Figures for the Artist in the Writings of Henry James and Oscar Wilde

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Abstract

This study is a cultural materialist analysis of the spectacular commodity economy of the *fin-de-siècle* as mediated and represented in the iconography of the artist that Oscar Wilde and Henry James employ. The figure of the artist within the dominant social organisation of the *fin-de-siècle* is studied in relation to residual, dominant and emergent social formations. Focussing on four distinct figures, I examine the ways in which the discursive subject positions of the actress, the critic, the revolutionary and the child are oppositional because they represent positions that frustrate and evade the forceful processes that seek to incorporate individuals to the hegemony. This evasion is achieved because these positions exploit ambiguities within the discursive formations. Each of these positions is characterised by the same qualities of marginality, vulnerability and mutability, qualities traditionally identified as weaknesses, which I identify here as paradoxical strengths.

The figure of the actress captures the force with which the processes of hegemony reify women, but she also represents an alternative to those schemes of identity formation. The vulnerability of the actress before the hegemonic discourses, a vulnerability that the artist shares, is paradoxically the quality that offers the greatest opportunity for constructing alternative positions. In a corruptly theatrical world the actress's art allows her to confound the possessive male gaze, and to evade the roles scripted for her by hegemony. The figure of the actress represents the first example of the theatrically multiple subjectivity that James and Wilde identify and explore.

The critic is inextricably bound by systems of exchange and the logic of the marketplace and this represents the vulnerability of the critic. This vulnerability though depends upon the critic's intermediate position and this intermediate position is a site, I argue, which James and Wilde exploit as they re-conceptualise the action of culture and the work that art achieves. At the *fin-de-siècle* this work was recognised as necessary and urgent by many intellectuals. The developing mass culture presented an emergent form of social organisation, one that offered substantial opportunities for change. Cultural critics sought to find ways to understand and influence these social forms. Both Henry James and Oscar Wilde critique the dominant narratives of art and culture through their readings and rewritings of Matthew Arnold's works. Their rewritings reveal the complicity of Arnold's formulations with the hegemony at the same time as they identify oppositional positions and strategies. These oppositional positions and strategies depend upon redefining the existing relations of production and consumption that govern aesthetic encounters. The work that art does becomes the transformation of the individual's consciousness, a change from the fixed bourgeois self to a theatrically

multiple subjectivity. The critic mimes this change in order to make the process available to all.

The revolutionary represents the vulnerability of the individual to political discourses of reaction and revolution. This vulnerability is realised by James and Wilde in their works through the figure of the scapegoat, an individual whose relation to the group is explicitly dangerous and revelatory. I argue that James and Wilde both identify a theatrically multiple subjectivity and I trace the genealogy of this subjectivity in Hegelian thought. I illustrate how Henry James's investigation of city-spaces demonstrates his understanding of the creation and regulation of subjects in modernity.

The figure of the child is a familiar role for the romantic artist but the romantic child is also the latent being intently examined by late nineteenth century psychology, ethnology, and physiology. I argue that the potential of the child, as its promise and its threat, reveal the means through which subject positions are established, fixed and regulated, and holds out the promise of evading those regulatory schemes. I read Oscar Wilde's fairy-tales in the context of late nineteenth century folklore research, in particular the writings of Andrew Lang, and I relate James's literary children in 'The Turn of the Screw' and *What Maisie Knew* to his developing modernist literary form.

I conclude that a significant contribution of these writers to the establishment of a distinctively Modernist literary practice was their detailed exploration and examination of the relationship of the artist to the dominant and emergent social formations, and their commitment to an active role for the artist in contesting the limits of modern subjectivity, doing battle with the forces of capital.

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List of abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this work. Wherever text is emphasised the emphasis is that of the original text unless otherwise indicated.

Complete Tales	*The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel, 12 vols (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963)
Edel, *Henry James*	Leon Edel, *Henry James*, 5 vols (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953-72)
Edel, Letters	*Letters of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel, 4 vols (1974-84)
Notebooks	*The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel and Lyall H Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*	Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1988)
The Artist as Critic	*Oscar Wilde: The Artist as Critic; Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1970)
Sentimental Education	Gustave Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, ed. and trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964)
Complete Letters	Rupert Hart-Davis and Merlin Holland, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000)
Phenomenology	G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Sprit*, ed. by J. N. Findlay, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)
Horne *Henry James*	Philip Horne, *Henry James: A Life in Letters* (London: Penguin, 1999)
Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*	H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (London: Methuen, 1976, reprint. 1980)
Literary Criticism I	Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature; American Writers; English Writers*, Library of America series (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1984)
Literary Criticism II	Henry James, *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, and the Prefaces to the New York edition*, Library of America series (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1984)
Kaplan, *Henry James*	Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992)
Vera	Oscar Wilde, *Vera: or, The Nihilist*, ed. Frances Miriam Reed, Studies in British Literature (Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989)
Ross, ed., *Collected Works*	*The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Robert Ross, facsimile reprint edition, 15 vols (London: Thoemmes Press, 1993)
Oxford Notebooks	Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand, *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks: A Portrait of a Mind in the Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)
Complete Prose Works	*Matthew Arnold: Complete Prose Works*, ed. by R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1962-77)
Complete Works	*The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994)

Introduction: Figures for the Artist

> The past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are. (*Complete Works*, 1194)

Towards the end of 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' Oscar Wilde makes this enigmatic statement. What does it mean? In the future will everyone be an artist? If so, what does it mean to be an artist? In a discussion of socialism, of what relevance is the idea or the figure of the artist? Art and artists present a spectacular challenge to the simpler forms of socialist thought. Is an artist a worker, if so in what relation does the artist as worker stand to the dominant productive relations? Wilde's essay concerns itself with issues of social justice. How does this concern relate to the statement above? The beginnings of an answer can be discovered in the last sentence quoted: 'The future is what artists are'. The insistent grammatical tense of the sentence is the present but the concern is with a sense of the future. Between these two states stand artists, intermediaries between what mankind ought not to be and what mankind could become. This thesis explores ways in which the idea of the artist as an intermediary is explored by Oscar Wilde and Henry James as they struggle to wrest authority for art and artists from the dominant forms of social organization that seek to grant artists power only in drastically circumscribed terms, as commodity brokers, celebrities, and technicians.

Fin-de-siècle culture abounds in analogues or figures for the artist. Detectives and criminals, journalists, academics and scientists, connoisseurs, collectors, priests and dandies, are all roles that are explored by contemporary writers as they strive to stake out a position of authority from which the artist could speak. Sherlock Holmes is the artist as aestheticised scientist. His forensic method, like that of Poe's Dupin before him, makes of mysteries a primal scene which simultaneously authorizes and demonstrates the authority of rational scientific discourse. The detective genre in its form promises that threatening social forces can be controlled, and presents a technician who exercises this control. In Holmes the aesthete's mannerisms, connoisseurship, and interest in the unnatural all mask the exercise of reason: his interest in objects records his objective observation of phenomena and accompanying deductive reasoning, and his reason admits of no bounds imposed by social forms. The authority of the detective is bought at a high price however. That authority relies on the revelation of the mystery and the neutralization of transgression: the detective, a socially marginal figure, secures the status quo. As a figure for the artist the detective offers only a sharply circumscribed position. Detectives are like artists due to their imaginative creation and recreation of narratives. Specifically Holmes is figured as artistic, or aesthetic, through Doyle's characterization of

his temperament, his virtuoso musicianship, and his moods and sudden enthusiasms. The first Holmes story acknowledges this connection in its title. Holmes calls the mystery of Jefferson Hope 'a study in scarlet' in ironic reference to Whistler, and this reference identifies Holmes as a creature of the aesthetic eighties.[1] Importantly, understanding the detective as an artist places the artist in the same subservient role as the detective before the dominant social forces. Just as the detective acts as guarantor to the social status quo, the artist becomes only a handmaiden to the dominant social forces at their most nakedly coercive. In the Sherlock Holmes stories we get some sense of this when we remember the similarities between Moriarty and Holmes; Doyle's master criminal schemes with the same force of reason that Holmes employs to neutralise those schemes. The criminal is not so different from the detective. The difference lies in the freedom of the detective at the end of the tale, the freedom to continue to take part in the never-ending process of securing hegemony. If the artist is like the detective then their place in the dominant social formations is to play a further part in the continual process of stabilising those formations.

The converse of the detective as artist is the figuring of the criminal as artist. Arthur Conan Doyle relates in his memoirs that at a dinner given by the editor J. M. Stoddart in 1889, he and Oscar Wilde each undertook to produce short stories for *Lippincott's Magazine*. In February of the following year *Lippincott's* published 'The Sign of Four', and in July 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. Wilde's story offers Dorian as someone who lives out the suggestions that fiction and fancy make to him, providing readers, as Wilde understood but his contemporaries contrived to ignore, with a figure of the artist as aestheticised murderer. If Holmes is a scientist, then Dorian is a literal reader of Walter Pater who makes no distinction between thinking of a thing and doing it. His pursuit of new sensations parodies a rational objective scientific method at the same time as it suggests the limits of Pater's hedonism.[2] Concurrently, the conjunction of the artist and criminal was also to be found in Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal* (1890):

> The vanity of criminals is at once an intellectual and an emotional fact. It witnesses at once to their false estimate of life and of themselves, and to their egotistic delight in admiration. They share this character with a large proportion of artists and literary men, though, as Lombroso remarks, they decidedly excel themselves in this respect. The vanity of the artist and literary man marks the abnormal elements, the tendency in them to degeneration. It reveals in them the weak point of a mental organization, which at other points is highly

[1] Conan Doyle is following McNeill Whistler's styling of the titles of his paintings here, such as 'Nocturne in Blue and Gold' (1872), 'Harmony in Grey and Green' (1872-4) and 'Arrangement in Grey and Black' (1871): Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 135.

[2] Pater's 'Conclusion' to his *The Renaissance* (1873) provides a succinct account of his thought on aesthetic experience and Wilde's treatment of Pater will be discussed more fully below.

> developed. Vanity may exist in the well-developed ordinary man, but it is unobtrusive; in its extreme form it marks the abnormal man, the man of unbalanced mental organization, artist or criminal.[3]

Havelock Ellis is always concerned to analyze mental states as directly related to physiological states, providing a rational, scientific, materialist description of human experience and culture. This passage is interesting for the relations it establishes between 'types' and states. Artists and criminals are predisposed by their shared vanity to degeneration and anti-social behaviour. The figure of the artist here implied is that of a bohemian, marginal figure, the licensed fool perhaps of Joyce's description of Wilde, 'court jester to the English'.[4] Specifically the romantic idea of the artist as marginal and at odds with society is affirmed at the same time as the authority of the scientist is affirmed. Ellis lumps the criminal and the artist together, defining them against the rational well-developed ordinary man, the normative bourgeois subject.

Henry James transforms the figures of the detective and criminal by exploiting their characteristics in specifically literary contexts, and in so doing emphasises the resemblances of these figures to that of the critic and writer. The narrators of his stories of literary life are often investigators of specifically textual mysteries. In 'The Figure in the Carpet' (1896) the narrator of the story is a detective scouring Vereker's novels for clues to what Vereker calls his 'exquisite scheme' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 9, 271-316, 282), and what the narrator calls 'buried treasure' (285). The narrator of 'The Aspern Papers' (1888) is criminal and detective, critic and artist. In his unscrupulous pursuit of Jeffrey Aspern's papers, he investigates the past. It is as a critic that he looks for Aspern's papers, but he cannot help creating new narratives out of his quest. He questions servants like an investigator, and rummages closets, first with his eyes and then physically (*Complete Tales*, vol. 6, 275-382, 352,). When Juliana catches him prowling her rooms in the night he feels himself in the glare of her eyes 'a caught burglar'.[5] In both versions of the tale the perfidious narrator is condemned by Juliana as a 'publishing scoundrel'. The forms of James's stories of literary life approximate that of detective stories but develop elements which in traditional detective stories remain latent. The pleasure of 'The Aspern Papers' relies on readers' recognition that the narrator is at once detective and criminal, critic and fabulist, as well as on our understanding the ways in which James ironically balances the competing characteristics of these roles. Such a story cannot end with the kind of revelation that a detective story promises; classical detective stories end almost

[3] Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* The Contemporary Social Sciences series (London: Walter Scott, 1890), p. 139.

[4] James Joyce, 'Oscar Wilde: The Poet of Salomé', in *James Joyce: Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. by Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 148-51 (p.149).

[5] 'Caught burglar' is a revision for the New York edition text, reprinted in Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories*, ed. by Adrian Poole, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 1-98 (p. 79). The *Complete Tales* text has her gaze make him feel 'horribly ashamed' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 6, 362).

unfailingly with a revelation occasioned by the detective resolving any mystery. James's stories concerning writers rarely, if ever, end in this way. The competing roles for the characters in the stories mirror the conflicting roles open to the *fin-de-siècle* artist, and they focus our attention on the role of the reader in the drama (after all the original role in which the narrator of 'The Aspern Papers' casts himself is that of reader). Adrian Poole notes that the tales of literary life emphasise the intermediary status of writing at the same time as they identify the artist as an intermediary: 'Writing hovers between past and future. Something has been done and it is there in the words. It lies like buried, human treasure and what others may do with it is anyone's business'.[6] Writing, which is commodity and communication, material property and immaterial value, negotiates between absent writer and present reader, and James's late stories and novels take as their scene and theme resistances to and the dangers of, the competing worldly readings that seek to reduce writing to a thing, to make of it only a commodity or treasure, rather than realise it as ethical communication.

George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) offers a further roster of possible roles for individuals engaged in artistic work. John Halperin notes that 'each of the leading literary men of the novel - Reardon, Biffen, Whelpdale, Milvain, Yule - ... have their origin in the novelist's self-dramatizing impulse'.[7] Gissing contrasts Edwin Reardon and his anguished struggle to write and his sense of his artistic integrity, with Harold Biffen and Jasper Milvain. Biffen is concerned with the formal artistic qualities of prose and aims for 'an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent'.[8] Biffen's creed is Gissing's satire on Zola, Naturalism and his own younger self. Despite this satire, the figure of Biffen also offers a heroic view of artistic integrity, along with a stark description of the costs of that integrity. Milvain is the artist as journalist, but not journalist only. Milvain represents the modern artist who accepts without question that 'literature nowadays is a trade ... your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetising' (8). The commercialism of the contemporary literary scene is no different from the trade in grain or any of the many less essential commodities of the age. Caught between these two Reardon's writing life is one of struggle and privation, ending finally in a death that Gissing calls *practical*. In these three characters the novel offers a sharp portrait of the demands on the contemporary writer. A further aspect of this portrait can be seen in the contrast between Alfred Yule and Jasper Milvain; the relations between these two specifically capture shifting relations

[6] James, *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories*, p. xix.

[7] John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 426.

[8] George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. by John Goode, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 144.

of production. Alfred Yule is a figure associated with the higher journalism of the mid-century, with journals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*. He is a pedantic scholar of antiquities who deplores the shift away from these serious minded journals towards what he calls 'the multiplication of ephemerides' (37). The ephemeral qualities of the late nineteenth century journals are imagined by Henry James as trains which, running to the inexorable timetable dictated by the market, must leave the station whether full or not.[9] Gissing's novel captures the conflicts in the roles available to writers in the new, increasingly professionalized, cultural marketplace. Artists as scholars, journalists, or academics (and often a combination of these roles) find their work almost unavoidably circumscribed by the demands of the market.

A further group of persistent figures for the late nineteenth century artist are the dandy, the collector, and the connoisseur. These figures are interrelated, and each records aspects of the conflicts within which individual artists find themselves. Ellen Moers has traced the history of the dandy as a figure and identifies the *fin-de-siècle* dandy as in 'scornful, silent, unsuccessful rebellion against the mediocre materialism of a democratic era'.[10] This is a hint she develops from Baudelaire who claims in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1860) that the dandy as a type appears at a time of crisis as democratic society develops and individuality confronts uniformity.[11] Baudelaire hails the dandy as an urban development of the Romantic type of the artist. The *blasé* dandy belongs to 'an institution outside the law, [one with] a rigorous code of laws'; he creates his own identity in the face of the disintegration of self that urban living threatens (419). This dandy is at once an anti-democratic figure and a type created by Republican democracy, sign and symptom of resistance to democratic social norms, and a figure whose identity depends upon the representational logic of the mass urban society of the nineteenth century. The dandy-artists derive their identity from the secret life they lead within the crowd and from the energy of the crowd:

> For the imperfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world ... the lover of universal life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity (399-400).

Here the artist becomes the idler, observer and dandy whose self-creation depends on their experience of the energy of the crowd, an energy figured as electrical. However, this

[9] Henry James, 'The Science of Criticism' (1891), reprinted in *Literary Criticism I*, pp. 95-99 (p.95).

[10] Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), p. 372.

