of Chad's newfound sophistication and his reasons for wishing to stay in Paris. I rely here on notions of enigma and delay suggested by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 38ff.

Strether's rural fantasy. At first these 'gusts of speculations' are harmless, 'sudden flights of fancy in Louvre galleries, hungry gazes through clear plates behind which lemon-coloured volumes were as fresh as fruit on the tree' (78–9).[72] In this way, works of art and spaces associated with their display encourage his 'flights of fancy'; tellingly, the 'volumes' are reduced to their external, aesthetic appeal ('lemon-coloured' 'fruit') and so remain objects which provide a purely visual pleasure. But while Strether's 'flights' are enjoyable and in their own way profitable, they contribute to his persistent misdirection—that is, he willingly loses himself in the spectacular labyrinth. Although he perceives a Paris which 'twinkled and trembled and melted together' (81), he is unperturbed. He allows it to work its spell and refrains from making up his mind. It is this aesthetic licence that allows Strether to construct his Lambinet in the French countryside; it is this abdication of judgment that allows him to be deceived about the very essence of his mission, Chad's real relation to Madame de Vionnet.

Little Bilham, like Maria Gostrey, advises Strether not to make up his mind. He asks: "'What more than a vain appearance does the wisest of us know? I commend you […] the vain appearance'" (152). Thus, the visual sense is foregrounded from the start of their relation. For example, as Strether approaches Chad's apartment building he 'felt himself noticed' by a young man on the balcony and who looked back at Strether 'as in acknowledgement of his being himself in observation' (86), like the figure in Gustave Caillebotte's *Jeune homme à la fenêtre* (1876).[73] The two swiftly enter a mutually reinforcing aesthetic appreciation of the Parisian

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[72] A yellow dust jacket in the period 'generally denoted […] risqué French novels,' an association famously reinforced by Dorian Gray's seduction at the hands of a 'yellow book' that is often thought to be an edition Husymans's *À rebours* (1884) – the 'bible of French Decadence' – and that, in turn, probably inspired the title of *The Yellow Book*, a periodical associated with Aestheticism and Decadence: Sally Ledger, "Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*," *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 50, no. 1 (2007): 5. On James's involvement with *The Yellow Book* see Anne Diebel, "'The Dreary Duty': Henry James, *The Yellow Book*, and Literary Personality," *The Henry James Review* 32, no. 1 (2011): 45–59. On the significance of the 'lemon-coloured volumes' in *The Ambassadors* see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Podsnappery, Sexuality, and the English Novel," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (1982): 341–2; Richard Salmon, "The Secret of the Spectacle: Epistemology and Commodity Display in *The Ambassadors*," *The Henry James Review* 14, no. 1 (1993): 46; and Menton, "Typical Tales," 298.

[73] Reginald Abbott has linked the balcony scenes in *The Ambassadors*, Caillebotte's paintings of male figures looking out of 'upper-story windows or standing on balconies,' and Haussmann's renovation of Paris (as described by T. J. Clark), which gave clearer views across the city: Reginald Abbott, "The Incredible Floating Man: Henry James's Lambert Strether," *The Henry James Review* 11, no. 3 (1990): 187 n.8. For Clark's account of Haussmann's renovation

scene; unconventionally, however, it is the younger man who initiates his elder. Little Bilham helps Strether accustom himself to "'appearance'": he takes him to the Louvre (102–3), where the painter's 'beautiful intelligence' and his 'habit of Paris' figure for Strether as 'an unseparated part of the charged iridescent air, the glamour of the name, the splendour of the space, the colour of the masters' (104). Such is Little Bilham's perceived mastery of the aesthetic sense that the 'splendour of the space' and the 'colour of the masters' were present 'wherever the young man led,' even beyond the walls of the Louvre (104). In this way, Little Bilham becomes a kind of walking, talking, aesthetic encouragement for Strether. He is evidently successful in this enterprise, because Strether attempts to return the favour by advising Little Bilham to propose to Jeanne de Vionnet. But even Little Bilham – even the artist who commends the "'vain appearance'" – recognises that there is no "'chance in such a field for a poor little painter-man'" (203). This exchange is revealing precisely because it shows that Strether has taken Little Bilham's advice too literally, too closely to heart: he has let his aesthetic sense get the better of him and has thereby denied the practical realities of the social situation in which he finds himself; Chad could marry Jeanne because of his money and his attractive personal attributes; Little Bilham, on the other hand, is but a "'poor little painter-man'"—an unlikely suitor. In imagining that Little Bilham could in fact marry Jeanne de Vionnet, Strether indicates his growing acceptance of the aesthetic sense, and he allows this sense to master his more pragmatic faculties. (Though to Strether's credit, it also testifies to his enduring moral sense: why shouldn't they marry were they to fall in love?) This is an important part of the journey towards Book Eleven. Strether transitions from a certain disquiet in the face of his 'uncontrolled perceptions' to an acceptance and even a welcoming of such perceptions. However, it is this very acceptance that guarantees his ignorance of Chad's affair. Strether

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see T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 24–78.

allows himself to dwell ceaselessly on the surface of things; and in doing so, he refuses to read what such surfaces might signify.