[11] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Charles Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, ed. and trans. by P. E. Charvet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 390-435 (p. 422).

self-creation is the donning of a disguise. Walter Benjamin characterises this masquerade as the obscured entry of the artist and intellectual into urban systems of representation and exchange: 'in the person of the flâneur, the intelligentsia becomes acquainted with the marketplace. It surrenders itself to the market, thinking merely to look around; but in fact it is already seeking a buyer'.[12]

Jean Christophe Agnew has argued that Henry James in his artworks and his theorising of representation offers a 'window on the process of cultural reproduction', a glimpse of the complex experience of consumer culture as it entrenches itself.[13] Agnew further argues that James performs an 'immanent critique' (83) of this culture through his examination of the artist's 'consuming vision'. Agnew characterises this way of seeing the world as the emergent subjectivity of consumer culture, the view from the subject positions that interpellate individuals in the hegemonic formations. Agnew's theorising of James's position is welcome and careful but he misreads James when he takes at face value James's recurrent dismissal of the world of business. He also fails to read *The American Scene* (1907) with sufficient alertness to James's complex ironic representation of his vision of the new twentieth century America. Agnew argues that James 'kept the forms of consumer culture he found in America's hotels and ghettos firmly confined to the outskirts of his fictive settings' (78) but he also quotes James from *The American Scene* writing on the relation of labourers to the economy in which they find themselves. These wage earners have a new freedom it is true but, James writes, 'there is such a thing, in the United States, as the freedom to grow up to be blighted, and it may be the only freedom in store for the smaller fry of future generations'. In the face of the 'new remorseless monopolies' of the consumer economy the freedom of the individual - the 'living unit' as James puts it - is recognised as an illusion. Agnew argues that James's representation of himself as detached from this economy is a defensive strategy spurred on by his recognition of his 'emotional and intellectual proximity ... to a burgeoning mass-market society' (79). This is the familiar characterisation of James as patrician snob, recoiling from the emerging mass culture, with the added twist that he knew not what he said. I will be arguing throughout this thesis that the complex explorations of subjectivity that I show James undertaking give the lie to this characterisation and that James's fictions identify specific subject positions that seek to evade the illusion of freedom created by the dominant culture.

[12] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, first edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 14-26 (p. 21).

[13] Jean Christophe Agnew, 'The Consuming Vision of Henry James', in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. by Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 65-100 (p. 99).

The relationship of the consuming vision of the artist to the market is troped by Henry James and Oscar Wilde in the figure of the collector or the connoisseur (a figure who registers James's alertness to the imbrications of the aesthetic and the market far earlier than Agnew allows). Gilbert Osmond provides an example of an early satire by James of the connoisseur as aesthete and failed artist. Ralph Touchett says Osmond looks like a prince in disguise, one who 'abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness'.[14] Osmond's villa represents the mask of aloofness that he presents to the world. The 'antique, solid, weather-worn yet imposing front had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask, not the face of the house. It has heavy lids, but not eyes' (248). Later James tells us that Isabel recognises that Gilbert, rather than renounce the world, had always kept one eye on it. She imagines him gazing out from the impassive face of his home: 'he had looked at [the world] out of his window even when he appeared to be most detached from it' (462). Osmond's world-view appeared at first to Isabel to be aesthetic and non-material, but later stands revealed as vulgarly materialist. This collector collects people not just as well as *bibelots* but as though they are *bibelots*. The dangerous prospect that James recognises and satirises in the hateful figure of Gilbert Osmond is that the consuming vision of the artist may be sterile, never able to dispel the feeling of inanition created by the very logic of this consumption to which the collector (and the artist as collector) is bound.

This emptiness characterises the other famous and significant figure of the artist as collector at the *fin-de-siècle*, that of J. K. Huysmans's Des Esseintes in his novel *À rebours* (1884). Huysmans's novel catalogues his hero's search for sensations of ever-increasing refinement and fineness of discrimination. Individual chapters catalogue his investigations of fabrics, jewellery and perfumes in exhaustive detail (exhausting for the reader). Huysmans's hero serves as a precursor for Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray whose interest in laces and jewellery mimics that of Des Esseintes. Dorian is fascinated by a 'poisonous book' whose hero seems to him 'a kind of pre-figuring type of himself' (*Complete Works*, 96-7).[15] Wilde's novel figures Dorian as a collector who compares his treasures to himself; the fantastic embroideries and laces of history that he collects or desires he compares with his own unchanging countenance: 'no winter marred his face or stained his flower-like bloom. How different it was with material things' (*Complete Works*, 104). Dorian's face is a mask that he turns to the world, one which hides his inanition. Neil Bartlett identifies collecting as erotic and suggests that Wilde's heroes are all

[14] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. by Nicola Bradbury, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 273.

[15] Regenia Gagnier points out that Wilde's type-written manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for *Lippincott's* names a different novel, *Le Secret de Raoul* by Catulle Sarrazin, as Dorian's fascinating book: Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls Of The Marketplace: Oscar Wilde And The Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. 65.

'collectors and connoisseurs' and that the activity of collecting is erotic: 'in the connoisseur's library, erotica and exotica are somehow indistinguishable'.[16] Bartlett goes on to suggest that 'the artist as connoisseur belongs to a new elite, an aristocracy of sensibility, part of whose identity depends upon their aloofness from the world of production' (181). Bartlett is arguing for the recognition of this idea of an elite as a constitutive component of queer identity. The homosexual and the collector each join a secret society whose members know one another by discrete signs (and perhaps these signs and these societies are the same, not separate). For my purposes the important prospect here is not the construction of a queer identity at the *fin-de-siècle* but the failure of art for art's sake as a tenable position for the modern artist. The aloofness from the world of production stands here as a mask that seeks to disguise the relationship of the artist to modern consumer culture.

Figures as masks

The figures for the artist discussed above could be understood as masks which individual artists might assume. The idea of the mask was a pungent and suggestive one at the *fin-de-siècle*. Such a mask is not necessarily a disguise; a mask might be at once a means of aligning oneself with one's antecedents as an artist and of asserting one's own maturity and individuality. Mallarmé's early poem 'Le Guignon' records his debt to Baudelaire and Gautier and his assumption of the mantle of a poet; the poem figures this mantle as a jinx, or curse that costs each poet dear; the bearers of the curse are 'Dérisoires martyrs de hazards tortueux'.[17] The poets Mallarmé describes are chosen by some impersonal force for their gift and this identification is a mixed martyrdom and triumph. The poem appeared in Verlaine's *Les Poètes Maudits* (1884) anthology and the outsider figure of the poet that characterises this French tradition provides a further role for the artist, one that had persuasive force for Oscar Wilde, but one with disadvantages that Wilde recognised; the *poètes maudit's* critique of society depends on their rejection of society, a determined outsider's stance rather a position at once inside and outside of society. Mallarmé's artistic seriousness and ambition could be understood to be bought at the cost of the artist being marginalised in contemporary society. I will argue throughout this thesis that, though Oscar Wilde and Henry James saw this marginality as the almost unavoidable lot of the modern artist, both men attempted to find positions for the modern artist that were at once marginal and central. The paradox that both recognises

[16] Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde*, Masks, first edition (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), p. 178-9.

[17] Stéphane Mallarmé 'Le Guignon' (written 1862) in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, ed. and trans. by Henry Weinfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 4-6, (p. 4).

and seeks to exploit is the powerful work that the marginal figure does in securing the hegemonic social forms which marginalise them. I argue that Wilde and James recognised an opportunity for the modern artist to shape contemporary civilization, to transform rather than to be transformed by the powerful forces of social change. Wilde's public performance of the aesthete might be understood as a quite deliberate performance strategy followed as a means of avoiding the alternative role of the *poètes maudit*.

A further aspect of Mallarmé's poetics is important here. His concept of the sacred role of the poet as he records the sensations he receives was the understanding Mallarmé gained from the spiritual crisis he experienced in 1866-7. Writing to Henri Cazalis in May 1866, he described how he had wholly lost his sense of himself in the creative process: 'I still need to look at myself in that mirror in order to think and if it were not in front of this desk on which I am writing to you, I would become the Void once again. That will let you know that I am now impersonal and no longer the Stéphane that you knew - but a capacity possessed by the spiritual Universe to see itself and develop itself, through what was once me'.[18] The poet's sensations are not his alone but an aspect of the reflection of the universe as it observes itself. This theory of impersonality influenced Yeats who incorporated it into his theory of masks:

> I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. We put on a grotesque or solemn painted face to hide us from the terrors of judgement, invent an imaginative Saturnalia where one forgets reality, a game like that of a child, where one loses the infinite pain of self-realization. Perhaps all sins and energies of the world are but its flight from an infinite blinding beam.[19]

Yeats's thought resembles Mallarmé's in his insistence on the sacred duty of the poet in communicating spiritual knowledge unobtainable in any other way and in his conception of how this knowledge communicates itself to the poet. The mask here is a means of hiding that impersonal face from the world for fear of its judgement. The grotesque painted face hides the poet from the world and from himself (for judgement includes the idea of self-judgement). Yeats's mask is at once a device to give him confidence (as A. Norman Jeffares suggests), a disguise to conceal the artist, and a means by which the artist can explore other natures and experiences.[20] This exploration is the core of Yeats's

[18] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Letters*, quoted in Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, p. xvi

[19] W B Yeats, 'Anima Hominis' (1917), in *Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 165-80 (p. 173).

[20] A. Norman Jeffares, *W B Yeats: A New Biography*, Arena (London: Arrow Books, 1990), p. 320.

ethical thought and something that he shares with Oscar Wilde. The impersonality that Yeats deems necessary above has the accompanying effect of making virtue a 'theatrical, consciously dramatic' process of imagination, sympathy and judgement:

> If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinguished from the acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask ...[21]

'Active virtue' requires a multiple mobile subjectivity; ethical thought and behaviour depends upon sympathy that compels action, a sympathy realised through the imaginative realisation of points-of-view other than that of the individual's self. This is in contrast to the acceptance of a fixed position or *code* of behaviour. This mobile subjectivity is that realised by artists, as Yeats's theory of impersonality asserts, and it is that which I will argue Oscar Wilde and Henry James seek to make available to everyone as an alternative to the dominant bourgeois subjectivity.

Yeats's idea of the mask is dependent on Wilde's critical essays and example, both the example of an artist bringing contraries to life, and an artist who pays the price of confronting the public. Yeats acknowledges this debt implicitly in his *Autobiographies* where he writes 'we begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy'.[22] Wilde read to Yeats from the proof copy of 'The Decay of Lying' in 1888 (313-4). In that essay Wilde performs his theory of anti-realist art as a dialogue. In one of Vivian's longer passages he says that 'Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life' (*Complete Works*, 1085). The *work* of art is to shape nature, to provide sensations that man has not yet recognised in nature: 'the infinite variety of Nature that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her' (*Complete Works*, 1071):

> Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment (*Complete Works*, 1078)

It is in this sense that 'Art is a veil, rather than a mirror' (*Complete Works*, 1082). Art creates nature: 'Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us' (*Complete Works*, 1086). Wilde's attack on mimetic Art is accompanied by a stressing of the centrality of human

[21] Yeats, 'Anima Hominis', p. 173.

[22] Yeats, *Selected Criticism and Prose*, p. 334.

agency and perception. Agency is central to both the individual's perception and to the creative artist's work. In 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' and 'The Critic as Artist' Wilde stresses the co-operative encounter between artist, audience and artwork. Shakespeare's art is dependent upon and enriched by the art of the actor 'who gave form and substance to the poet's fancy, and brought into Drama the elements of a noble realism' (*Complete Works*, 322). This use of realism is misleading. What Wilde has in mind is that 'intense realism of visible action' achieved in 'that strange mimicry of life by the living'. It is only *theatrical* art that 'uses all means at once, and, appealing to both eye and ear, has at its disposal, and in its service, form, colour, tone, look, and word, the swiftness of motion, the intense realism of visible action' (*Complete Works*, 323). In this strength there lies a weakness however; there is 'a danger in the absolute identity of medium and matter, the danger of ignoble realism and unimaginative imitation'. The power of the drama lies in its command of all the aspects of representation available, and in the social nature of the artistic encounter, and this power is not tethered to producing only imitation: representation is not necessarily mimesis. Wilde has ready a helpful Elizabethan example with resonances for his own time. A contemporary account of the last production of *Henry the Eighth* complained that the too realistic repetition on stage of the rituals of the court invited ridicule of those very rituals. Staging the rituals serves to highlight the theatrical in the real and solemn, and the revelatory power in the theatrical. This representation is more than an imitation; it alters the status of that which it represents.

It is the collaborative nature of the encounter between work and audience on which Wilde concentrates on in 'The Critic as Artist'; every encounter with an artwork becomes dramatic in the sense that artist, audience and work come together to perform the work of art. In order to illustrate the extent and consequences of this process Wilde redefines the critic's role. Gilbert identifies criticism as 'a creation within a creation' (*Complete Works*, 1125). In the encounter with the artwork the critic is not only an interpreter, at least not 'in the sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has been put to his lips to say', but as one who 'gives no less than he receives, and lends as much as he borrows' (*Complete Works*, 1131-2). The aesthetic that Wilde outlines establishes a transformative power in the experience of both artist and audience and this power is expressly identified as a power that trumps the collusion between commodity culture and contemporary aesthetics. Yeats's *codes* of behaviour are Wilde's 'ignoble realism and unimaginative imitation': ethical action depends upon active participation in the drama of everyday life, not the following of rules laid down elsewhere. The individual becomes actor-agent in this drama which stages the 'real' as a mask, a role, which is open to rewriting by the actor-agent. Such a conception allows Wilde to argue, in the opening of 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.', that 'all Art [is] to a certain degree, a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one's own personality on some imaginative plane out of

reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life' (*Complete Works*, 302). This is the crucial and complex link that Wilde makes between his notion of masks and Walter Pater's characterisation of sensations. Wilde takes Pater's conception of a contingent, shifting subjectivity or self, one open to experience and change, and links this with the idea of the multiplication of personality. In the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* (1873), Pater describes a solipsistic position with each individual isolated in their own mind: 'Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world'.[23] This solipsism is a danger in Pater's argument, but more important for Wilde was Pater's description of the shifting experience of selfhood, 'that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves' (236), what he calls soon afterwards 'a quickened multiplied consciousness' (238). Through an acute, imaginative attention to the flux of experience, an attention aided to its highest pitch by art, the individual can savour each passing moment of this flux. Of these fine moments that consciousness apprehends Pater argues that they disappear as soon as they have been apprehended. Of each moment, 'it may ever be truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is' (235). Pater's theory of self here, as in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), depends on a mobile, shifting, not fixed subjectivity.

In 'The Critic as Artist' Wilde takes this multiplied consciousness and develops the idea. Art and imagination, he argues, allow us to imaginatively experience the other: 'it is not our own life that we live, but the lives of the dead, and the soul that dwells within us is no single spiritual entity, making us personal and individual, created for our service, and entering into us for our joy' (*Complete Works*, 1138). The mobile subjectivity that Wilde identifies here is radical. This mobility contravenes one of the fundamental tenets of Victorian identity, the individuality of the Christian soul. That readers do not miss his radical contention, Wilde satirises the contradictions of bourgeois subjectivity with its conceptual roots in a Christianity that has long since ceded its own radical power (the power of Christ's example) to the secular bourgeois hegemony. Strictly speaking each soul is at once individual and non-individual, God's and ours. Wilde's target is the slippage that had occurred into a vulgarised secular notion of soul that went hand in hand with social hypocrisy that allowed the good Christian to avoid their responsibilities for their fellows. It is part of the complex of ideas that Wilde satirises in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when he has Lord Henry declaim:

> Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the intellect – simply a confession of failures. Faithfulness! I must analyse it some day. The passion for property is in it. There are many things that we

[23] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 239, 235.

> might throw away if we were not afraid that others might pick them up' (*Complete Works*, 48).

Faithfulness, consistency, sincerity were all key characteristics of the positive narrative of Victorian self-hood. These same characteristics were conspicuously missing from the scene that prompted Wilde to write 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'. Wilde makes the link between faithfulness and property, between an attribute of the self and what gives that attributes its basis: faithfulness guarantees respect for property and, in a self-confirming circle, the idea of private property demands faithfulness to its institutions (without such acceptance of the institution of private property, i.e. faithfulness to the idea of ownership, we might all turn thief). Lord Henry presents a complex figure in terms of my argument. Wilde uses him as a voice to attack Victorian hypocrisies explicitly, but his hedonistic philosophy is identified in the novel as little more than a refiguring of just those hypocrisies. Basil Hallward tells Henry 'You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose' (*Complete Works*, 20). In the novel Lord Henry and Dorian Gray dramatise the dangers of the position that Wilde outlines in his critical essays. When Lord Henry first tells Dorian that one of the great secrets of life is 'to cure the soul by the means of the senses, and the senses by the means of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know' (*Complete Works*, 30), we can hear echoes of Pater. I also think that we can catch an oblique joke on Wilde's part. Dorian Gray is his, not Henry's, creation. Wilde's struggle is always to liberate the idea of the soul from the shackles of the essentialist bourgeois subjectivity. The movement that he makes in 'The Critic as Artist' is to figure the critic as possessed of a multiple, mobile subjectivity that is an alternative to the fixed bourgeois Victorian subject. This mobile subjectivity has twin advantages: it evades the powerful determinants of identity and selfhood deployed by the hegemonic discourses; and its central characteristic is mutability, an openness to change. This mobile subjectivity is theatrical and the centre of Wilde's ethical aesthetics.

Henry James's stories of literary life offer a link with my discussion of Oscar Wilde's thought. The usual understanding of these stories is that they represent James's recoil from the difficulties and embarrassments that he felt in the modern world of publishing. However this takes too little account of the comic qualities of the stories. The comedy of the stories depends on the immersion of the authors in what they claim is an inimical world, that of capitalist production. The prefaces to the 1890s tales of literary life are concerned with how one writes, rather than for whom one writes or why one writes. The 'supersubtle fry' of the stories are literary technicians who strike the aesthete's pose in order to evade exactly those questions (whom one writes for, or why one writes). James acknowledges this pose as an avoidance of these questions in his prefaces. In the preface to 'The Lessons of the Master' he notes that whereas so many of his fictions arise

from 'some good jog of fond fancy's elbow, some pencilled note on somebody else's case' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1228), from a suggestive incident in life or an anecdote related, these tales of the literary life arose 'preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind.' This is a suggestion that what we must examine in the tales is not their *verité* quality of picturing the realities of literary life but rather their picture of an alternative ironic view of modern literary life. The suggestion is made clearer when James writes that he was able to answer critical charges of implausibility of character by the following plea: 'I was able to plead that my postulates, my animating presences, were all, to their great enrichment, their intensification of value, ironic; the strength of applied irony being surely in the sincerities, the lucidities, the utilities that stand behind it. When it's not a campaign, of a sort ... it's not worth speaking of' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1229). James's ironic presentation of the literary life is a campaign, he seems to suggest, on behalf of a better way, a 'possible other case' as distinguished from 'the actuality [which] is pretentious and vain'. James's stories create a fictional readership, a fictional public, who respond to works of fiction in the 'right' way, that is with the correct tact and decorum, yet James's irony reveals even these responses as inadequate. He writes the 'better course', which is thought to be aesthetes concerned with and responding to form and beauty, only for his irony to expose the poverty of this view. The *campaign* of the stories of literary life is to emphasise the material conditions of literary production and to reveal through 'applied irony' the complicities of contemporary representations of the artist and artistic work with those material conditions. This campaign can be contrasted with that which Strether (and James) undertakes in *The Ambassadors* (1903).

The Ambassadors realises James's most complex treatment of subjectivity. Lambert Strether's 'double consciousness' allows James to dramatise 'the precious moral of everything' which is the 'process of vision' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1305). Strether's burden is 'the oddity of [his] double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference'.[24] Sharing this consciousness, the reader joins Strether in the process of vision and witnesses his continual reassessment and reinterpretation of the situations, events and people that he witnesses.[25] His conclusions are often erroneous, and as we read we see him either dodging the obvious implications of events, or too quickly judging situations only to find that his responses, governed by his judgements, are inappropriate. This ironic process of vision culminates in the comic scenes of book eleven

[24] Henry James, *The Ambassadors* ed. by Christopher Butler, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 2

[25] A further sense of the expression 'double consciousness' is that Strether is burdened with his own and the reader's consciousness. This is the subject of James's discussion in the preface to the novel when he describes the various options for the narrative point-of-view that he recognised when writing *The Ambassadors* and makes the observation that a first-person narrator is both subject and object in a novel, both the viewer and the object viewed (*Literary Criticism II*, 1316).

where into Strether's vision of a rural idyll drift Madame de Vionnett and Chad Newsome. This final re-education is a re-vision of what Strether and the reader have known all along and is a masterpiece of comedy and staging. This is 're-vision' because it is at once seeing something new and seeing anew what has already been viewed but not recognised, understood or accepted. Strether in the train back to Paris marvels at the civilized way in which duplicity revealed need not be duplicity acknowledged, neither need it imply simply (or simple) moral failure.

In the earliest books of the novel James emphasises the complex temporality of Strether's vision. Seated in the Luxembourg Gardens Strether is conscious of his past and how it might have been different, all the possible presents that might have sprung from those pasts as well as the present he now experiences and the possible and impossible futures before him. James gives the reader Strether's own re-vision of his past:

> It was at present as if the backward picture had hung there, the long crooked course, grey in the shadow of his solitude. It had been a dreadful cheerful sociable solitude, a solitude of life or choice, of community; but though there had been people enough all round it there had been but three or four persons *in* it. Waymarsh was one of these, and the fact struck him just now as marking the record. Mrs. Newsome was another, and Miss Gostrey had of a sudden shown signs of becoming a third. Beyond, behind them was the pale figure of his real youth, which held against its breast the two presences paler than itself - the young wife he had early lost and the young son he had stupidly sacrificed. He had again and again made out for himself that he might have kept his little boy, his little dull boy who had died at school of rapid diphtheria, if he had not in those years so insanely given himself to merely missing the mother. It was the soreness of his remorse that the child had in all likelihood not really been dull - had been dull, as he had been banished and neglected, mainly because the father had been unwittingly selfish. This was doubtless but the secret habit of sorrow, which had slowly given way to time; yet there remained an ache sharp enough to make the spirit, at the sight now and again of some fair young man just growing up, wince with the thought of an opportunity lost. (58-9)

Strether composes for himself a tableau, as James does for us (the trope of painting is important and exploited by James throughout the novel). In reviewing the events of his past Strether constructs a narrative, a story that he can only see in retrospect; 'the soreness of his remorse' tells us that this narrative includes judgement, judgement that was missing in the young bereaved Strether; it is a revision of Strether's past and something more than hindsight. Here the double consciousness means seeing and judging, learning to compose narratives as we live and review them, seeking alternatives. The passage serves the important purpose early in the novel of providing a powerful human motivation for Strether's interest in Chad: the lost opportunities of Strether as a young man and as a father are to be played out in his relationship to Chad.

Strether recognises that here in the gardens it is his present situation which allows him to review his life and prospects. Reading Mrs Newsome's letter he thinks that he has had to cross the Atlantic to be able to appreciate her style:

> His friend wrote admirably, and her tone was even more in her style than in her voice - he might almost, for the hour, have had to come this distance to get its full carrying quality; yet the plenitude of his consciousness of difference consorted perfectly with the deepened intensity of the connexion. It was the difference, the difference of being just where he was and *as* he was, that formed the escape - this difference was so much greater than he had dreamed it would be (56-7).

Strether is pulled both ways at once, he has an almost overwhelming consciousness of how different Paris is to Woollett and how different he feels about the two, and this consciousness of difference serves to highlight his connection with Woollett and Mrs Newsome. His understanding of others (in this case Mrs Newsome) depends upon 'being just where he was and *as* he was'. This is part of the process of vision by which James shows Strether trying to understand himself in relation to others, and himself as an other. Showing this process of vision to the reader is James's campaign in the novel.

Strether's overt campaign is the repatriation of Chad. Arriving in Paris, Strether knows that he is not there directly for his own benefit but as the eponymous functionary of the novel's title: 'He wasn't there to dip, to consume - he was there to reconstruct. He wasn't there for his own profit - not, that is, the direct; he was there on some chance of feeling the brush of the wing of the stray spirit of youth' (66). Strether's task is Chad's repatriation, but James aims to show how Strether reconstructs Chad's experience of Paris and his own self in the theatre of sensations provided by the metropolis. Strether feels that his campaign has started on the morning he immerses himself in the bohemian *quartier* of Paris the better to understand the changes that he anticipates Paris has wrought on Chad. His morning walk is to help him catch 'the brush of the wing of the stray spirit of youth', which is his guess at Chad's response to the experiences the city promises, but he also senses the 'stray spirit' of his own youth as he browses the bookstalls under the old arches of the Odéon. Strether's hope that his surrender to the sensations of the city will 'put himself in relation' with Chad meets with only a qualified success; he imagines he now knows who Chad may have become, but he is also confronted with his younger self as a figure quite other to his present self, and paradoxically, with a vision of himself now as someone different than he expects. James registers Strether's confused sense of himself in Strether's surprise at seeing himself grow young again: 'He had never expected - that was the truth of it - again to find himself young, and all the years and other things it had taken to make him so were exactly his present arithmetic' (57). In the potentially comic figure of the older man grown young

again, James identifies Strether as the hero of a peculiar *Bildungsroman*, one which foregrounds its narrative of *bildung* as a process of revision.

Strether's confusion is also realised in his sense of what it is that happens to young men in Paris. His terms of references descend from earlier examples: 'Old imaginations of the Latin Quarter had played their part for him, and he had duly recalled its having been with this scene of rather ominous legend that, like so many young men in fiction as well as in fact, Chad had begun' (64). The Paris that Strether imagines for Chad is that of previous literary representations where Paris represents initiation and adventure. In particular, it is the initiation of the young male artist into the mysteries of the city and of representation. Chad's letters home seem to confirm this picture; amongst the 'clever fellows, the friendly countrymen ... mainly young painters, sculptors, architects, medical student', Chad is to discover whether he too could be an artist: 'There had been literally a moment at which it appeared there might be something in him; there had been at any rate a moment at which he had written that he didn't know but what a month or two more might see him enrolled in some atelier' (65). Strether's reconstruction of Chad's experience of Paris depends upon earlier literary precedents which makes of Chad a 'type'. He becomes the young provincial travelling to the city, like Balzac's Lucien de Rubempré and Eugène de Rastignac, to make his fortune and perhaps to become an artist. What these young men receive is an education - literary, social, political and sensual. This sentimental education is what Strether imagines for Chad, but James's novel involves its reader in Strether's sentimental re-education. Strether's reconstructions of himself as an other, achieved as he peoples his interior stage with figures whose motivations and desires he attempts to fathom, depend upon his thinking himself into the positions of the other, and this complex interior consciousness (or 'double consciousness') is James's figuring of a theatrically multiple subjectivity. This subjectivity is characterised not by its being fractured and less than complete, but by its being decentred. We could say that in *The Ambassadors* James dramatises the consciousness of the modern subject as the experience of doing battle with formations and forces over which the individual has no control.

Subjectivity, Art and Culture

I will argue that Henry James and Oscar Wilde identify a mobile multiple subjectivity which is a complex subject position available to the artist within the dominant social formations of the *fin-de-siècle*. In each of my chapters I identify a subject position characterized by marginality, vulnerability and mutability that provide a means of analysing the complex relations between subjectivity, art and culture. These intermediate subject positions can be understood as negotiating between dominant, residual and emergent social formations. Raymond Williams, following Gramsci, emphasises that

hegemony 'is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated, and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified'.[26] He goes on to discuss the 'central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective ... which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived' (38). These dominant 'practices, meanings and values' are not static, but constitute the processes by which individuals are incorporated into a sense of reality into 'a sense of [the] absolute ... beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives'. The dynamic process of incorporation secures the stability of the social formations by a constant generation and incorporation of discursive forms that are at variance with the central dominant definitions. In a consumer society these processes can be likened to the endless generation of commodities whose exchange value depends on their variance from one another without this variance making them different from the other products on the shelf. Williams identifies the possibility of forms that are outside these processes of incorporation, forms which he calls *alternative* and *oppositional* (40). These forms are subject to historical variation and are related to the movements between dominant, residual and emergent formations. The dominant social formation of the late nineteenth century was that of a commodity culture where relations between producer and consumer, individual and market, were at a point of high stress. The intermediate subject positions that I will be outlining are oppositional in the sense that they represent positions that frustrate and evade the forceful processes that seek to incorporate individuals. These positions are oppositional also in the sense that they offer a glimpse of 'emergent not incorporated' formations (the phrase is Williams': 41) that contest the emergent incorporated forms. The theatrically mobile subjectivity that I identify in the writings of Wilde and James is at once a refuge for the artist from the processes of incorporation and a subject position, I argue, that they each try to make available to others.

Throughout his written work Raymond Williams argued for a reformulation of the idea of 'culture'. In *Culture and Society* (1958) his inquiry took the form of establishing a genealogy of 'culture' and an examination of the uses to which the term was put in the period 1780-1950.[27] The emergence of the idea of culture as a realm separate from that of production is one which he continued to investigate and against which he argues in the opening pages of *Marxism and Literature* (1977). There he argues that the problem of criticism is the problem of 'culture'. The complexity of the term is key: 'it became a noun

[26] Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture Selected Essays*, ed. by Raymond Williams (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 31-47 (p. 38).

[27] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, Pelican (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 348, 17.

of 'inner' process, specialized to its presumed agencies in "intellectual life" and "the arts". It became also a noun of general process, specialized to its presumed configurations in "whole ways of life". It played an equally crucial role in definitions of the "human sciences" and the "social sciences"'.[28] The role of culture in the formulation of these sciences, which each sought a field separated and inimical to the other, led to a conceptualisation of cultural history as 'secondary' or 'superstructural': 'a realm of "mere" ideas, beliefs art, customs, determined by the basic material history ... [this reproduces] the separation of 'culture' from material social life ... the dominant tendency in idealist cultural thought' (19). Instead of this repetition of the dominant form of idealist thought, Williams argues that cultural history ought to be made material, that literary production should be examined and understood within the material conditions of its production and that these conditions should not exclude the complex formations that determine the roles available to readers and writers in the effective dominant formations (19, 5, 126). The argument of this thesis attempts to fulfil Williams' injunction to make cultural history material.

My examination of the writings, lives and world of James and Wilde focuses on their investigation of the positions available to individuals within the dominant discursive formations. Their investigation is materialist, not metaphysical, since it deals with the categories, forms and representations that govern everyday life. My argument is structured around two senses of the term *figure*. The first is that of the image of specific characters, specific roles or subject positions scripted by the dominant social formations. These positions share with one another certain characteristics. Each is vulnerable and marginal, and characterised by mutability; the actress is unknowable, the critic alien, the revolutionary hidden, and the child latent. Within contemporary formations these figures are available to artists as oppositional positions which evade the interpellations of the dominant discourses. These figures, identifiable as images, are also figurative. This second sense of *figure*, the rhetorical sense, establishes the movement by which, I argue, James and Wilde see the characteristics of these other subject positions available to the creative artist. The individual artist is successively or perhaps even simultaneously, an actress, a critic, a revolutionary, and a child in their bid to evade the roles they are offered upon the stage of modern capitalist society. The movement between these roles mimics the movement of metonymy or metaphor and suggests the sense in which each figure for the artist represents at once a mask that shields the artist and also the sense in which the subjectivity that I argue James and Wilde identify is mobile and theatrical.

[28] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 17.

In chapter one I examine the ways in which the figure of the actress suggests to James and Wilde a theatrically mobile subjectivity. The consuming masculine gaze on women represented a key means by which women were incorporated into the dominant social formations. This gaze is also the basis of the work that the artist does. The actress, like the artist, watches and is watched by her audience (with the key difference that she remains on show of course). The anxious problem that presents itself to the late nineteenth century artist is how to negotiate the position of the artwork and the artist in the marketplace. The figure of the actress represents in condensed form this complex of problems and suggests a solution. Both men show how the figure of the actress highlights the theatricality of the everyday; leaving the stage the actress does not necessarily swap her scripted role for her true self, an identity that is hers alone, but rather swaps one script for another. The radical oppositional potential lies in the ambiguity of the actress's performance: when does she stop acting? James and Wilde suggest that there is no definite answer to this question, and that the example of the actress suggests a theatrical subjectivity at odds with the dominant social forms. A figure that is often associated with the *fin-de-siècle* artist is the dandy and previous discussions of Wilde's dandies have argued that their theatricality is the vehicle for Wilde's critique of late nineteenth century culture. I argue that the dandy's performance of self is insufficient for the purposes of Wilde's critique; the dandy stands as the negative image of the artist to which the positive quantity is the actress. Henry James indicates the inadequacy of the dandy figure in his comic ironic stories of literary life, particularly 'The Private Life' (1891). The figure of the actress stands as the first example of both men's examination of an oppositional subject position.

The argument of my second chapter depends upon the recognition of specific aspects of the late nineteenth century idea of 'culture'. Both Wilde and James develop the suggestions made by Matthew Arnold in his discussions of the powerful transformative force of culture and the role of the critic. The critic stands as an intermediary between artwork, artist and audience, producer, commodity and consumer. This intermediate position resembles that of the actress and suffers from the same vulnerability, but I argue that James and Wilde both make the critic the conduit for the transformative power of culture when they emphasise that the role of the critic is to perform a radical theatrically multiple subjectivity. This recasting of the role of the critic and of aesthetic experience it implies rescripts the parts played by the participants in an aesthetic encounter. This represents a radical reformulation of Matthew Arnold's idea of culture. James's response to Arnold identifies his failure to extricate critic, artist and audience from the logic of the marketplace. James registers this failure in his recognition that Arnold avoids the implications of his own reasoning when he places the transformative power of culture at the behest of the state. What had promised to be a trans-national force that dissolved the

boundaries between peoples becomes a significant force in the creation and maintenance of the dominant social formations. James rewrites Arnold, emphasising the critic as alien, someone at once inside and outside, an intermediary. This critic performs a radically mobile subjectivity in their encounter with the artwork. James's critic is the ideal reader of an other's text, able to take on roles in a drama scripted by an other. In this James's critic resembles Arnold's disinterested critic, possessed of 'infinite curiosity and incorrigible patience'. However, James's critic becomes a touchstone where for Arnold the touchstone is the work: the object becomes the subject. The experience that James's critic performs for the benefit of his audience is the spectacle of agency, an agency quite distinct from the illusionary agency of the consumer. James's reformulation of the figure of the critic is only a part of his assertion of the radical power of aesthetic experience. Both James and Wilde reject the primacy of the 'original' artist over the critic as a significant part of the process by which the conditions of aesthetic production are mystified. Instead they emphasise the intermediary position of the critic as one that fuses the roles of producer and consumer.

I argue that Oscar Wilde reformulates Matthew Arnold's cultural criticism through an extended impersonation of the critical 'type' that Arnold identified. Wilde's impersonation reveals the disingenuity of Arnold's 'disinterested critic' and the complicities of Arnold's critical discourse with colonialist and imperialist projects. Wilde's critic is an intermediary between the past, present and future. S/he becomes a site for the interrogation of competing narratives of self, narratives of incorporation or interpellation that position subjects. The theatrically mobile subjectivity of Wilde's critic matches that of James's critic and Wilde, like James, retains key terms and concepts from Matthew Arnold: the intermediate position of the critic; the curiosity that impels discovery; and the openness of the critical spirit which transforms a singular, monological identity into dialogical, dialectical self, being as a process of becoming. The multiplication of personality that Wilde argues for as the action of the critical spirit transforms relations between readers, writers and works in ways that mirror the shifts I argue Henry James achieved in his rescripting of the parts played by the participants in the aesthetic encounter. Finally, Wilde, like James, is concerned with the ethical education and experience of the individual. The dialogical basis of identity for which he argues implies an ethics that does not depend upon an external authority but upon the self-conscious analytical powers and judgements of the individual who recognises themselves as other.