Throughout the novel, then, Strether learns to respond to aesthetic phenomena by withholding his immediate judgment, by allowing surfaces to affect him without immediately pursuing a notional depth. This may be broadly consistent with literary impressionism—although, as we have seen, this dynamic is ultimately subverted in Book Eleven, or at least shown to be dangerous. But Strether's aestheticization of reality does not make surfaces 'show' depths; rather it serves to put off the pursuit of signification. This dynamic also sustains the narrative by allowing Strether to treat his embassy too as a kind of aesthetic affair. Significantly, his aesthetic appreciation applies to the object of his mission, Chad himself. The young man's 'conspicuous improvement' – his newfound urbanity – 'affected' Strether 'as he might have been affected by some light pleasant perfect work of art' (263). For this reason, it is hardly surprising that Strether should be confused and, ultimately, misguided about Chad. The young man becomes another aesthetic object to consider, to take pleasure in; he becomes another tint, a play of light which twinkles and melts together with the bright Parisian scene. Indeed, the more Strether's aesthetic sense improves, the easier it is for him to remain blind to the deception and dissimulation around him. He sees in Chad's apartment, for example, 'a landscape of no size, but of the French school, as our friend was glad to feel he knew' (192); with his aesthetic education reaping visible benefits, Strether loses track of Chad and his relations.

Strether's aesthetic progress relates to the broader theme and issue of time in the novel. Upon his arrival in Paris, he recognises that he 'hadn't had for years so rich a consciousness of time' (94): he is struck by his situation precisely because he had 'never expected – that was the truth of it – again to find himself young' (75). As James suggested in his preface, Strether is brought to '*see*' that he has missed so much of life, 'so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of

this process of vision.'[74] This 'process of vision' is inextricably linked to Strether's improving aesthetic sense and to his acute awareness of his own belated awakening. It is revealing, then, that he should be charmed and arrested by the 'full picture' in Gloriani's garden (164). Among artists and aristocrats and beautiful people of all kinds, and in a wondrous garden in a foreign city – in Paris, no less! – Strether is forced to set his perceptions in time. He seizes his impressions as gorgeous ephemera; he recognises how much of life has passed him by; and it is at this point and in this context that he offers his famous advice to Little Bilham: 'live all you can; it's a mistake not to' (162). In this way, the ethical problems of the text and the thematic issues they raise are imbricated in the technical questions of the novel, from Strether's use of painting to aestheticise the world around him to the sense of time which is proper to the art of fiction. This dynamic, as I have argued, is condensed into the action of Book Eleven; but it is at work throughout the novel, building slowly to its climax beside Strether's very own Lambinet landscape.

Despite the troubling of his illusion in Book Eleven, Strether does not wholly learn his lesson. In Book Twelve, the final section of *The Ambassadors*, he finds himself moving 'as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas' (393)—he returns, in other words, to the allure of painting, to seeing the world through an oblong gilt frame and as a series of arranged tableaux from which he can draw aesthetic pleasure. Perhaps he has simply learned to read these paintings correctly, has seen what lies beneath the surface? He sees the 'high clear picture' now (393), has escaped the romantic illusion offered by Lambinet; indeed, the fact that these canvases are 'clever' seems to indicate their comparative modernity.[75] He sees, perhaps, as the novelist intended the text to be seen: in his original proposal to his publishers, James wrote that he could 'only put in the picture' of Book Eleven 'with a single touch of the brush'; the

[74] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 1305.

[75] The term 'clever' was commonly used in the late-Victorian art press, where it was often associated with "modern" painting. One critic in 1896, for example, complained that the 'monstrously clever canvases' at the Paris Salon were 'banalities […] manufactured to advertise their monstrously clever authors': M. H. Spielmann, "The Paris Salons: An Appreciation of Modern French Art," *The Magazine of Art* (January, 1896): 372.

completed text 'will be brushed in another fashion in its order and proper light'.[76] Strether may not have left behind his tendency to aestheticise reality; instead, he may now be able to view things in their 'proper light'.