My third chapter develops the implications of my second: the disruptive, transformative power of culture, theorised in relation to art and criticism takes on a further, necessary guise, that of the revolutionary. This development is necessary because to assert the disruptive energy of culture without addressing the urgent socio-political

questions this raises is to avoid the implications of the disruptive power identified. The figure of the revolutionary provides a guise for the artist which allows James and Wilde to examine the relationship of the artist to modern mass society. I provide a genealogy of consciousness that details the development of Oscar Wilde's thinking as he adapts the Hegelian account of the dialectical development of consciousness. Hegelian dialectic requires a movement from stage to stage that explicitly depends upon intermediate subject positions. Wilde's essays of the 1880s on artworks and on the work that art does deliberately marry the material with the metaphysical in order to demonstrate the mutability of human nature and thus the opportunities for wide ranging practical political change. In 'The English Renaissance in Art' (1882) Wilde begins by demonstrating that art, far from being independent of material conditions, depends upon material conditions and advances in technology for its existence. This dependence emphasises that art cannot be separated from the society in which it is created without robbing it of 'its one true vitality'. He proposes the drama as the example of art that is entwined with the everyday and as a metaphor for the complex role that the modern subject must adopt in the face of competing interpellations. The theatrically multiple subjectivity that Wilde argues for is open and responsive to experience and change. This idea of the subject avoids the fixed, essentialist subjectivity of the bourgeois social formations that characterise identity as an individual possession, fixed and unchanging. This mutability registers the vulnerability of the individual subject before the over-determining force of the effective dominant discursive formations as a paradoxical source of power: the vulnerability, or what I later call scriptibility of the subject, the quality which makes interpellation possible, is also the quality which holds out the promise of an oppositional subjectivity. The role of the artist in this movement is that of the scapegoat, troped as a vulnerable revolutionary rather than a bomb-throwing anarchist. Wilde and his trials of the 1890s are already recognised as a dense conflagration of competing cultural questions. I offer a novel genealogy for Wilde's sense of himself during these years, a genealogy which emphasises the complex intellectual roots of his public performance, and a genealogy that makes cultural history material.

Henry James figures the artist as a revolutionary in order to investigate the place of artists within modern representations of urban networks of power. Comparing James's responses to Flaubert and his representations of cities to those of Flaubert, I argue that Flaubert's work provided James with a complex challenge. *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) represents the artist in the city as a failure; confronted by radically new urban networks of power Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau can only stand helplessly by, an onlooker incapable of representing the spectacle of the city and of culture that he witnesses. Flaubert wrote the novel of course to make just this charge against the intellectuals of his generation. James registers the theatricality of city life, I argue, in his representation of Hyacinth

Robinson in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) as an artist-flâneur-revolutionary. This figure, characterised by inanition, dramatises the discourses that compete to incorporate the artist and citizen in the dominant urban social formations. The glamour that characterises representations of modern urban wealth and privilege is registered by James's dense figuration of the relationship between social space and modern urban subjectivity. This complex representation of the city with its dependence on a theatrically mobile subjectivity requires that we review certain existing critical versions of James's narrative methods and its implications. Principally, I suggest that Fredric Jameson's characterisation of Jamesian narrative in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) requires considerable revision. Jameson's critique of the 'Jamesian point-of-view' fails to account for the complexity of Henry James's treatment of subjectivity and for the complexities of his developing scenic narrative form. The vulnerable, multiple subject position that I argue James identifies is not a privileged subject position but a decentred one, a position vulnerable to the modern urban circuits of exchange and circulation. The oppositional subject position that James represents in *The Princess Casamassima* works to bring into the light the networks of representations of the urban that sustain hegemony.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the figure of the child as an intermediary figure for the artist. Late nineteenth century culture made the figure of the child and the idea of childhood carry an extraordinary burden (a burden that in important senses the idea of children carries still). The child was figured by both the physical and human sciences as possessed of a secret and standing as a middle term between the past and the future. In biology the concepts of ontogeny and phylogeny identify the ways in which the individual child recapitulates the development of the species. Anthropologists and ethnologists adopted the concept of recapitulation in their theorising of the development of civilizations. Each of these ideas depends upon a movement from the simple to the complex. Scientists during the second half of the nineteenth century took the child as their object of study and sought to locate the complex in the apparently simple. The study of children and childhood refracts *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about race, gender and class, focussing on the period of latency a gaze which sought at once to discover the secrets of children and to deny that children had any secrets at all. Jacques Lacan argues that the secret of the latent child is not, as Freud had it, the secret of sexuality, but a combination of sexuality and language as the initiators of subjectivity. Lacan's recasting of Freud's work provides a means of linking the obsessive late nineteenth century gaze on children with the processes of incorporation into dominant discursive formations: the narratives of childhood and children that science and culture provide locate children within these formations at the same time as those narratives stumble on the enigma of the latency period.

Folk-lore research provides a specific example of the complex ways in which writings about and for children were implicated in these discursive processes. Folk-lore research argued that folk-tales represented survivals of vanished cultures. Andrew Lang goes so far as to claim a primacy for folk-tales over established myths and pantheons. Lang claims that the *märchen* of the Brothers Grimm are probably older than cultivated epics. This ethnological interest in folk-tales attempts to make them bear a burden of proof for the narrative of development of civilizations which ethnologists were developing; as survivals from an earlier period the tales provided evidence of the development in discrete stages of civilization. This evidence was needed to confirm the ethnological analogy of the progress from primitive to civilized, analogous to the development from childhood to maturity that the physical sciences had developed as the governing metaphor for the development of the species. Andrew Lang represents an important figure in these debates because he connects writings on folk-lore with fairy tales, and he employs the same problematic concepts in each of these related fields. The popular fairytales of Lang's Fairy Book series emphasise narratives of growth which chart the child's path to adulthood. The result of these narratives is the end of childhood and the putting aside of childish things, such as the narratives of self-making and transformation that fairytales provide alongside the linear development of maturation. Lang's fairy stories work to educate children into the normative social expectations of late Victorian society, expectations regarding gender and class. I argue that Oscar Wilde's tales trump the generic conventions of the fairytale form and reveal the ideological work that the traditional form accomplishes. Wilde emphasises that fairytales depend upon and thematise transformations and that as narratives of the self they resemble the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and how we came to be who we are. The acknowledgment of fairytales as dynamic, ambivalent narratives of the self, powerful narratives of self-creation, is one Wilde shares with Lang and the folklorists. Where he differs from them is in the political implications and possibilities that he recognises in their meta-narrative and its alternatives. These alternatives emphasise Romantic aspects of the idea of the child in order to register the power of narratives to shape identity. Against the background of intense scientific and cultural interest in children as intermediaries between the past, present, and future, Wilde draws attention to the ways in which narratives create identities, and the ways in which the particular cultural narratives that employ children as intermediaries secure the position of the hegemonic forces. Wilde's fairytales tell us that narratives are not innocent and that to assert that they are, or that children are, is to tell guilty stories that try to disguise their own corrupted nature. The secret of the latent child is the secret of the artist, the negotiation of narratives to balance and evade the powerful competing narratives of identity, or subject positions, forced on the individual by the dominant cultural forms.

Where Oscar Wilde is concerned to identify the political implications and possibilities in the figure of the latent child, and in that of the artist as child, Henry James explores the socio-sexual implications of the gaze upon the child registered in scientific, moral, and pedagogic discourses. James registers the idea of recapitulation as a sense in which the adult world attempts to fill the empty vessel of the latent child with a meaning that it assigns. 'The Turn of the Screw' replays the destructive adult gaze on children as a process that destroys children in the attempt to discover their secret. The form of the story is crucial. The narrative ambiguity that James achieves makes the reader complicit in the governess's quest. In this story our complicity can be avoided, but in *What Maisie Knew* (1899) the uncomfortable complicity of the reader with the adults of the novel is inescapable. James enlists his reader very directly in the obsessive gaze on a child and this exceptional narrative form develops some of the ideas raised in the preceding chapter concerning James's search for a form that demands the reader develop a theatrically multiple subjectivity. Maisie as intermediary between the fictive adults and the adult readers transforms both, lending them, as James says in his preface to the novel, a dignity that they otherwise lack. Maisie's subjectivity depends upon her learning to pose as having a secret. The remedy for her difficulties that she arrives at early in the novel is 'the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment'. This process mirrors exactly the process by which interiority arises out of the interpellations of individuals by discursive formations, and suggests at the same time a sense in which subjectivity is not entirely or simply created by these formations. Maisie's inner self is defensive and is a strategic process by which she seeks to evade interpellation by the adults. For James, the latency period provides the moment of greatest tension, the point of most intense scrutiny of the child. The narrative form that James constructs for his novel foregrounds the position of readers and author in this economy of signification in specific, precise and often uncomfortable ways. The sense in which Maisie's example transforms the fictive adults, readers and author is, once again as in the example of the critic, that the spectacle of agency she offers represents an oppositional subject position.

Choosing the figure of the child as the final example of the explorations of *fin-de-siècle* subjectivity allows me to emphasise my opening questions and to suggest the ways in which both men looked to the future. The figure of the artist is cast by James and Wilde as an intermediary between past, present and future. Understanding the immanent critique they perform depends on our accepting that they share Walter Benjamin's understanding that dominant social formations carry within themselves the means of their own transformation: 'Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it - as Hegel already noticed - by cunning. With the destabilizing of the market economy, we

begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled'.[29]

[29] Walter Benjamin, 'Exposé of 1935', in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 3-13 (p. 13).

Chapter one: Artists and Actresses

The motif of vision - the gaze of the artist and that of the consumer - is the thread which links together and structures my analysis. Art in modern spectacular society is always already doubly compromised. Firstly, its method mirrors that employed by spectacular society to commodify being. The gaze which allows the creation of the artwork, that of the observer of the human spectacle who attempts to imbue their work with human value, is precisely the same gaze which consumes the artwork, reifying it and placing human beings within systems of economic and cultural circulation. Secondly, the artwork cannot escape its place in these systems of circulation since it cannot exist without this privileging of vision. The watcher is always watched. This is the dialectical relationship between the artist and the society of the spectacle. The figure of the modern artist, decisively shaped in the *fin-de-siècle*, is janus faced - one face gazing anxiously towards the literary marketplace (a marketplace representative of wider capitalist markets), where their works, and they themselves, must sell successfully in an arena considered inimical to Art - the other face turned towards the problems of art, those of representation in an age that simultaneously demanded and denied essential being, denigrated and glamourised exteriority. The first figure that I argue both Wilde and James trope as a model for the modern artist is that of the actress. Similar to the artist, the actress watches and is watched by her audience. The audience, the human spectacle, provides her with her models, the raw materials of movement, mannerism and voice that she transforms into a role, while at the same time she remains at the mercy of this same audience of men and women whose means of consumption is looking, a looking that is gendered male, a gaze which reifies her body and being. I argue that both Henry James and Oscar Wilde recognised the part that the consuming masculine gaze played in the operation and maintenance of the hegemonic social relations, and that the characteristic both Wilde and James recognised in the figure of the actress is the potentially radical subject position she offers in the corruptly theatrical modern world, a subject position which holds out the possibility of resisting the commodifying gaze.

In *Man And Woman* (1894), Havelock Ellis described women as ideally suited to 'the art of acting' since:

> In women mental processes are usually more rapid than in men; they have also an emotional explosiveness much more marked than men possess, and more easily within call. At the same time the circumstances of women's social life have usually favoured a high degree of flexibility and adaptability as regards behaviour; they are, again, more trained in the vocal expression both of those emotions

> which they feel and those emotions which it is considered their duty to feel. Women are, therefore, more often in the position of actors.[1]

This suggestion of mutability on the part of all women rests uneasily with the dominant nineteenth century bourgeois ideology. This ideology, based on the separation of public and private spheres of experience, assigned women to the private sphere - that of the home and children, while the public sphere was that of institutions, run by men for men (owners, industrialists, managers and financiers), and dominated by men in their operation and hierarchical structure. At the same time as these institutions transformed the economic fabric of life, a spatial displacement occurred which contributed to and helped constitute the new social formation. The public sphere was that of the bourgeois man who leaves his family, possibly in the suburbs, to work in the city, while his wife remains behind to maintain the household. Men were, therefore, mobile and visible, women immobile and invisible. The separation of these areas in everyday life had then two components, the visual and spatial. There was, however, a disjunct between this ideology and the economic necessities of life. The separation of spheres demanded that women remain at home, invisible to any but their husbands, tending to the property that their husband was accumulating, while the massive growth in industrialisation, bureaucracy, and retail demanded workers to produce their goods, and staff to service their customers. Women provided this labour. Thus women were figured as invisible in public, while being all too visible on the streets. Janet Wolff, in her essay 'The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life' (1990), provides a useful condensed account of investigations into the part culture played in establishing and governing the maintenance of these spheres. [2] In *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (1985), Rachel Bowlby traces those anxieties and contradictions of modernity which arose because those processes which assigned women to the private sphere were also those that forced women to be highly visible in the public sphere.[3]

The actress transgresses the bourgeois separation of public and private spheres in a particularly visible and charged fashion. This public woman contrasts sharply with the

[1] Ellis seems almost aware of the contradiction that he inscribes. His 'at the same time' refers to his just prior statements which ascribe to women an overpowering spontaneity and incapacity for reflection in art which sits awkwardly with his suggestion that women in everyday life express emotions that they do not actually feel but which 'it is considered their duty to feel'. If women must assume roles, do they then not need to have the ability to check their spontaneity and reflect upon how best to appear to fulfil their duty? Ellis grants the need for agency while simultaneously attempting to deny it; Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (London: Walter Scott, 1904), p. 373-4.

[2] Janet Wolff, 'The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life', in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, ed. by Janet Wolff (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 12-33.

[3] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), Introduction and Chapter one.

private woman - the angel in the house - who did not dissemble or display herself and who was characterised by modesty, fidelity and sincerity. The actress as a public woman was encoded as both erotically desirable and available. Tracy C Davis has analysed how, 'female performers (regarded as a single class by the dominant culture) received the stigma (attached to displaying themselves in public) uniformly in spite of their professional specialities and socio-economic diversity.'[4] This is an area that Davis has further investigated in her *Actresses as Working Women* (1991) which analyses the socioeconomic organisation of the theatre as well as the representations of actresses in advertising and Victorian pornography.[5] As vaudeville performer, chorus girl or leading actress, no woman escaped this positioning. At the same time however, these women functioned as potent cultural symbols. Christopher Kent provides a succinct statement of this potency:

> To Victorians the profession of actress, like that of governess, had a symbolic importance as an occupation for women that transcended mere numbers. It offered striking opportunities for independence, fame and fortune, and even for those outside it the stage incarnated fantasies providing vicarious release in the notion that there was an area of special dispensation from the normal categories, moral and social, that defined a woman's place.[6]

I argue that James and Wilde suggest that the attributes of the actress in performance are available to women as a way of being: and that such attributes might also offer the anxious artist a hint of how to elude the commodifying forces of the dominant culture.

In playing a part, a role, an actress foregrounds her performance as performance, she belies her own personality, and seems to deny her very identity and essence. The process of changing one's appearance and of adopting the feelings of some imaginary other threatens both the exterior signs by which we imagine we can know someone else's essential interior life, and that very interior life itself. An actress's performance potentially jeopardises the very processes by which culture regulates subject positions. Oscar Wilde exploits this analogy between the actress and women at large in his society comedies when he uses the theatre to stage men and women's uneven social relations, and, in so doing, represent the positions in which these relations subsisted. The actor on stage looks with the same powerful male gaze that the men in the audience turn upon both the actresses on stage and the women in the audience. Concomitantly, if the actor on stage shares his masculine gaze with the men in the audience, can the actress share her

[4] Tracy C. Davis, 'Actresses and Prostitutes in Victorian London', *Theatre Research International*, 13 (1988), pp. 221-234 (p. 232).

[5] Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*, series ed. Susan Bassnett, Gender and Performance (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 200.

[6] Christopher Kent, 'Image and Reality: The Actress and Society', in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 94-116 (p. 94).

way of being with the women in the audience? What Wilde and James investigate is whether the attributes of the actress are available to women in culture as a way of being and whether these attributes allow a measure of self-fashioning in the face of a restrictive patriarchal gaze which seeks to maintain and promote its hegemony.

In his earliest society comedy, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), Oscar Wilde insists that the basis of a private woman's identity, which almost certainly means a married woman's identity, is theatrical, and that her existence necessitates the adoption of roles and masks. All women, Wilde insists, are subject to the erotic male gaze which remains with them even when they seem to be alone, or with one another. While public women circulate as commodities in the capitalist market of male desire, so do 'private' women in the marriage market. Wilde's play is a careful exposé, disguised as a comedy, of the endemic commodification of women's being.

Telling tales: speculation and gossip

On the stage Wilde emphasises the behavioural double standard which allows men a private and a public life, while requiring that a woman's public life be the guarantor of the morality of her husband's double life. It is not simply that morality is based upon women's virtue and that men 'don't matter' (*Complete Works*, 425) as the Duchess of Berwick asserts, but that a woman guarantees her husband's behaviour. She becomes the 'mask to hide his real life' (*Complete Works*, 438). These are the words of Lord Darlington to Lady Windermere, describing the relation that she bears to her husband. The exchanges between Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington early in the first act set out the premises of the play. She declares her belief in a simple puritan view of life. Her ideal, the correct moral ideal, is sacramental while, she says, the modern world seems to view life as a speculation (*Complete Works*, 422). Lord Darlington on the other hand is happy to accept that nowadays everybody pretends to be either good or bad (*Complete Works*, 422-3). Wilde puns on two meanings of *speculation*; the first is that of questioning, the questioning of appearances, not taking anything at face value, the condition of social interaction in a world where 'nothing looks so innocent as an indiscretion' (*Complete Works*, 441), a world where everyone is self-conscious, watching themselves and everyone else too. This meaning is immediately employed when Darlington follows Lady Windermere's statement by inviting her to speculate: 'Do you think then - of course I am only putting an imaginary instance - do you think ...' (*Complete Works*, 423). He invites her to guess at someone's guilty secret, to gossip. Ironically of course, the imaginary situation is one that he believes to be real, to be her own, and one that she is sure to discover very soon.