This renewed visual sense is central to the closing scene of *The Ambassadors*, in which Strether and Maria Gostrey discuss the romantic potential of their relationship. Strether argues that he would have illicitly benefited from his embassy should he and Maria become involved with one another; Maria reluctantly agrees, but she takes issue with Strether's "'horrible sharp eye for what makes'" him right (430). In the end, then, Strether does not lose his 'sharp' moral 'eye'—even if he is, as we have seen, temporarily confused about how to use it. It is only at the close of his adventure, only after having had his painterly illusion exposed, that he can confidently redeploy this moral 'eye'. He uses it to see that there can be no future for him and Maria; but he recognises, too, that his relation with Chad's mother, Mrs Newsome, is at an end. Why? Maria asks. Because, Strether says, "'I do what I didn't before – I *see* her'" (428) – in her 'proper light,' one imagines, and with a novelist's eye.

[76] James, *Notebooks*, 575.

Conclusion

In 1912, for Henry James's seventieth birthday, a group of his friends and admirers commissioned John Singer Sargent to paint the novelist's portrait.[1] James had known the painter since the mid-1880s, and the two were close enough for the commission to be somewhat embarrassing: if Sargent were to refuse the money, the portrait would look like it was exclusively *his* gift to the novelist and not that of the original commissioners; but if he accepted payment he would seem ungenerous or, worse, unscrupulous. In the end an equitable solution was found: the portrait was completed at no charge and the money was used to commission another artist to sculpt a bust of the novelist.[2] For James's part, sitting for Sargent changed his view of the painter's working methods. In his 1887 profile of the artist for *Harper's*, the novelist had figured Sargent's perception to be so exceptionally quick that, for him, 'the process by which the object seen resolves itself into the object pictured is extraordinarily immediate'.[3] But when it came time to sit for the painter, it turned out things weren't quite so simple. In February 1912, James wrote to Edith Wharton: 'I have already sat *twice* to the great man […]. It proved, the 1st time, not to be a matter of the famous "one" impressionistic sitting at all – & he finds me difficult, perverse, obscure – quite as if I were a mere facial Awkward Age or Sacred Fount'.[4] The novelist's face proved as challenging to read as his oeuvre, defying

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[1] On the circumstances surrounding the portrait, including details of Sargent's previous attempts to represent James as well as an earlier failed subscription led by Edith Wharton, see Kilmurray and Ormond, *Complete Paintings*, 3: 228–31. The painting was finished in June 1913 and, after a brief display at Sargent's studio in Tite Street, it went on show at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in May 1914 where, on opening day, it was famously slashed by the suffragist Mary Wood. For a persuasive reading of the slashing and its relation to James's understanding of portraiture see Thomas J. Otten, "Slashing Henry James (On Painting and Political Economy, Circa 1900)," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 2 (2000): 293–320. James wrote after the event: 'I naturally feel very scalped and disfigured, but you will be glad to know that I seem to be pronounced curable': James, *Letters 4*, 712.

[2] Some of the money raised went on the purchase of a Charles II porringer and dish while the rest went to the artist Derwent Wood (1871–1976), personally selected by Sargent to produce the bust: see Ormond and Kilmurray, *Later Portraits*, 228–9.

[3] James, *CWA*, 1: 417. The profile, we recall from chapter 2, may have helped launch Sargent's career in the United States: Fairbrother, *Sargent*, 68.

[4] Lyall H. Powers, ed., *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters, 1900–1915* (New York: Scribner's, 1990), 212.

the alleged immediacy of Sargent's perception. This assimilation of the corpus and the body archly burlesques the critical reception of James's 'perverse, obscure' novels *The Awkward Age* (1899) and *The Sacred Fount* (1901) which, alongside *The Ambassadors* and other works penned at the turn of the century, helped to establish his enduring reputation as a "difficult" writer.[5] But it also revels in this obscurity: reading me isn't so easy, James boasts; it takes time to seize him—and even then, the difficulty goes on.[6] The novelist's letter registers something of a surprise, too; against all expectations, the process proved 'not to be a matter of the famous "one" impressionistic sitting at all'.

James's surprise is in its own way surprising. Because, as Thomas Otten has pointed out, 'even a glance at the pencil studies for a painting like *Madame X* indicates [that] Sargent's portraits are produced by a series of tentative experiments, not by a glance so rapid that it works like a grasping hand'.[7] It seems odd that James should not have known this, or that he should have failed to acknowledge it. He had on at least one occasion visited Sargent's *atelier*, taking Isabella Stewart Gardner in 1886 to see the painter's *Madame Gautreau* (1884) at his studio in Tite Street.[8] Moreover, James often visited the studios of his extensive network of painter friends; and he had from a young age been exposed to the process of painting as he daubed alongside his brother, William, in William Morris Hunt's Newport studio.[9] And yet, his 1887 profile of Sargent was not the first time the novelist appeared ill-informed about painters and

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[5] For this reception see Gard, *Heritage*, 282–305 and 306–16. Gard himself calls *The Sacred Fount* 'the quintessence of all that might be thought obscure, trivial, or dubious in the later James': ibid., 555.

[6] In the end James sat at least eight times for the Sargent portrait. On 18 June 1913 he wrote to his brother, William, describing his 'regular sittings for my portrait to Sargent, which have numbered now seven or eight'; on 25 June he wrote to his friend, the Welsh author Rhoda Broughton (1840–1920), that the painting was 'finished, *parachevé*,' and confessed that he was 'sorry to have ceased to sit, in spite of the repeated holes it made in my precious mornings': quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *Later Portraits*, 230. Part of the difficulty, James believed, might have stemmed from the fact that Sargent painted only a few portraits between 1909–12 and had in some sense lost the habit: see ibid., 220–28.

[7] Otten, "Slashing," 308. Otten cites in illustration of his point Kilmurray and Ormond, *Complete Paintings*, 1: 113–18, figures 50–60.

[8] Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, "Private and Public Subjects in the Correspondence between Henry James and Isabella Stewart Gardner," *The Henry James Review* 31, no. 1 (2010): 235.

[9] Eimers, "Pictorial Art," 76. In his letters James writes of visiting Elizabeth Boott in her studio several times: Henry James, *Letters 1: 1843–75*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 388; James, *Letters 4*, 277. In 1884, James took Sargent himself to the studios of Edward Burne-Jones and Edwin Abbey: Fairbrother, *Sargent*, 61–2.

their method. In 1874, for example, he suggested that Rubens – a famously erudite artist whose intricate compositions harmoniously balance complex poses, dramatic light, rich colour, and iconographic subtlety – painted purely 'by impulse'.[10] This might have been mere rhetoric, an offhand comment prompted by the exigencies of occasional art writing; or, as one critic has claimed, it might have been coloured by Ruskin's critique of Rubens.[11] But when placed alongside James's surprise that Sargent's method was not 'extraordinarily immediate,' it is difficult to disagree with Otten's verdict–namely, that the novelist sometimes confused 'the process of making paintings with the experience of looking at them'.[12] Indeed, in his understanding of Sargent's supposedly 'immediate' perception James was not only restating a commonplace about Impressionist technique; he was also following his own lead first outlined in his *Harper's* profile of the painter. James's surprise might seem to indicate, then, that he had no firm basis on which to found his original claim. More likely, it shows that the novelist's own strongly defined position on painting sometimes obscured other perspectives on the subject.

This dynamic also inflected his mature theory of artistic relations. This theory depended on the distinction between painting's extension in space and fiction's extension in time. It was supplemented by a variety of other considerations, as we have seen – the relation between the two arts in the marketplace, for example, or the different strategies associated with literary and painterly portraiture. But the fundamental distinction remained: for James, painting was static while writing was dynamic, a fact which gave fiction the decisive advantage. This aided him in his quest to establish fiction as a serious form worthy of its place at the top of the hierarchy of the arts. In the process, he may occasionally have unduly simplified the complexity of painting,

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[10] Viola Hopkins Winner, "Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," *Criticism* 9, no. 1 (1967): 10.
[11] James called Rubens 'coarse' and 'unreflective,' terms which recall Ruskin's recurring criticisms of Rubens in his diaries and in *Praeterita*, as well as other contemporary responses to the painter offered by writers such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Marysa Demoor, "'The flesh-tints of Rubens': Henry James's Contribution to the Construction of Englishness," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 31, no. 1 (2004): 107–11, 16–7 n. 12 and 13. As for Rubens himself: it is a commonplace in scholarship on the painter to acknowledge his formidable erudition and extraordinary command of iconography, but for a recent example see Aneta Georgievska-Shine, *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth, 1610–20: Visual and Poetic Memory* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[12] Otten, "Slashing," 308.

just as Lessing had done before him in his treatment of the visual arts.[13] But as I have demonstrated throughout my thesis, this notion of painting was useful to James's critical and fictional project, and he made good use of it. Far from binding him to a reductive position on the painter's art, it helped him to make complex arguments about the capacities of painting and its relation to fiction; and in the process, it informed his literary theory and practice.