The second meaning of *speculation* is financial speculation, buying and selling goods with a view to their market value.[7] The object whose market value is in question in *Lady Windermere's Fan* is 'woman'; the characters act as speculators in the marriage market. At this late ball of the Season (the husband-hunting season) the Duchess of Berwick is intent upon ensnaring the rich Australian Mr. Hopper (*Complete Works*, 428) for her daughter, Lady Agatha. The Duchess wants 'not love at first sight but love at the end of the season, which is much more satisfactory' (*Complete Works*, 441); and feels 'that a mother who doesn't part with a daughter every season has no real affection' (*Complete Works*, 428). Wilde's satire emphasises the contiguity of a mother's affection with her avarice, but her calculations are not condemned, for they simply follow the logic of this world dominated by speculation. Edward Hopper enters the play with a second, complementary economic pun 'Capital place, London' (*Complete Works*, 433) - the capital which is driven by the exchange of capital. These puns manage, by their very nature, to simultaneously reveal and disguise the driving force of society - their double meanings mimic the action by which the phantasmagoria of the commodity endeavours to hide its true nature.

Other critics have touched upon the importance of gossip and speculation to the society comedies. Theatre audiences expected to recognise scenes and situations in the plays that corresponded to fashionable topics of conversation. Ian Small emphasizes the topicality of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and its position within the tradition of Society plays. He notes that Society plays of the early 1890s responded to contemporary events such as the establishment of the Married Women's Property Law of 1892 and the Mackenzie divorce case of 1891.[8] Kerry Powell has explored Wilde's indebtedness to the plays which were his precursors, and upon which he drew when writing his Society comedies. Powell notes the generic concern with contemporary gossip and the ways in which Wilde's plays both form the apex of the genre and exhaust it.[9]

The link established between marriage and money, women and acting is embodied in the eponymous fan. The fan performs several important functions: as a symbol of femininity it emphasises the centrality of theatrical presentation to women's identity; as a gift from husband to wife, it emphasises the marriage bond; and as it shifts from hand to hand, it becomes in quick succession, a weapon, a symbol of the marriage bond

[7] A further meaning, noted in OED, is that of a 'round game of cards, the chief feature of which is the buying and selling of trump cards': Cecil Graham teases Lord Augustus asking 'Hear you're going to be married again; thought you were tired of that game' (*Complete Works*, 435), and Lord Darlington says 'a curious thing ... about the game of marriage - a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion - the wives hold all the honours, and invariably, lose the odd trick' (*Complete Works*, 425).

[8] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, ed. by Ian Small, New Mermaids (London: Ernest Benn, 1980), p. XXI.

[9] Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Chapter one.

transgressed by the husband, then of that bond apparently torn also by the wife, then physical evidence of a woman's deceit, finally ending the play with a different meaning for each of the central characters as well as the audience. Each of these successive significations is important. As a symbol of femininity a fan is inescapably theatrical. Allowing a woman to mask herself, a fan also displaces the identity of a real woman in favour of an erotic ideal, an ideal that includes the promise of revelation, of unmasking. Twinned with this theatricality is the very materiality of a fan. It is an object which can move from hand to hand, which can be bought and sold. As a birthday gift to Lady Windermere marking her entry into her majority, the fan further symbolises her economic value as a woman. By a swift metonymy the commodification of women is established. The erotic ideal of woman is located in a system of exchange. This metonymy is part of the process of reification which forces women's acquiescence in unequal social relations by the very process that makes them inequitable: The erotic ideal circulates in a complementary and interconnecting market to that in which women, as possessions, circulate.

Lord Darlington continues to highlight pretence as the central mechanism by which the world of the play operates. It provides his rationale and the method for his attempted seduction of Lady Windermere. Darlington questions Lord Windermere's fidelity and lingers on his deception, emphasising the theatricality Lord Windermere needs must have employed to keep his secret from his wife and must continue to employ: 'the look in his eyes was false, his voice false, his touch false, his passion false' (*Complete Works*, 438). Darlington doesn't stop there, he demands that Lady Windermere recognise that to remain with her husband she would need to 'be to him the mask of his real life, the cloak to hide his secret' (*Complete Works*, 438): she would be living a lie that the world in its hypocrisy demands (*Complete Works*, 439). This hypocrisy is the behavioural double standard which governs relations between men and women. Lady Windermere must learn to pretend, whether she likes it or not says Darlington, just like everyone else in this corrupt society.

There seem to be only two choices open to women in the world of the play. Either they can openly accept the double standard, as Lady Plymdale and the Duchess of Berwick do, or they can deny that it affects them as Lady Windermere does. At the ball in act II, Lady Plymdale's pronouncements show her acceptance of the cynical nature of modern marriage. She says she does not trust appearances: 'It's most dangerous for a husband to pay any attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they are alone. The world has grown suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life' (*Complete Works*, 435). Wilde also has her suggest ironically that 'women of [Mrs. Erlynne's] kind are most useful. They form the basis of other people's marriages' (*Complete Works*, 438); the fallen woman is at the heart of modern marriage as

a necessary condition. The Duchess of Berwick's mercenary pursuit of Edward Hopper as a husband for Lady Agatha makes clear that the 'monstrous suspicion' that women are bought and sold which begins to stir in Lady Windermere (*Complete Works*, 447) is considered an accepted fact by the Duchess. The Duchess provides a direct contrast to Lady Windermere. She tells Lady Windermere, 'I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties - the men get furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, some one should make a stand against it' (*Complete Works*, 424): someone, but not her. Lady Windermere responds that she will make a stand, believing that her house is different from all others, uncorrupted, and of course this is ironically undercut by several subsequent revelations; Lord Windermere's relationship with Mrs. Erlynne and his invitation for her to attend the ball, the behaviour of the men and women at the ball, and last, though not least, the discovery that Lady Windermere's whole life rests upon a very private deception, that of her abandonment by her mother and the lies of her father. Lady Windermere's view that the bad inhabit a different world from the good is revealed as a sentimental deception, and her closing words, that 'there is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand' (*Complete Works*, 463), though they remain ironic, demonstrate that she has learnt the lesson that her mother has to teach her.

Learning to Lie

That lesson is an alternative to the 'either/or' logic of sentiment or cynicism described above. The lesson that Lady Windermere learns from Mrs. Erlynne is duplicity. She learns to be speculative, to question the social masks that she encounters and finally she acknowledges that she too must play her part in the social masquerade: 'To shut one's eyes to half of life that one may live securely is as though one blinded oneself that one might walk with more safety in a land of pit and precipice' (*Complete Works*, 463). The violence of the imagery suggests the severity of the folly that she recognises in her past ideals. To be wilfully blind is to put oneself in danger, not to escape danger.

However, the audience is very aware that if Lady Windermere has learned to recognise the lies that society rests upon and also learnt the skills to survive that such knowledge makes available, she does so through being, and finally remaining, deceived. As Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne face one another in Lord Darlington's rooms, Lady Windermere demonstrates just how far she has travelled from her earlier wilfully blind state. She suspects Mrs. Erlynne and Lord Windermere of being in league: 'My husband sent you to lure me back that I might serve as a blind to whatever relations exist between you and him' (*Complete Works*, 445). Her view of marriage seems now to exactly echo Lord Darlington's insinuations earlier. She goes further still, for she does not believe that the letter burnt before her by Mrs. Erlynne is her own (*Complete Works*, 446). But her

very presence in Lord Darlington's rooms testifies to her residual belief that she can escape this corrupt world. Mrs. Erlynne tries to dispel this misconception with plain talking:

> You don't know what may be in store for you, unless you leave this house at once. You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at - to be an outcast! To find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face. (*Complete Works*, 447)

This has been Mrs. Erlynne's experience, the one that she wishes to spare her daughter. The choice of 'pit', which Lady Windermere will use later to describe the dangers that open before a woman in society (*Complete Works*, 463), and Wilde's stage direction reinforce the impression of Mrs. Erlynne's sincerity and the irony of Lady Windermere's attitude, giving some indication of the painful double bind that a woman finds herself in when she employs Mrs. Erlynne's methods:[10]

> MRS ERLYNNE: (Starts, with a gesture of pain. Then restrains herself, and comes over to where LADY WINDERMERE is sitting. As she speaks she stretches out her hands towards her, but does not dare to touch her) (*Complete Works*, 447)

If Lady Windermere follows the lesson of her mother, then it becomes impossible for her to recognise sincerity, but if she does not then she remains the dupe of a society which views her innocence cynically. If each woman becomes a social actress, adopting role after role, then can any role ever be taken at face value? The answer lies in Mrs. Erlynne's assurances to Lord Windermere:

> I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible - they made me suffer - they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless - I want to live childless still. (*Hiding her feelings with a trivial laugh*). Besides, my dear Windermere, how on earth could I pose as a mother with a grown-up daughter? Margaret is twenty-one, and I have never admitted that I am more than twenty-nine, or thirty at the most. Twenty-nine when there are pink shades, thirty when there are not. (*Complete Works*, 459-60)

Mrs. Erlynne may speak sincerely here, but Lord Windermere cannot know this, and neither can we the audience or readers. This is her secret, the secret that empowers her, and confounds Lord Windermere. This final interview with Lord Windermere finds her

[10] *Pit* also draws attention to the material, dramatic nature of the scene of the play - the pit before which both the actors playing Mrs Erlynne and Lady Windermere stand is the orchestra pit which separates audience from stage, actors from audience.

squaring up to him as the mistress of her own fate. As he threatens to reveal her to his wife - her daughter - she promises to play a further role: 'I will make my name so infamous that it will mar every moment of her life' (*Complete Works*, 460). Her name will be infamous and by extension infect his name, neatly inverting the power of patriarchal society to rename a woman in marriage.

In this singular scene of comedy lies the final devastating touch of Wilde's play. Mrs. Erlynne eludes Windermere's power to name and control her through her self-conscious adoption of a succession of roles. She is aware that she is always on stage, under the gaze of the world, like an actress.[11] She counters this watchfulness by adopting a variety of roles - the adventuress in society at the ball, the mother concerned about her daughter, the penitent, humble sinner with Lady Windermere in Lord Darlington's rooms, the impenitent with the men still in the same rooms, and finally the mistress of her own fate in the last scene. The result of adopting such a variety of the roles is that she reveals their inherent falsity and limits; she resists being confined to any one position. The roles that society allows women - mother, lover, wife, mistress, whore - serve always, Wilde argues, to confine them in subject positions dominated by men. There can be no escape from this system of domination, only evasion and that too has a price.

The price that Mrs. Erlynne - and by extension, all women who choose to adopt the attributes of the actress - pays for her radical theatricality is that her daughter can never know the relation in which she stands to her. But this is a price worth paying, suggests Wilde: Such a secret self confounds the hegemony of male vision:

> LORD WINDERMERE: ... I know you thoroughly.
> MRS ERLYNNE: (*Looking steadily at him*) I question that. (*Complete Works*, 459)

He can never know when she is sincere. Would she really risk her daughter's position? As the scene develops the audience are invited to laugh at Lord Windermere's expense, as the play lingers on his ignorance and powerlessness. Each of his arguments, which he imagines will rout this bad woman, serves only to show the audience her command of the situation. As she gazes back at him her full power and individuality are intimated. She maintains an implacable gaze which the men of the play world cannot read. The gaze of this social actress on these men is the same one with which the actress playing Mrs. Erlynne gazes back into the theatre, unsettling the complacent men who must face the possibility that she is not there on stage, in the street, simply for their delectation, but has a secret (which is not their secret erotic ideal of her) which is hers and hers alone.

[11] Kaplan and Stowell note that the very costuming of Wilde's heroine here contributes to her success. In this scene Mrs Erlynne appears in 'the evening's most sophisticated gown'; the culmination of the production's use of women's fashions emphasises Mrs Erlynne's triumph: Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.18.

Mrs. Erlynne was, Wilde wrote to George Alexander during rehearsals preceding the play's first opening performances, 'a character as yet untouched by literature' (*Complete Letters*, 516) and this novelty arises from her thoroughgoing theatricality. All Wilde's discussions and remonstrations with Alexander over the staging of the play turn upon the dramatic nature of the presentation of Mrs Erlynne and her situation. He remonstrates with Alexander over changes that may make Mrs Erlynne seem like 'a vulgar horrid woman', and he is precise in his requirement that 'Mrs Erlynne should hold the centre of the stage, and be its central figure' in act four (*Complete Letters*, 513). She should do this seated on a sofa from which, he describes to Alexander, she cannot move: 'Windermere is in his own house, can pace up and down - does, in fact, do so; Mrs Erlynne, of course, cannot do anything of the kind. She rises from the sofa, and sits down, but with the possibility of Lady Windermere entering at any moment, for her to walk about, or cross, or the like, would be melodramatic, but not dramatic or artistic.' Wilde's care here reveals his sense of the constraints on a woman's performance, the restrictions on an individual's movements, even during the direst crisis. Wilde defends the structure of his play, writing that 'the chief merit of my last act is to me the fact that it does not contain, as most plays do, the explanation of what the audience knows already, but that it is the sudden explanation of what the audience desires to know, followed immediately by the revelation of a character as yet untouched by literature' (*Complete Letters*, 516). The revelation of Mrs Erlynne's secret identity, that she is Lady Windermere's mother, is the fulcrum of the play, but it is not the still unchanging fact of the nature of this new *character*. This new figure remains enigmatic, her secret not exhausted by the revelation of the last act.

She is a woman watched always in both literal and metaphorical senses. She is watched by the other men and women at the ball and by the men in Darlington's rooms. She is also viewed in the minds' eyes of men and women. Wilde captures this lascivious gaze when he has Lord Augustus say to Lord Windermere that the Duchess of Berwick's condemnation of Mrs. Erlynne 'didn't leave a rag on her...(*Aside.*) Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have an extremely fine figure' (*Complete Works*, 434). She is also watched always by the ghostly audience in the playhouse who recognise themselves in the men and women on the stage - the women in the censure of an adulteress, and the men in the erotic gaze that they share with Lord Augustus. What Mrs. Erlynne's performances have affected in Lord Windermere, they affect upon the audience also. By dramatic sleight of hand the audience must accept resolution without revelation. The audience looking at the players on the stage believe that they hold the power, their gaze upon the bodies of the women on the stage fixing those women in systems of erotic exchange. But just as Mrs. Erlynne returns Lord Windermere's gaze unflinchingly, secure in her ability to improvise roles which mystify

him, so the actress playing her gazes back inscrutably at the audience: Mrs. Erlynne dominates Lord Windermere (*Complete Works*, 445), just as Wilde wrote Ellen Terry did the Lyceum audience. Reviewing *Olivia* in May 1885, Wilde wrote:

> It is impossible to escape from the sweet tyranny of her personality. She dominates her audience by the secret of Cleopatra. In her Olivia, however, it is not merely her personality that fascinates us but her power also, her power over pathos, and her command of situation. [...] In Miss Terry our stage possesses a really great artist, who can thrill an audience without harrowing it, and by means that seem simple and easy can produce the finest dramatic effect. (*Complete Works*, 955-6)

Ellen Terry, the actress, is an artist because she dominates the audience. Her domination is the result of her command of situation, both that scripted for the play and that which is less formally scripted but no less powerfully determined, the situation of an actress under the gaze of her audience. In identifying Ellen Terry as a great artist in 1885, Wilde is engaging in a furious current debate over the nature of acting, and especially the potentially corrupting nature of acting for women, occasioned by responses to an English translation of Denis Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (begun 1769, published posthumously 1830). Diderot argues for an extreme self-consciousness on the part of the actor, an all-observant, dispassionate awareness of themselves and their situation. The mid-1880s debates concerned the confrontation between this view of artistic success for the actor and the anxieties occasioned by accepting this idea of a 'wholly self-conscious actor' possessed of a 'multiple consciousness' as a model available first to actresses, and second to women in general.[12] I read *Lady Windermere's Fan* and Wilde's other society comedies as, at least in part, fictional responses to the underlying cultural anxieties that occasioned this debate. Dressed up as comedy, appearing paradoxically to both satirise and pander to the audience's egotism, this is the summation of Mrs. Erlynne's success and the radical possibility she holds out to women of resisting and returning defiantly, indefatigably, the male gaze which seeks to consume them. She is not a fallen woman, not a stereotype but a figure of resistance, one who, in remaining impenitent, warns the audience of the presence in their midst of exactly the conditions for the creation of a whole race of Mrs. Erlynnes, each capable of scripting their own performance, at a cost certainly, but not a fatal or disastrously restrictive one.

If we examine the genesis of Wilde's texts we can see that the question of the actresses' relationship to women's social roles was one that he focussed on. The revisions Wilde made during his writing of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and those he made to *The*

[12] These are the words of D. J. Gordon and John Stokes who discuss these contemporary debates in detail: D J Gordon and John Stokes, 'The Reference of *The Tragic Muse*', in *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*, ed. by John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 81-167 (p. 128-32).

Picture of Dorian Gray on its publication as a book, very deliberately develop two women characters, Sybil Vane and Mrs. Erlynne, in contrast to the male characters who surround them.[13] Wilde began writing *Lady Windermere's Fan* with the view of Mrs. Erlynne as an adventurer, a cold hard woman. However, as Ian Small details, a distinct pattern in his revisions 'can be detected with regard to the play's plot, its verbal patterns, and Wilde's methods of characterisations'.[14] Each successive revision brought him further from his starting point until finally she is the complex character that I have outlined above. The similarity of the good to the bad woman becomes increasingly central as the play moves to its final acting edition and its first edition. There is a sense in which each of these draft selves haunts the final play, just as each of the roles that Mrs. Erlynne adopts inhabits the figure that she cuts on stage. The result of the revisions is to outline a possible subject position within the social formations that holds out the promise of resisting the dominant commodification of being.

Sybil Vane provides a contrast with Dorian and Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The principal revisions to the text are the addition of the Preface and six chapters, by which, as Isobel Murray notes, Wilde 'greatly improves the action, structure, and balance of the novel, as well as details of style'.[15] One of the new chapters is a long scene featuring Sybil Vane, her mother and brother. This addition stands out from all the others in the text because, rather then polishing epigrams and witticisms, it actually shifts the focus of the text. The chapter marks a break from the tiny circle within which the rest of the novel's action takes place, shifting the focus from the upper class milieu to the democratic masses who live by the strictures and conventions, social and mythic, that Dorian and Henry disdain. When Sybil acts badly she explains to Dorian she does so because she believes in the romantic myth that has him figured as 'Prince Charming', come to take her away from her poor existence. This myth is simply that of the bourgeois marriage, something that Henry understands. Dorian wishes to claim an absolute, transcendent importance for this bond however, he calls marriage an 'irrevocable vow', suggesting that love can conquer all (*Complete Works*, 66). Henry is quick to stress the civil proprieties and remind Dorian that he would not want his wife to act (*Complete Works*, 70). The importance of Sybil Vane to the novel cannot be stressed enough. After all, it is Dorian's break with her that occasions the first change in the appearance of the portrait. The transformation of the portrait is the visible emblem of Dorian's inanition; his inner being is on show, just as Sybil's was to him when she showed her delight and naive belief

[13] Complete in one issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, Oscar Wilde, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, (1891), pp. 3-100, July 1890.

[14] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, p. XXVIII-IV.

[15] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Isobel Murray, Oxford English Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. XXV.

in him as a saviour. This revision, along with the addition of the preface, attempts to develop and make more sophisticated a novel which, Wilde averred in a letter to the editor of the *Scots Observer*, 'will be to each man what he is himself. It is the spectator and not life, that [the novel] really mirrors' (*Complete Letters*, 441). The contrast that Sybil Vane provides with the dandies of the novel highlights the differences between the theatricalised identity available to women that I have outlined and the theatricality of the dandy.

In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and Wilde's other works, the characterisation of his dandies depends upon their open acknowledgement of social life's theatricality. The dandies of *Lady Windermere's Fan* are Lord Darlington, Cecil Graham and Dumby. Cecil Graham's every statement helps him fulfil the audience's expectations of a Wildean dandy. He equates morality with tedious after dinner talk (*Complete Works*, 435), and differentiates between scandal and gossip, saying 'Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality' (*Complete Works*, 451). However these statements and the conjunction between Cecil Graham's views and Mrs. Erlynne's adroit 'Manners before morals' (*Complete Works*, 457), which silences Lord Windermere, should not lead us to equate the situations of these social performers. Though the dandies do emphasise the theatricality of everyday life, this emphasis does not disadvantage them. Their performances, like the rumours of Lord Darlington's depravity (or Lord Henry Wotton's depravity in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), embody the theatricality of the dominant masculine culture.[16] Their theatricality is wholly complicit with the society of the spectacle. By glamorising their exteriority, both their public and their private lives are revealed as ephemeral, their inanition exposed. This inanition, and a play on the public and private, can be examined in an extraordinarily concise form in Henry James's story 'The Private Life' (1892).

In 'The Private Life' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 189-227) three characters are contrasted; an aristocrat, an author and an actress. The narrator suggests that Lord Mellifont is 'all public' and has 'no corresponding private life', and contrasts this with the actress and the 'great mature novelist' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 198) who is engaged in writing a play for the actress. Lord Mellifont's every gesture is that of a *public* figure - punning on the twin meanings of public political life and life lived in view of others - 'As he stood there smiling at us and waving a practised hand into the transparent night (he introduced the view as if it had been a candidate and "supported" the very Alps)' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 212):

[16] Basil Hallward says to Lord Henry Wotton 'you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. You are an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose' (*Complete Works*, 20) and Wilde stresses the point by repetition again (*Complete Works*, 23) and again 'You are much better than you pretend to be' (*Complete Works*, 64)

> He looked simply, as he did always, everywhere, the principal feature of the scene. Naturally he had no sketch to show us, but nothing could better have rounded off our actual conception of him than the way he fell into position as we approached. He had been selecting his point of view; he took possession of it with a flourish of the pencil. He leaned against a rock; his beautiful little box of water-colours reposed on a natural table beside him, a ledge of the bank which showed how inveterately nature ministered to his convenience. He painted while he talked and he talked while he painted; and if the painting was as miscellaneous as the talk, the talk would equally have graced an album (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 220).

The narrative image of a man stood, stock still, apparently in the act of composition, but whose work is himself, and is achieved and completed by virtue of being watched, seems emblematic of the emptiness of such a social life. The novelist, Clare Vawdrey, on the other hand is two entirely separate people, one a public figure who is affable and unremarkable, the owner of opinions 'sound and second-rate' (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 192), while his second self is literally private, unseen and unknown. The doubleness of the novelist represents an ironic figuring of the experience of social life for the male artist, the masking of creativity by a personable social character that is a kind of bad faith and complicity with the social order. The figure who completes this trio, Blanche Adney, emphasises the position of the artist in society, the position that Vawdrey's social persona attempts to disguise. The actress 'in society was like the model off the pedestal':

> she was the picture walking about, which to the artless social mind was a perpetual surprise - a miracle. People thought that she told them the secrets of the pictorial nature, in return for which they gave her relaxation and tea. She told them nothing and she drank the tea; but they had, all the same, the best of the bargain (*Complete Tales*, vol. 8, 198).

The figure she cuts in society is explicitly an object and circulates in a system of exchange, one where bargains are struck, where, despite her silence, her appearance and glamour are so over-determined culturally that her social performance is taken for her 'real' self. Blanche Adney stands as a contrast to the two male figures (much as Miriam Rooth does to Nick Dormer and Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse* (1890)) emphasising the inadvertent complicity of male artists with the masculine gaze.

Lord Darlington and Wilde's other dandies resemble Lord Mellifont, but with an attenuated sense of their own complicity or corruption that James omits from 'The Private Life'. Onstage, Wilde's dandies' performances do not differentiate them from other men but rather exaggerate the theatricality of all social life by staging their connoisseurship of, not only women, but women and men's performances. Importantly, dandies are not artists; their performances are scripted by the logic of the commodifying gaze. Mrs. Erlynne, however, fashions her own performance in the theatre of capital, she author(ise)s her own identity. Dumby notes that she seems 'like an *édition de luxe* of a

wicked French novel, meant especially for the English market' (*Complete Works*, 437). She has a talent for explaining things as, early in the play, Wilde allows Lord Augustus to note when he says to Lord Windermere, 'She explains everything. Egad! She explains you. She has got any amount of explanations for you - and all of them different' (*Complete Works*, 434). This echoes the Duchess of Berwick's still earlier mention of Mrs. Erlynne's pasts, 'Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and they all fit' (*Complete Works*, 425-6). Whether 'and they all fit' is a damning indictment of Mrs. Erlynne's ingenuity and storytelling skill, or a heavily disguised complement by the Duchess to Mrs Erlynne's talents, the audience is left to ponder.

The actress stands then as a potentially potent figure for the artist because she resists the endemic commodification of being. Wilde's satire plays always upon the theatricality of urban living. His plays and players cast *their* shadow out onto the audience, emphasising the audience's complicity and duplicity with the processes dramatised. He inserted himself as author into this relation with his customary author's curtain speeches which comically cast the artist as the observer upon his own production, the audience to his own performance. The image of Wilde before the footlights is that of the artist gazing out at the audience, laughing at their expectations and their comforts, a defiant figure 'balancing always on the stretched tightrope of his wit', balanced between respectability and infamy, between outspoken critique and commodification in the marketplace of the capital. [17] It is this image of balancing, of negotiating the positions available which links Wilde and James. I have identified the ways in which Oscar Wilde employs the idea of woman as actress in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Now I will suggest the links between Wilde's conceptualisation and Henry James's in *The Tragic Muse* (1889). Wilde's work identifies the spectacle of the actress as a vision of a transgressive figure. I have argued that the actress potentially evades the logic of the commodifying gaze; it is this evasiveness that is attractive as an idea to Wilde and James since it offers the possibility of artists negotiating their complicity with the restrictive logic of commodification. This negotiation can be recognised as a constant concern for Henry James throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

'Playing a part': Actresses and Artists

The problematic part vision plays in both artistic creation and commodification is a problem that fascinated James. In 'The Art of Fiction' (1884) he asserts that for the artist the most important thing is to be 'blessed with the faculty that when you give it an inch

[17] The image of the tightrope is used by James when he describes Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse*: Henry James, *The Tragic Muse*, ed. by Philip Horne, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1995), p. 475.

takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale':

> the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it - this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in the country and in the town, and in the most different stages of education. (*Literary Criticism I*, 53)

Vision here shades into sensibility, making meaning out of the mysteries which confront every modern individual. The novelist is in competition with his 'brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch their colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle' (*Literary Criticism I*, 53). The play between inside and outside here is unavoidable: the rendering stresses the outward appearance as the means of obtaining the substance, the precious interior meaning of life. The play alerts us to James's ambivalence; he recognises that fiction only provides an illusion of substance, that 'to "render" the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business' and that this illusion is itself perhaps only an illusion of interiority. Perhaps the illusion that the artist creates reveals no truth or essential being, but rather indirectly reveals only its lack. This illusion of substance resembles that phantasmagoria of capitalism, reification. I understand reification to be the process by which capitalism spirits away evidence of the labour that goes into producing a commodity, masking this reality with a glamorous surface, or as John Goode describes it - 'the phase of reception and circulation masks the phase of production'.[18] Marx describes this process in *Capital* when he discusses commodity fetishism.[19] The gaze of the consumer reifies the commodity, disguising the origins of its value. Thus, the artwork, enmeshed not just in the circulation of value, but inescapably bound up with the very systems by which that value is ascribed, is in danger of becoming nothing more than an empty commodity. The crisis that faced James and other nineteenth century writers was how to resist the commodification of art. James recognised that the new citizens of the modern metropolis, the consumers, the enfranchised masses, represent both the future possibilities for civilisation, and a formidable threat to present civilization, and his answer was to set about creating an art that would transform its consumers into the citizens of the world, or, to use James's phrase for Millie Theale, the 'heir[s] of all the ages' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1290). This art

[18] John Goode, 'The Decadent Writer as Producer', in *Decadence and the 1890s*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), pp. 108-29 (p. 127).

[19] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957-62), 1, vol.1, section 1.4.

would, as a necessary part of achieving this transformation, certainly resist, if it did not transcend, the processes of commodification. It is my argument that James sensed that only by building into artworks processes or mechanisms which registered resistance and/or alternatives to commodification could artists negotiate a place for themselves in modernity. In the figures of the artist represented in James's novel *The Tragic Muse* (1890) we can recognise his struggle to create an art and an identity for the artist which is more than a commodity. The novel dramatises a struggle between public, democratic art and private, elitist art and does so by foregrounding performance as performance. Public art is the theatre, the art of the actor and, perhaps, of the dandy, the spectacle of everyday urban life in the modern metropolis. The foregrounding of performance emphasises that it is with performance as spectacle that the art market, the marriage market and the financial market come together. In *The Tragic Muse* the figure of the artist and the actress are drawn together as James examines whether the intermediate subject position that the actress achieves is available to artists.

The luxury that was once available to only the elite appears now to be available to all. The splendour of the modern city is ostensibly available to everyone who wanders the streets, strolls in the parks, or visits the city's museums, art galleries and national monuments; all the inhabitants of the city can consume the spectacle. However, it is in this moment of becoming consumers, this shift of the image of the public from being producers to consumers, that the potential freedom of the public is betrayed.[20] The consumer is individualised, privatised, enmeshed in the possession and circulation of commodities. The potentially liberating gaze threatens to reproduce the relations between individuals that objectify and individualise objects and human beings as commodities. I argue that James's work makes dialectical the experience of consumption: *The Tragic Muse*, by foregrounding performance as performance directly signals that the performance is a commodity and that the commodity, because it is stylised and implicated in economic circulation, is a luxury object - only the elite have the cultural and economic "wherewithal" to purchase the performance. However, the stylisation of the performance takes the form of a parody of this elite, reflecting back to them their own inanition, vulgarity and helplessness in the brutal theatre of capital.

Miriam Rooth: the actress as artist

The Tragic Muse (1889) describes the apprenticeship and first successes of the aspiring actress Miriam Rooth. As an actress she is a commodified figure who exhibits herself as she says 'to a loathsome crowd, on a platform, with trumpets and a big drum, for money

[20] Susan Buck-Morss, 'Dream World of Mass Culture: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Modernity and the Dialectics of Seeing', in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. by David Michael Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 309-38 (p. 311).

- [she exhibits her] body and ... soul' (113/110-1).[21] The glamour and visual appeal of the actress relies upon her reflection and representation of human emotion to the audience - an audience not necessarily housed in a theatre, but one watching the show on the wider stage of society itself. From the first, Miriam fashions her own identity as a performance: she plans to adopt a variety of stage names before she has even trod a board 'Maud Vavasour ... Edith Temple ... Gladys Vane' (44/49). She seems always to be acting:

> Her existence was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next, before the perpetual mirror of some curiosity or admiration or wonder - some spectatorship that she perceived or imagined in the people about her. (130/126)

Miriam's creation of herself is dependant on the illusion, at the very least, of spectatorship. Miriam internalises her own performance taking care always to know how her arms fall:

> 'I wish you could see yourself,' Sherringham answered.
> 'My dear fellow, I do. What do you take me for? I didn't miss a vibration of my voice, a fold of my robe.'
> 'I didn't see you looking,' Sherringham returned.
> 'No one ever will. Do you think I would show it?'
> '*Ars celare artem*,' Basil Dashwood jocosely dropped (230/218)

In so doing she creates her art which is her own appearance, which in its turn is consumed by the spectatorship, real or imagined, that surrounds her. James follows Diderot's discussion in *Paradoxe sur le comédien* here. Miriam's sense that her performances involve hearing 'the truth that turns oneself inside out' (110/108) registers the interiorising of one's performance, the cool calculation and self-observation that Diderot emphasises. James shows that he recognises that the novelty of his fictional situation rests in the collision between this theory of acting and the interpellation of individual women by the dominant social formations. First he wittily draws attention to the view of the actress from the stage; Miriam says, '"we're all showing ourselves all the while; only some of us are not worth paying"':

> "The public who pays us. After all, they expect us to look at them too, who are not half so well worth it. If you should see some of the creatures who have the face to plant themselves in the stalls, before one, for three mortal hours!" (474/439)

Here the usual view is inverted. Then James emphasises the idea of the propriety of such a young woman discussing her own *posing* dispassionately as a theatrical effect no longer

[21] References to *The Tragic Muse* are to the Macmillan 1890 Edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin 1982, reprint), and The New York Edition text ed. Philip Horne (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1995), references in the text include page numbers from 1886 ed. followed by page numbers from the New York edition reprint.

confined to the stage: 'She asked him if it disgusted him to hear her speak like that, as if she were always posing and thinking about herself, living only to be looked at, thrusting forward her person. She often got sick of doing so, already; but *à la guerre comme à la guerre*' (274/260-1).[22] This self-concern runs contrary to the accepted standards of modesty that a young woman should obey, and the collocation of the battle of Nick's public life as a member of parliament with Miriam's sense of herself engaged in an everyday battle of love and war only further highlights her equation of the equivalence between her life and his. This *posing* of Miriam's mirrors that of Mrs Erlynne in Wilde's play, and offers a key conception of interiority. When discussing Miriam the dandy Gabriel Nash puns on the meaning of *producer* to suggest Miriam's limits, 'I think of her absolutely as a real producer, but as a producer whose production is her own person' (376/352). Nash is sketching for Sherringham Miriam's *future*, a future of 'populations and deputations, reporters and photographers, placards, and interviews and banquets, steamers, railways, dollars, diamonds, speeches and artistic ruin' (375/352), and suggesting that Miriam cannot sustain her performance. But the pun works the other way too, in the sense that Miriam produces or creates her own identity upon this public stage. The self-conscious activity of the actor, the art of appearing to be someone else, allows the actress to be other than she is thought to be. Miriam's very being is a role or narrative that she creates out of the hints and snatches of life observed. This creative ability is one with what James had earlier called 'the power ... to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it' (*Literary Criticism I*, 53). The descriptions James gives to Nash of Miriam's future are patronising and cynical, but they do offer a view of the dangers that press on such a presumptuous path.

A corollary of this creative self-fashioning is that unintelligibility or mysteriousness that I have previously discussed in connection with Mrs Erlynne. This thoroughgoing theatricality unsettles the complacent male gaze by presenting to it an enigmatic face, and this is the labyrinth at the edge of which Peter Sherringham lingers, afraid to enter, unable to resist her mysterious pull:

> What's rare in you is that you have - as I suspect, at least - no nature of your own ... You are always playing at something; there are no intervals ... You can't be everything, a consummate actress and a flower of the field. You've got to choose ... Your feigning may be honest, in the sense that your only feeling is your feigned one ... That's what I mean by the absence of a ground or of intervals. It's a kind of thing that's a labyrinth! (145/138-9)

[22] In the New York edition this paragraph also carries an oblique comparison between the theatricality of parliamentary life and the theatrical life of the actor. Miriam calls parliament 'your terrible House'.