In the twentieth century, the territorial understanding of inter-art relations, formalised by Lessing and taken up by James, was newly codified by the influential art writer Clement Greenberg in his account of modernist art.[14] In his seminal essays "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940) and "Modernist Painting" (1961) Greenberg argued that an artistic revolution began in the mid-nineteenth century – that is, when Henry James was beginning his aesthetic education – which resulted in the separation of painting and literature into distinct spheres.[15] Painting, Greenberg claimed, was from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries overly 'susceptible to the temptation to emulate the effects' of literature, the 'dominant' art in the period: literature had 'won the upper hand,' which led painters to neglect the qualities specific to the medium of painting; as a result, they 'tried to win admission to [literature's] domain' by focusing on issues such as subject matter and narrative.[16] Something had to change:

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[13] As one critic has put it, E. H. Gombrich 'exaggerates only slightly when he says that the *Laocoön* "is not so much a book about as against the visual arts"': H. B. Nisbet, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10. As I suggested in the introduction, there are clear commonalities between James's understanding of painting and Lessing's classic theory on the subject. Not only in terms of their theoretical content – their dependence on an image of painting as static and immediate as against the dynamic process associated with literature – but also in terms of their formal structure. As W. J. T. Mitchell has argued, the 'aim of Lessing's laws of genre […] is clearly not to make the spatial and temporal arts separate but equal, but to segregate them in what he regards as their natural inequality': Mitchell, *Iconology*, 107. For a good summary of responses to Lessing from painters and theorists of painting as well as alternatives to the paragonal model of inter-art relations see Joe Bray, *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–21.

[14] Though we recall from chapter 4 that, as Carol Armstrong has put it, in many ways 'it is Zola's view that underlies Greenberg's positioning of Manet as the father of modernism': Armstrong, *Manette*, 31; see also Zola, *Écrits sur l'art*, 112–20 and 137–70.

[15] Greenberg described his "Towards a Newer Laocoön" as an 'historical apology for abstract art,' a phrase which also usefully glosses "Modern Painting" because, as T. J. Clark has put it, 'Laocoön' sets out 'what were to become Greenberg's main preoccupations and commitments as a critic': Greenberg, *Essays*, 1: 37; T. J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 140.

[16] Greenberg, *Essays*, 1: 24.

> What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this, each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure.[17]

In this account, Manet – who was eleven years James's senior – is the first modernist painter because he began the process of 'exterminating' 'literature' from painting: Manet helped to establish painting's 'purity' by focusing on the qualities specific to the painter's art, such as the flatness of the canvas, and thereby forgoing inessential elements such as illusionism.[18] Greenberg's Manet, then, was the first to purge painting of its relation to "literature" and so to justify his medium in splendid isolation, a process that led eventually to abstract art.[19]

Greenberg's account proved enormously influential. Although it has fallen out of favour – more on this in a moment – it still animates scholarship in the field, and it retains a compelling explanatory power.[20] Indeed, James's use of painting as I have described it in this thesis might be seen to support, to some extent, Greenberg's theory of artistic relations. The novelist articulated a notion of painting which could be assimilated into literary art, which could be judged by literary standards, and which was ultimately inferior to the art of fiction. Following this logic, James's instrumentalisation of painting and his attempts to position it below fiction in the hierarchy of the arts represent precisely the kinds of threat to which Greenberg's Manet

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[17] Ibid., 4: 85–93, at 86.

[18] Ibid, 1: 28. "Purity" is still taken to be Greenberg's watchword, even if he later disavowed it. In "Complaints of an Art Critic" (1967) Greenberg wrote of himself: '[…] he is taken to believe in and advocate "purity" […]. As if "purity," however useful it may have been as an illusion, were anything more than an illusion in his eyes, and if he ever wrote anything to indicate otherwise': ibid., 4: 267.

[19] It is worth noting, however, that Greenberg later modified his conception of Manet's role in this narrative. Carol Armstrong, for example, notes that Greenberg's 1967 essay "Manet in Philadelphia" argues that 'far from standing at the head of the modernist "line," Manet's own painting did not even "develop in a straight line"': Armstrong, *Manette*, xiii; Greenberg, *Essays*, 4: 240–4.

[20] The body of scholarship that builds on or argues against Greenberg's work is vast and continues to grow. Indeed, in a recent article, Alastair Wright adds to and corrects Greenberg's view of Seurat and the movement towards abstraction: Alastair Wright, "On the Origins of Abstraction: Seurat and the Screening of History," *Art History* 41, no. 1 (2018): 72–103.

was responding; whether Manet indeed responded in the way Greenberg suggests is a different matter.

Today, Greenberg is typically used by critics as a foil: he offers, for many scholars, an exemplary formalist account of modernism that invites, even demands revision.[21] This is in part because of his emphasis on disaffiliation and purity, hallmarks of modernist historiographical practices, as well as the narrative of progress he constructs (Greenberg himself called his theory an 'historical apology for abstract art').[22] In other words, his vindication of modernist art is itself distinctly modernist: it is as much a part of the history of modernism as the painting it purports to describe; it therefore cannot be considered a historically neutral instrument of analysis.[23] In fact, commentators now find it easy to dismiss some of his central tenets. For example, quoting a critic whose 'stated goal is to correct Greenberg's separation of painting and literature into distinct spheres,' the art historian Alastair Wright asks: 'who believes any longer in that separation?'[24] In codifying the nominally essential differences between the arts, it is argued, Greenberg in fact caricatured each medium and, at the same time, flattened the complexity of artistic relations.[25]

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[21] Though, as several critics have pointed out, this may be at the expense of caricaturing Greenberg's position. As Stephen Melville has put it, the 'artworld demonization' of Greenberg has led to a 'thick miasma of nonreadings that have so long obscured his views': Stephen Melville, "Kant After Greenberg," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 1 (1998): 67–74. For a good overview of some of the dominant positions on Greenberg's thought see Daniel A. Siedell, "Contemporary Art Criticism and the Legacy of Clement Greenberg: Or, How Artwriting Earned Its Good Name," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 4 (2002): 15–31.

[22] Greenberg, *Essays*, 1: 37. Indeed, Greenberg's polemical defence of modernist painting stands at the notional end of modernism which, despite the penetrating historiographical questions asked by Raymond Williams in his famous essay 'When was Modernism?' we still tend to treat as a title for a 'whole cultural movement and moment [that] has […] been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s': Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1986), 32.

[23] I owe this phrase to Adam Parkes, who describes his use of Freud and Walter Benjamin as 'objects of historical inquiry rather than as historically neutral instruments of analysis': Parkes, *Shock*, 250.

[24] Alastair Wright, "Reviewed Work(s): *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege 1870–71* by Hollis Clayson; *Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism: Blurring Genre Boundaries* by Arden Reed; *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* by Jennifer L. Shaw," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 3 (2004): 611. The critic Wright addresses in his review is Arden Reed, who claims that, *pace* Greenberg, Flaubert and Manet 'exploit the other's medium to work out their respective projects': Arden Reed, *Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism: Blurring Genre Boundaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 227.

[25] In my account of Greenberg's theories it should be noted that, although he has been attacked or defended by generations of art historians, he has also sustained varied readings, most notably from Michael Fried and T. J. Clark: see especially Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Clark, "Greenberg's Theory," 139–56; the exchange between Clark and Fried in *The Politics of Interpretation*,

James's understanding of inter-art relations can undoubtedly be assimilated into the genealogy that leads from Lessing to Greenberg. However, I've been discussing Greenberg at such length precisely to emphasise the differences between his trenchant theories and James's subtle work. The novelist's view of painting as I have described it in this thesis is ultimately more nuanced, more sensitive, and more forgiving than Greenberg's account, even if they touch upon many of the same issues. Indeed, in his understanding of painting and his approach to artistic relations, James's oeuvre is closer to writers such as Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf than to a theorist like Greenberg. Stein, for example, was undeniably interested in the essence of different mediums and genres, but she never ceased to reflect on the radical entanglements of painting and literature.[26] Woolf, meanwhile, consistently engaged the 'symbiotic relation between […] verbal and visual,' the painter's art and the art of fiction.[27] Like James, these writers sought to expand the horizons of their own forms (sometimes, admittedly, through imperial strategies). But they did not conceive of the arts as inhabiting or having to inhabit ultimately distinct spheres, sealed off hermetically from the productive friction generated by their relation.[28]

There is one major novelist in particular who, even more than James, illustrates this openness to other mediums, and especially painting, and who simultaneously believed that

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ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983); and the overview of some of these debates offered in Siedell, "Artwriting," 15–31.