The labyrinth here is a figure for a complex surface. One way to view a labyrinth is as inviting a quest to reach its depth in the centre; another is to understand it as leading either nowhere or only back to where one begins, or worse still, to image a labyrinth so vast as to defeat any attempt to penetrate it or escape it. Sherringham, in noting the absence of boundaries around Miriam's personality, acknowledges that he cannot see beyond her beautiful surface. At the theatre he feels that Miriam's rapt attention to the performance is 'a very pretty exhibition of enthusiasm, if enthusiasm be ever critical', but asks whether it is 'in fact an exhibition, a line taken for effect, so that at the comedy her own comedy was the most successful of all?' (149/142). In the box that he keeps at the theatre he is aware that to 'the spectators who turned an admiring eye into the dim apartment of which she pervaded the front, she might have passed for a romantic, or at any rate an insatiable young woman from the country'. Sherringham's awareness of these spectators, and the culturally loaded figure of the provincial wife in the city that James ironically gives to Peter, suggests that we should recognise here Sherringham's attempts to defuse the threat that Miriam poses to the certainty of his world. The small stage of the theatre box in which both Peter and Miriam perform (Miriam's performance is particularly marked, she 'pervad[es] the front' of the box, as though her social performance demands and draws attention) does the work here, as in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), of staging the glamour of modernity.

The scene of Peter Sherringham's first proposal of marriage to Miriam Rooth is an important one. During their first visit together to the Théâtre Française Peter proposes that Miriam give up her dramatic ambitions, marry him and become a respectable upper middle class wife, and in time perhaps an ambassadress (242/228). In this scene the overlapping complexities of the art and marriage markets, and of private and public art and life are all present. Peter Sherringham's desire for Miriam overcomes the threat that she represents for him. Everything about Miriam is threatening and fascinating to Sherringham - her femininity, her exotic Jewishness, her freedom to move around Paris, London and all Europe. Encompassing all these, there is his apprehension that she has no inner being, 'no nature of [her] own', no 'moral privacy', that she lives 'in a high wind of exhibition, of figuration ... [and that] such a woman was a kind of monster' (130/126). *Figuration* here is the word James gives to Peter Sherringham to suggest his sense of Miriam Rooth's inanition but it also registers just that which Peter finds threatening. The recognition of this enigmatic quality of Miriam Rooth's by Peter Sherringham allows James to represent the response of the 'immemorial compact formations' (476/441) that Peter Sherringham represents metonymically to the subjectivity that, I argue, Miriam Rooth represents. Peter calls her 'a kind of devouring demon' (409/383), fearing that her artistry can exist only at the expense of sincerity. Miriam responds that '"one may live in paint and tinsel, but one isn't absolutely without a soul. Yes, I've got one ... though I do

paint my face and practise my intonations"'. There follows a remarkable passage in which Miriam declares her affection for him, as well as noting the disparity in their social positions. All Peter can think of though is her sincerity: 'the same impression, the old impression was with him again; the sense that if she was sincere it was the sincerity of execution, if she was genuine it was the genuineness of doing it well' (410/ 383). Peter complains that Miriam's dramatic nature knows no limits, that 'there is no interval', but his own role as dramatic critic can be seen to overflow its usual bounds. Here, in private he responds to her as though she were performing, and finds himself trapped by his own logic. Miriam Rooth's inescapable performance threatens Peter Sherringham's confidence that he, as man, can 'know' her, recognise her 'true being'. This knowing is possessive, based on his observation of her, his consumption of the spectacle that she represents to him. In marrying her he would effectively nullify the threat that he perceives in her mutability, opacity, and independence. However, marriage for Miriam would not result in some realisation of 'true being' and consequently an end to performance, but in a continuing performance before a limited audience, her husband. His proposal signals the significance of the choice confronting Miriam (and the reader) here. She must either become a private possession, or continue in a never-ending public performance.

The description of celebrated Mlle Voisin emphasises these points. She is deliberately figured as an object 'precious and frail, an instrument for producing rare sounds, to be handled, like a legendary violin, with a recognition of its value' (245/232), yet this objectification is *mysterious* (Miriam's word): 'Her charming manner is itself a kind of contempt. It's an abyss - it's the wall of China. She has a hard polish, an inimitable surface, like some wonderful porcelain that costs more than you'd think' (248/234). Here, off-stage, the actress is still performing and her performance gives her the appearance of an object, something inhuman, subject to purchase and exchange. Another way to consider this is to recognise that perhaps her performance protects her from the gaze of the consumer - her manner says "my performance is for sale, not me". However, she is still an actress before an audience and, though her manner resists the familiarity of the meeting, keeping the audience in their place, Peter Sherringham's very familiar greeting and the setting of the meeting suggest obliquely the tradition of going behind the scenes both in reality and novels. Perhaps the scene cannot help but draw to mind for contemporary readers their prejudices and their salacious interest in what might really go on behind the curtain. In particular, Emile Zola's *Nana* (1884) laid bare the function of this room and the dressing rooms. With this suggestion of private possession and sexual desire James effectively superimposes the marriage market on the sex market; the husband or even the suitor is nothing more than a client.

This objectification has already been strikingly registered earlier in the novel in Peter's description of Mme Carré during Miriam's first interview with the veteran

actress. James has Peter view Mme Carré as a machine suggesting his characteristic distrust of the ideal of the actor. He imagines that her facial expressions are created by 'a multitude of little facial wires ... pulled from within':

> Her whole countenance had the look of long service - of a thing infinitely worn and used, drawn and stretched to excess, with its elasticity overdone and its springs relaxed, yet religiously preserved and kept in repair, even as some valuable old timepiece which might have quivered and rumbled but could be trusted to strike the hour (82/85)

The inner being that Sherringham seeks is in fact the performance that Miriam has internalised - her surface is her inside. The irony on James's behalf lies in Sherringham's wild and increasingly foolish attempts to make Miriam conform to his view of the world. At the moment that Peter Sherringham proposes, Miriam is seated before the famous portrait by Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Rachel as the Tragic Muse* which hangs in the green room of the Théâtre Française. The portrait embodies the dialectic that I argue shapes the novel. The picture is literally and figuratively a leftover from another age; it is a reminder of the theatre and Paris in the middle of the century, and figuratively, it is an artwork that recovers at least a little of the ritual 'value' that Walter Benjamin asserts was overtaken by the exhibition value an artwork gained as it became reproducible.[23]

The aspect of Benjamin's analysis that interests me here is his concern with the separation, by mechanical reproduction, of the work of art from the fabric of tradition (217). His examples are religious idols and their associated rituals, and he asserts that, much closer to our own time, 'The ritualistic basis [of the aura of the work of art] is still recognisable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty' (217) and he footnotes this remark noting that 'with the secularization of art, authenticity displaces the cult value of the work ... the uniqueness of the phenomena which hold sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the creator or of his creative achievement' (237). The portrait does this in two ways. The classical costume of Rachel and the architectural forms that provide the background to her figure suggest a classical or mythical basis to the composition. However there occurs a curious doubling of the columns that form the background to the painting; a second colonnade shadows the first colonnade that appears behind Rachel. This shadowing makes ambiguous the architectural function of the first colonnade. The classical architectural forms resemble both columns and a theatre curtain before which the figure of Rachel stands. Thematically this arrangement allows the painter to suggest both a

[23] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 211-44 (p. 218-9).

temple and a theatre, identifying the Théâtre Française as a temple of dramatic art.[24] This arrangement has the effect of foregrounding Rachel's appearance as a performance, one that she controls and one endowed with the protection of classical tradition. Secondly, the picture is famed and significant because it resides only in the Théâtre Française, a temple of art, representing traditional art. It could be argued counter to this point that there is nothing in this particular painting which escapes the qualitative transformation of the nature of the artwork that Benjamin chronicles (219). However, it is the representation of the portrait within James's novel, and the relationship between the scene and the characters with which I am concerned here. The painting figures the resistant character and power of the actress's subjectivity. Rachel in the painting, like Miriam in James's novel, is available to the viewer, as Miriam is to the reader, but only as an enigmatic figure. Each of these actors is represented as in control of her performance and as unknowable.

Three figures for the artist in *The Tragic Muse*

Three characters in the novel offer themselves as models for the artist: Nick Dormer, Miriam Rooth, and Gabriel Nash (in a sense the novel is a *Künstlerroman*, a novel of the education of an artist). The book invites comparison between Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth as artists. Nick Dormer is male, socially privileged, and fixed within the social world of the English nineteenth century. He is acutely aware of himself as part of a fixed social order against which he chafes. Visiting his sponsor, Mr Carteret at Beauclere, James gives Nick a comic sense of the slow passing of time. Beauclere is a 'shore where the tide of time [breaks] with a ripple too faint to be a warning ... Nick ... surreptitiously looking at his watch, perceived it was ten o'clock. It might as well be 1830' (197/187). It is also a place that gives Nick a 'sense of England - a sort of apprehended revelation of his country':

> The dim annals of the place appeared to be in the air (foundations bafflingly early, a great monastic life, wars of the Roses, with battles and blood in the streets, and then the long quietude of the respectable centuries, all cornfields and magistrates and vicars), and these things were connected with an emotion that arose from the green country, the rich land so infinitely lived in, and laid on him a hand that was too ghostly to press, and yet somehow too urgent to be light. It produced a throb that he could not have spoken of, it was so deep, and that was half imagination and half responsibility. These impressions melted

[24] See Adeline R. Tintner's essay 'Miriam Rooth As The English Rachel: Gérôme's Rachel As The Tragic Muse' for a fuller discussion of the relationship between James's novel and Rachel's portrait. I have adapted Tintner's description of the portrait here to illustrate my contention: Adeline R. Tintner, 'Miriam Rooth As The English Rachel: Gérôme's Rachel As The Tragic Muse', in *Henry James and The Lust Of The Eyes: Thirteen Artists In His Work*, ed. by Adeline R. Tintner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), pp. 56-69 (p. 58).

> together and made a general appeal, of which, with his new honour as legislator, he was the sentient subject. (197/187)

Like Peter Sherringham, Nick Dormer is carefully represented by James as formed and impelled by his social situation, by the 'immemorial compact formations' (476/441) which produce in him a sense of himself as their 'sentient subject'. This quietly comic characterisation of Englishness is one against which Nick fights, and his throwing up of parliamentary life for the life of a painter of portraits is part of that battle. Nick's 'double nature' (176/ 169) registers the battle within him between his artistic temperament and his sense of his duty as a product of the machinery of English public life. This doubleness allows James to suggest also the possible political positions available to the artist. Aligning politics with public life and privilege, with Nick's parliamentary life, makes his choice of an aesthetic life seem like a retreat from politics. As a model for the artist all Nick offers is a private life in retreat before the cultural and political challenges of the day. James's choice of Nick's talent is important. As a painter Nick is the brother of the novelist described in 'The Art of Fiction', and suffers from some of the same problems as the modern novelist. Nick wishes to be a portraitist and finds that his connections with the upper-class social world offer him easy opportunities to gain commissions.

In his 1887 essay on John Singer Sargent James writes that 'there is no greater work of art than a great portrait - a truth to be constantly taken to heart by a painter wielding in his hands the weapon that Mr Sargent wields'.[25] James values the art of the portraitist and Sargent was a painter associated with just that upper-class world of aristocracy and wealth of which James makes Nick Dormer a member. Sargent's portraits offer a record of that class during a period of profound transition, as David Cannadine suggests.[26] More pertinently, James's essay on Sargent concentrates upon his exhibition showing and successes, but it is strikingly silent on his relations with the subjects of his portraits, who are often also his patrons. A painter of portraits stands in an older, more established relation to their audience than does the novelist. Jonathan Freedman makes the point that the only alternative to the mass market that *The Tragic Muse* includes, represented by Nick Dormer, is the outmoded economic and aesthetic relation of aristocratic patronage.[27] Novelists by contrast cannot avoid their relationship with the literary marketplace and must negotiate (in a number of senses) their position.

Miriam Rooth, by contrast with Nick Dormer, offers a more representative figure for the artist enmeshed in networks of cultural and economic exchange. Miriam possesses all those characteristics that Nick Dormer does not. She shares with him none of his social

[25] Henry James, 'John Singer Sargent', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* LXXV (October 1887), pp. 683-91 (p. 91).

[26] David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, Papermac (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. xiii.

[27] Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 190.

privileges; as a woman her public and her political roles are radically circumscribed; and her Jewishness marks her as on the periphery of the social formations at the centre of which Nick Dormer and those like Nick Dormer are positioned. Miriam enters into the role of the artist as she might that of a stage role. Images of her figure circulate on playbills and flyers almost like debased portraits. These images of Miriam foreshadow the fate of portraiture since mechanical reproduction transforms the relationship of the portraitist to their audience. Most strikingly, Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth are contrasted as artists in their relationship to the public sphere, and to celebrity. Nick understands art as a private production, and the artist to be a private figure, not a public one (as distinct from the politician). Miriam knows however that her art demands that she be a public performer in at least two senses, as an actress and as a celebrity. James contrasts the two in order to reveal the powerlessness of Nick Dormer's position in the face of the commodification of art-objects and artists. James charges Miriam with negotiating the dangers that celebrity and the market hold for the modern artist who cannot, as Nick Dormer hopes to, turn their back on the very crucible of their work. The final success of Miriam Rooth as a figure for the artist lies in her ability as an actor to evade the commodifying gaze of the audience; not only the audience on the stage or in the theatre, but that in the street, those who see her upon placards, or take her home pictured upon a playbill.

Gabriel Nash represents a further figure for the artist. He is the least satisfactory of this trio however. While Nick Dormer paints and Miriam Rooth acts, Gabriel Nash produces nothing but his talk and this is not enough. When he falls silent Nick Dormer pities him: 'There were moments when [Nick] was even moved to a degree of pity by the silence that poor Gabriel's own faculty of sound made around him - when at least it qualified with thinness the mystery that he could never wholly dissociate from him, the sense of the transient and the occasional, the likeness to vapour or murmuring wind or shifting light' (505/470). Nash's own productions are so slight that they make no sound, he is mere artistic fashion personified. When Nick Dormer paints Nash's portrait he feels he has laid a trap for Nash. As he paints, Nick makes the critic Nash the object of analysis rather than the subject:

> He caught eventually a glimmer of the truth underlying the strangeness, guessed that what upset his friend was simply the reversal, in such a combination, of his usual terms of intercourse. He was so accustomed to living upon irony and the interpretation of things that it was new to him to be himself interpreted and - as a gentleman who sits for his portrait is always liable to be - interpreted all ironically. From being outside of the universe he was suddenly brought into it, and from the position of a commentator and critic, an easy amateurish editor of the whole affair, reduced to that of a humble ingredient and contributor (510/ 474)

Nash as a 'commentator and critic' finds that when the tables are turned and the gaze of the artist is turned upon him such analysis is uncomfortable. James's choice of analogy suggests his concerns: Nash becomes one of an army of contributors to the periodical press, a contributor, rather than an editor, and this reversal removes his authority to speak on art matters. The final result of Nick Dormer's portrait of Nash suggests his insubstantiality. The portrait, left lying in Nick's studio appears to fade away to a blank canvas. The similarities with *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* here are striking but misleading. Wilde's novel had not yet been published and James was familiar with the same sources that Wilde used for his novel, principally Balzac, Huysman, Pater and Stevenson. The fading of Nash's portrait suggests only James's satirical weighing of self-styled cultural arbiters.

The resemblance of Gabriel Nash to Oscar Wilde has presented a problem for critics of *The Tragic Muse*. Oscar Cargill has argued for Nash's resemblance to Wilde, only to have his argument rebutted point by point by Lyall Powers.[28] Cargill argues that Nash resembles Wilde, particularly in his attendance upon Miriam which resembles Wilde's famed courting of Ellen Terry, Sarah Bernhardt, and Lilly Langtry.[29] Lyall Powers argues that if Nash resembles Wilde, he bears a stronger resemblance to Henry James, and Powers cites James's comment in his preface to the New York edition volume containing 'The Lessons of the Master' that resemblances of characters in fiction to real people are not to be taken for those people unless the 'art' is very bad.[30] A more recent critic, Jonathan Freedman, suggests that Nash resembles both Oscar Wilde and Henry James, and this is I think an important point.[31] Freedman argues that James recognised in Wilde's Aestheticism a role to which he himself aspired:

> Wittily, parodically, and paradoxically, the Wildean aesthete enters fully into the mechanisms of the mass market - its advertising, and public relations apparatus in particular - and, by vending his critique of that market on the basis of an appeal to transcendent values of the pure aesthetic, achieves an enormous success in it. The aesthete, in other words, makes the commodification of literary and aesthetic value by the mass market work for him - and he does so by decrying that market (181).

Freedman is surely right to see James's relationship to Wilde as an influence on his characterisation of Nash and I am indebted to Freedman's analysis of the processes of

[28] Oscar Cargill, 'Mr James's Aesthetic Mr Nash', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 12 (1957), pp. 177-87; Lyall Powers, 'Mr James's Aesthetic Mr Nash - Again', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 13 (1959), pp. 341-9.

[29] Oscar Cargill, 'Mr James's Aesthetic Mr Nash', p.181.

[30] Powers may be correct in the context of *The Tragic Muse* but James could also be guarding himself in this preface against suggestions that another of his stories, 'The Author of Beltraffio', bears a too close resemblance to the real J. A. Symonds, a point Powers overlooks: Lyall Powers, 'Mr James's Aesthetic Mr Nash - Again', p. 349.