[26] Stein was 'undoubtedly influenced by the modes of modern painting she helped to discover and promulgate,' as one critic has put it: Marianne DeKoven, "Gertrude Stein and Modern Painting: Beyond Literary Cubism," *Contemporary Literature* 22, no. 1 (1981): 81. And she has 'provided us with probably the fullest theoretical and practical exploration' of the literary portrait, as another commentator has suggested: Wendy Steiner, "Postmodernist Portraits," *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (1987): 1.

[27] Chantal Lacourarie, "Painting and Writing: A Symbiotic Relation in Virginia Woolf's Works," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 81. On the subject see also Maggie Humm, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to the Virginia Woolf and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and Ann Banfield, "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time," *Poetics Today* 24, no. 3 (2003): 472–516.

[28] Once more, Greenberg might reasonably argue that this is precisely the threat to which Manet responded; but this begs the question in that it is predicated on the assumption that these artists worked within a conflictual model of artistic relations—that is, it assumes one of the central positions it sets out to prove. Historical work on the subject by, for example, Pierre Bourdieu cited throughout this thesis suggests that there may indeed have been such a conflict at work: see Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*. But this does not obviate the possibility that artists were moving towards greater cooperation – towards assimilating other forms in new ways into their works – rather than seeking greater purity and formal restraint; this account was, in any case, always premised on a highly selective canon of authors and painters.

literature holds an extraordinary power which exceeds the other arts. In November 1913, one month before Sargent's portrait went on private display at his studio in Tite Street, a Frenchman thirty years James's junior published his debut novel, the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Early in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913), the narrator is reading his literary idol, the novelist Bergotte, in the garden at Combray when he is interrupted by the dandyish connoisseur Swann. Swann's conversation deftly moves from painting to fiction and from fiction to drama: he asks after one of the narrator's friends who looks like Bellini's *Sultan Mehmet II* (1480); he says that he knows Bergotte well, can have the narrator's book inscribed; and he inflames the narrator's desire to see the actress known as Berma perform on stage: she is 'only an actress if you like, but you know that I don't believe very much in the "hierarchy" of arts'—that is, as Swann goes on to say, despite the fact that she is 'only an actress,' her 'acting will give you as noble an inspiration as any masterpiece of art in the world'.[29] The narrator is struck by the way Swann delivers this verdict:

> whenever he spoke of serious matters, whenever he used an expression which seemed to imply a definite opinion upon some important subject, he would take care to isolate it, to sterilise it by using a special intonation, mechanical and ironic, as though he put the phrase or word between inverted commas, and was anxious to disclaim any personal responsibility for it; as who should say 'the "hierarchy," don't you know, as silly people call it.' But then, if it was so absurd, why did he say the "hierarchy"?[30]

Swann's suave self-effacement tips the narrator off to the seriousness of the question. In the time scheme of the novel, this exchange probably takes place in the 1880s or early 1890s – around the time James published *The Tragic Muse* – when, as we have seen, such a hierarchy was a legitimate subject of discussion.[31] And eager though Swann may be to disavow artistic rivalries,

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[29] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 115.
[30] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 115–6.
[31] On the chronology of Proust's novel see Gareth H. Steel, *Chronology and Time in À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Droz, 1979), chapter 2. On the hierarchy of the arts in the French context see especially Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*; Wettlaufer, "Zola, Manet," 437–463; and Rancière, *Speech*, chapters 1 and 2. In the English context, which

this issue is in fact central to Proust's *Künstlerroman*. In the next volume of the *recherche*, the narrator leaves drama behind in favour of painting. Initiated into the mysteries of vision by the painter Elstir, the narrator declares that Berma's art 'had become a feeble, tawdry thing' to him: 'since my visits to Elstir, it was on to certain tapestries, certain modern paintings that I had transferred the inner faith I had once had in the acting, the tragic art of Berma'.[32] In the final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé* (1927), this 'faith' is 'transferred' on to the novel and to literature more generally. The narrator declares: 'Real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated – the only life in consequence which can be said to be really lived – is literature'.[33] He consequently realises that he must write the work that will itself become *À la recherche du temps perdu*.[34] Just as Swann's 'special intonation' seems to disclaim the gravity of the topic at hand, then, the brevity and seeming triviality of his exchange with the narrator in the garden at Combray masks the significance of the issue to the work as a whole.[35]

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interested Proust greatly, see especially Byerly, *Realism*, and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "The Sublime Rivalry of Word and Image: Turner and Ruskin Revisited," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2000): 149–69.

[32] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: The Guermantes Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996), 33.

[33] Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996), 253. Proust's French reads: '*la vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent réellement vécue, c'est la littérature*': Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, Florence Callu, Francine Goujon, Eugène Nicole, Pierre-Louis Rey, Brian Rogers, and Jo Yoshida, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987–1989), 4: 474. It should be said however that the other arts participate in this redemptive process, most notably painting: on the subject see especially Antoine Compagnon, "Proust au musée," in *Marcel Proust: l'écriture et les arts*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié with Florence Callu (Paris: Gallimard/Bibliothèque nationale de France/Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999) and many of the essays in Christie McDonald and François Proulx, eds., *Marcel Proust and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially chapters 2, 3, 11, and 13. On what Proust's novel sees itself as being able to achieve that the other arts could not, see especially Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), chapters 1, 7, and 8. Descombes's work is also usefully attentive to the discrepancies between what Proust's *recherche* says it is doing and what it actually does.

[34] Tadié, *Proust*, 294. That time should be at the centre of Proust's project as well as James's understanding of fiction fits with Fredric Jameson's account of the 'strange vocation of the modernists': Proust's 'will to make the past live again,' Joyce's 'elaborate literary reconstruction of 1904 Dublin' – as well as, to my mind, Joyce's recapitulation of Flaubert's research practices for *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) – 'Thomas Mann's endless musings on time, moments in Pound and Eliot, political nostalgia in Yeats,' all attest to this 'strange vocation': Jameson, *Antinomies*, 289.

[35] Although to my mind Proust's representation of the arts and their relations is more thoroughly theorised and finally more nuanced than James's understanding. Few critics have discussed the two writers together, but for a suggestive "confrontation" see Bruce Lowery, *Marcel Proust et Henry James: Une Confrontation* (Paris: Plon, 1964); for an original treatment of Proust and James alongside Pater and Gerard Manley Hopkins see Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); see also the landmark essays on James and Proust respectively in Sedgwick, *Closet*, chapters 4 and 5.

The vision of artistic relations which animated James's criticism and fiction is at the core of Proust's *recherche*. Both novelists, like many of their contemporaries, were fascinated by inter-art relations, and they both exploited these relations to spectacular effect. It is fitting, then, that two months before Sargent began work on his portrait, in March 1913, James published *A Small Boy and Others*, an autobiographical account of his childhood which, owing to the strange contortions of literary history, now seems eminently Proustian.[36] In it, James recounts a trip to the Louvre in the 1850s that left him 'overwhelmed' and 'bewildered' but which proved 'educative, formative, fertilising, in a degree which no other "intellectual experience" our youth was to know could pretend […] to rival.'[37] The novelist recounts subsequent visits to the Louvre as an adolescent when, unaccompanied, he strolled through the galleries and streets of Paris as though there could finally be no separation between the two. During these 'independent visits […] the house of life and the palace of art became so mixed and interchangeable […] that an excursion to look at pictures would have but half expressed my afternoon':

> I had looked at pictures, looked and looked again […]; but I had also looked at France and looked at Europe, looked even at America as Europe itself might be conceived so to look, looked at history, as a still-felt past and complacently personal future, at society, manners, types, characters, possibilities and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts; and all in the light of being splendidly "on my own," as I supposed it.[38]

The act of looking 'at pictures would have but half expressed' his activity because it was not through painting that the novelist believed one could best access and represent 'possibilities

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[36] On this phenomenon – which, for example, makes certain of Kierkegaard's parables appear Kafkaesque because each writer's work 'modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future' – see Jorge Luis Borges's "Kafka and his Precursors" (1951), an essay which self-consciously develops T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917): Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 1999), 365. On whether James and Proust were familiar with each other's work see Angus Wrenn, "Eager Disciple and Reluctant Master: Paul Bourget's Role in the Reception of Henry James in France (with a Note on the Extent of James's Influence on Marcel Proust)' in *The Reception of Henry James in Europe*, ed. Annick Duperray (London: Continuum, 2006), 36–46.

[37] James, *Autobiographies*, 207, 210. On the paintings James was likely to have seen at this time see Compagnon, "Proust au musée," 2–8, and James Kearns, "From Store to Museum: The Reorganization of the Louvre's Painting Collections in 1848," *The Modern Language Review* 102, no. 1 (2007): 58–73.

[38] James, *A Small Boy*, 211.

and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts'. For James, it was fiction and fiction alone that could contain and illuminate the depth of experience, the breadth and range of life in the world. This didn't stop him from looking and looking again at the painter's art. But he typically did so for his own ends, his own passion, and in service of what he called 'the most magnificent form,' the art of fiction.[39]

[39] James, *Literary Criticism 1*, 61.

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