[31] Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 182.

commodification and their relationship to aestheticism. His discussion of the professionalisation of authorship during the period is particularly helpful. However I do think that he gives too much weight to Gabriel Nash as a figure for Henry James without considering adequately Miriam Rooth as an alternative. The subject position that Miriam Rooth inhabits is one to which Freedman gives too little consideration. Freedman argues that what Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth have in common is their obsessive concern with their craft: by contrast Gabriel Nash 'is committed only to a mode of inspired dillettantishness' (182). This opposition captures, Freedman argues, James's anxiety concerning the professionalisation of authorship and art. James though, is more alert than Freedman to the possibilities that Miriam Rooth's situation suggests. James describes the full reach of these possibilities in his preface to the New York edition of the novel.

The preface is concerned with the encounter between the (male) artist and his (female) creation. James begins by describing how the origins of the novel are twofold, both a long held artistic need to '"do something about art" - art, that is, as a human complication and a social stumbling-block', and the very pressing need to provide Thomas Bailey Aldrich, the editor of the Atlantic Monthly, with a new serial to run (*Literary Criticism II*, 1103). The *genesis* (*Literary Criticism II*, 1104) of the novel lies in a confrontation between creation and the marketplace, and James, writing this preface almost twenty years after, takes this opportunity to note what he sees as his precarious market position; 'What lives not least, to be quite candid, is the fact that I was to see this production make a virtual end, for the time, as by its sinister effect - though for reasons still obscure to me - of the pleasant old custom of the "running" of the novel'.

What James records next is his recollection of the ways in which Miriam Rooth resisted even his attempts to place her. His discussion of the difficulties of placing the centre of his work is familiar from other New York edition prefaces; in this preface though, James suggests specifically that a character of his creation, Miriam Rooth, resisted him. As the writer of the preface, and of the novel, James must turn his eye upon Miriam Rooth just as the men of the novel do (and any male readers) and in so doing he is attempting to fix her in a position that suits him. This difficulty James says he faces was in placing the *centre* of his work; 'again and again, perversely, incurably, the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself not, so to speak, in the middle ... I urge myself to the candid confession that in very few of my productions, to my eye, has the organic centre succeeded in getting into proper position' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1108). The centre of the novel cannot be Nick Dormer's consciousness, James explains, because the reader is treated to so much of Peter Sherringham's consciousness, and vice versa. However, how can it be in Miriam's:

> Given that we have no direct exhibition of hers whatever, that we get it all inferentially and inductively, seeing it only through a more or

> less bewildered interpretation of it by others. The emphasis is all on an absolutely objective Miriam, and, this affirmed, how - with such an amount of exposed subjectivity around her - can so dense a medium be a centre? (*Literary Criticism II*, 1112)

The novelist turns his gaze upon her, objectifying her and trying to fix her in relation to the other features of his composition, and he finds his material resistant, finds Miriam resistant. The novelist's relation to his subject begins to mirror the relations between the characters that I have traced above: the male artist's privileged gaze cannot dispel the radical indeterminacy of the actress figure that he himself has written. James names this sense when he says that Miriam possesses a '*usurping* consciousness' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1112), which resists the men within the world of the novel, and those without. James takes care to seem playful as he suggests this radical relationship between the author and their fiction, but his humour retains a double edge. If the problem of writing about artists is the problem of writing about a preference whose honours are only those of 'contraction, concentration, and a seemingly deplorable indifference to everything but itself.' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1106), and 'the most charming truth about the preference for art is that to parade abroad so thoroughly inward and so naturally embarrassed a matter is to falsify and vulgarise it', then to write about artists is to write about 'a marked insistence of somebody's willingness to pass mainly for an ass'. In James's own case, he admits that the difficulty of placing Miriam led to a ludicrous situation:

> Time after time, then, has the precious waistband or girdle, studded and buckled and placed for brave outward show, practically worked itself, and in spite of desperate remonstrance, or in other words essential counterplotting, to a point perilously near the knees - perilously I mean for the freedom of these parts. In several of my compositions this displacement has so succeeded, at the crisis, in defying and resisting me, has appeared so fraught with probable dishonour, that I still turn upon them, in spite of the greater or less success of final dissimulation, a rueful and wondering eye. (*Literary Criticism II*, 1108-9)

This comic figure, not just enfeebled but ambiguously debagged (*waistband* and *girdle* are gender non-specific after all), stands then as another figure for the artist; the artist as clown, tripped up by the creative energies of his own works. The vision is comic and the idea serious: the relationship of artists to their own works is a negotiation with a power not entirely artists's to command; language, and the representations that it enables as narrative art, carries a power that wrestles with the existing representations of artists and readers. It is this power that readers encounter as they read and in the next chapter I will argue that it is this power that James suggests can transform readers, altering their very sense of themselves and their world. In *The Tragic Muse* we catch a glimpse of this in Peter Sherringham's wonderment at Miriam Rooth's identity. Sherringham

acknowledges that her mutability is not simply a series of masks but an alertness to and command of the situations in which she finds herself:

> To say that she was always acting suggests too much that she was often fatiguing; for her changing face affected this particular admirer at least not as a series of masks, but as a response to perceived differences, an intensity of sensibility, or still more as something cleverly constructive, like the shifting of a scene in a play or a room with many windows. Her incarnations were incalculable (383/ 359).

Here the male gaze is altered. Peter Sherringham recognises that Miriam Rooth's changing appearance makes her inscrutable and that this variety is not simply a series of disguises but a dynamic process of self-creation which grants her power in the scenes of social life. Miriam's 'intensity of sensibility' is her acute awareness of the interplay in everyday life of representations which seek to script her; this awareness is 'cleverly constructive' because her incalculable incarnations frustrate the observer while commanding his admiration. This is Peter's confusion; he can't read Miriam according to the scripts that he knows by heart, which should indicate to him that her morals are in question, and yet he cannot help recognising her commanding presence. James has Gabriel Nash provide the final comment on the fusing of Miriam's art and her identity. Peter Sherringham suggests that, contrary to commonplace notions about artistic temperament and bohemian living, artists are often very ordinary people: '"I usually find the artist a very meek, decent little person"'. Gabriel Nash replies, '"You never find the artist - you only find his work, and that's all you need find. When the artist's a woman and the woman's an actress ..."' (377-8/ 354). Miriam's art is her self and her success lies in her ability to construct identities that are not simply masks to evade the commodifying male gaze, but alternatives to those representations which the dominant culture provides.

The actress as a potent cultural symbol has been the subject of this chapter. I have argued that James and Wilde each recognise that the actress inhabits a resistant subject position. The resistant qualities of this subject position arise out of instabilities and contradictions within the very discourses of gender and property that interpellate subjects. The actress on stage, whose glamour and style seems almost to be the epitome of culture's success in reifying women, *also* suggests the availability of a path, following which the individual can evade the processes of commodification - either, commodification by becoming simply a commercial object, fashioned only for consumption, or once again reduction to the status of an object by being available only to those with sufficient cultural and economic capital, that is, private and elitist. The very vulnerability of the actress before the hegemonic discourses, a vulnerability that the artist shares, paradoxically is the quality that offers the greatest possibility for change. The actress as intermediary between text and audience, and the writer as intermediary between text and reader, perform the spectacle of multiple subjectivity.

Chapter two: Rewriting Arnold; the Critic as Ironic Alien

In this chapter I will investigate the responses of Henry James and Oscar Wilde in their critical writings to the writings and influence of Matthew Arnold. This response takes the form of an interrogation and rewriting of Arnold's ideas of culture and the critic. Both writers, I argue, identify the limits and failings of Arnold's characterisation of culture and criticism, while remaining committed to a broadly Arnoldian project, one which sees culture and criticism as a dynamic transformative force that can influence individuals and states. In their staging of the figure of the critic as a trope for the artist I argue that we can recognise the complex ways in which James and Wilde sought to negotiate a public role for the artist as an intellectual, a role that sought to mitigate the complicities of established discourses of criticism with the dominant capitalist social formations.

For Wilde and James the critic, as a prominent cultural 'type', stood in perilous relation to the rapacious literary marketplace and the enfranchised mass public who made that marketplace such a site for the contestation of cultural representations. As an intermediary in this marketplace between the author/ producer and the reader/ consumer, the critic shares some characteristics with the figure of the actress. Both critic and actress, as mediators or initiators of art works within the public realm, stand in anxious relation to the producers and the consumers of these works. The actress, in promotional photographs and as a star turn, functions as a blank on which the drama is enacted, the new fashions introduced, erotic fantasies projected. By analogy, the critic as reviewer is potentially a flunky, awaiting the pleasure of the publishers on the one hand, and pandering to the appetites of the voracious periodical press and its expanding readership, on the other. Though this is obviously a caricature of the critic, as a stereotype it played its part in the wider view of the critic as, again like the actress, nothing more than the interpreter of others' texts. The inanition of the actress and the critic in this formulation are emblematic of the logic of the marketplace and of the threat that this logic represents to the other participants in these relations, the producers and the consumers. And yet the very intermediary position that the critic inhabits offers a more positive hope. The rewritings of dominant topoi by Henry James and Oscar Wilde that I detail below attempt a revitalization of the intermediary subject position of the critic as a means to elude the over-determining logic of the marketplace which infects and damages human relations. It is the relations between readers and writers as subjects in dialogue enmeshed in inhuman systems of exchange, and the possibility that Art might foster the

negotiation of positions within these systems of exchange, which underpins my investigation.

I discussed previously how ambiguities in the role of 'actress', understood as a metaphoric and figurative role scripted by the dominant culture, offer exactly those individuals written out of that script the means to fashion a new role, to transform the static subject positions on offer: women as objects under the hegemonic gaze, men as patriarchal consumers of objectified human beings. Henry James himself in his 1907 preface to *The Tragic Muse* identifies as analogous the gazes of actress and critic. James writes that Miriam turns on Peter 'with absolute sincerity and with the cold passion of the critic who knows, on sight of them together, the more or less dazzling false from the comparatively grey coloured true' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1116). As Wilde was later to note, 'the actor is the critic of the drama' (*Complete Works*, 1131), and the drama that Miriam criticises is the commodified *fin-de-siècle* social life that reduces women to the status of property.

The scene of Peter Sherringham's second proposal to Miriam Rooth carefully overlays what should be a passionate love scene between a man and a woman with a critique of all the orthodoxies - critical and aesthetic, political, and gender - for which Peter stands. This complexity is achieved through James dramatising Miriam's self-consciousness and the critical understanding it gives her. The dominant metaphor is that of the stage. Peter wants Miriam to give up acting in the theatre only to continue to perform in 'a bigger theatre than any of those places in the Strand', that of the diplomatic world (466/ 432). In an ironic slip Peter implores Miriam 'You're a magnificent creature. Just quietly marry me and I'll manage you' only to have Miriam point out the inappropriateness of his choice of verb: '"Manage" me?' The girl's inflexion was droll; it made him change colour.' Peter's language betrays him as Miriam is quick to point out, and his language is really that of the Arnoldian critic. Miriam calls him 'The best judge, the best critic, the best observer, the best *believer*' (472/ 438) she has come across. But his credentials as a critic rest on his Arnoldian disinterestedness in Miriam and the theatre, and the ironies of this scene make clear just how far from such a position Peter now stands and has always stood. When Miriam pinpoints Peter's difficulties she expresses them as a conflict between his very sensitivity and his allegiances to the self-contradictory dominant discourse of criticism:

> My talent is the thing that takes you: could there be a better proof than that it's tonight's exhibition that has settled you? It's indeed a misfortune that you're so sensitive to this particular kind of talent, since it plays tricks with your power *to see things as they are*. Without it I should be a dull, ignorant, third - rate woman, and yet that's the fate that you ask me to face and insanely pretend you are ready to face yourself. (466/433; emphasis added)

The Arnoldian critic's sensitivity is not denied but his self-consciousness, his *suppleness* as James will term it in 'The Science of Criticism', is not sufficient to the task of negotiating the dense ironies of the complex modern social scene (*Literary Criticism I*, 99). The battle between Peter Sherringham's attraction to the theatre and his commitment to the traditional patriarchal world of politics and international diplomacy mirrors a wider cultural conflict as the increasingly pervasive theatricality of modern living assaults the old certainties and authorities. James is lucid on this point:

> If the pointless groan in which Peter exhaled a part of his humiliation had been translated into words, these words would have been as heavily charged with a genuine British mistrust of the uncanny principle as if the poor fellow speaking them had never quitted his island. Several acquired perceptions had struck a deep root in him, but an immemorial compact formation lay deeper still. (476/441)

The unspeakable cultural conflict that assails Peter is exactly the architectonic shifts in the 'immemorial compact formation' that James addresses in his criticism. James's final irony at Peter and the old order's expense is literally to turn the tables on him:

> 'Surely it's strange,' she said, 'the way the other solution never occurs to you.'
> 'The other solution?'
> 'That *you* should stay on the stage.'
> 'I don't understand you,' her friend gloomed.
> 'Stay on *my* stage. Come off your own.' (467/433)

All Miriam means is that she should continue to act once they are married and that he should continue to be no more than he is already, a confirmed amateur critic of the drama. Yet her suggestion, effectively equating her career with his, obviously inverts all the dominant gender expectations of marriage, as well as affronting notions of respectability, and her ironic framing of the proposal in a continuation of the stage metaphor emphasises both the staged nature of social life and the dominant balance of power. Peter's confusion, and the comedy of the scene, rests in the almost visible suggestion that Peter himself take up the theatrical stage.

Curiously this suggestion is developed in an early work of cinema, *Der Blaue Engel*.[1] Professor Rath, who gives up his comfortable bourgeois life as a teacher to become both the lover of Marlene Dietrich's irresistible Lola Lola, and a performer, literally a clown, in the cafe concerts, is simultaneously liberated and destroyed by his infatuation. The ironies of the playful suggestion in James's text are played out to their logical

[1] *Der Blaue Engel*, Dir. Josef Von Sternberg, 1930; More details of the film can be found in Donald Spoto's recent biography of Marlene Dietrich. Donald Spoto, *Blue Angel: The Life of Marlene Dietrich* (New York: Double Day, 1992), pp. 56-65.

conclusion: the serious public figure is now a laughing stock; where previously he derived his dignity from his social position and scholarly learning now he must seek it in love, a love which is only at first falteringly returned and later nothing so much as a burden to Lola. The comic mask of the clown cannot hide the pain of the man, a pain *that was* masked by the dead face of the everyday. The film offers the spectacle of liberation through infatuation, through submission to desire, that is at the same time a kind of death. The heroic bathetic figure of the professor stands as a grease-painted emblem for the new man of the twentieth century stripped of his authority as parent, husband, legislator, or pedagogue by the dangerous theatrical woman. This is the scene that the film revels in setting. Yet the 'dangerous' woman is actually of course entrapped in the circuit of desires that are not her own and the threat that she poses is only that which has arisen from the systems of representation established to both control, shape and administer desire. Dietrich's Lola Lola remains vulnerable finally to the desires of the audience who wish to possess her.

Miriam Rooth is James's dangerous theatrical woman and she understands that her profession is one that condemns her to selling herself for money 'like a contortionist at a country fair' (475/ 440). When Miriam asks Peter to come onto her stage she asks him to put himself in her position, a position he understands as being defined by the desires of others, a subordinate position, and to try imaginatively to see the view from that position. That he cannot suggests some of the limits, contradictions and complicities of his critical position.

Culture, the Critic, and the Critical Spirit

In *The Function of Criticism* (1984), which takes its name from Arnold's famous intervention, Terry Eagleton argues that criticism, as a rationalist discourse of the Enlightenment, mirrors the oppositional logic that drives the capitalist economic system. In the eighteenth century the emancipatory imperative of criticism was directed against the absolutist state. Criticism's energies were directed towards fashioning a cultural space for the emergent bourgeois class, but by the second half of the nineteenth century the 'public sphere' is in crisis. What had been shared between the participants in the public sphere has become unstable and the man of letters has to 'actively reinvent a public sphere', synthesising a new discursive formation from the ruins of the past, fractured as it was by 'the internal rupturing of bourgeois ideology, the growth of a confused amorphous reading public hungry for information and consolation, the continued subversion of "polite" opinion by the commercial market, and the apparently uncontrollable explosion and fragmentation of knowledge consequent upon the

accelerating division of intellectual labour'.[2] The function of criticism in this context is to attempt to shape this public, educate this mass into culture, and the critic, as Arnold conceived him, stands, Eagleton writes, 'poised precariously between clerisy and market forces', representing 'the last historical attempt to suture these two realms together; and when the logic of commodity production will render such strivings obviously utopian, he will duly disappear from historical sight. The twentieth-century man of letters is a more notably 'minority' figure than his Victorian predecessor' (52). This figure of the critic as high-wire artist, walking a tightrope suspended over the abyss of the marketplace, the critic as vulnerable performer, is only one aspect of the critic of which, I will argue, Henry James and Oscar Wilde are aware, and they balance this vulnerability with the critic's intermediary subject position, a position that depends upon accepting and transforming incompatible determining discourses.

John Carey makes a curious omission in his *The Intellectual and The Masses*.[3] Though his focus is on the period of English literary modernism - identified in his subtitle as 1880-1939 - and though he establishes his case by making appropriative argumentative swipes in time and space, he omits the one figure who contributed decisively to Anglo-American intellectual culture in the late nineteenth century. Sailing for America in 1883 was a man whose forthcoming tour, lecturing on the 'Majority and the Remnant', formed the basis for a work, *Discourses in America*, which is a distillation and digest of decades of writing.[4] Matthew Arnold's constant concern, from the early prose writings of the first series of *Essays in Criticism*, to 'A Word More About America' published in 1885, three years before his death, was to find a positive relation between the cultural elite and the newly enfranchised, culturally dispossessed populace. The solution that Arnold conceived was only partial. In *Discourses in America* Arnold argues that perhaps the only saving grace of the great numbers of modern Americans is that, since the numbers of the remnant remain proportionate to the numbers of the majority, such a large majority will give rise to a substantial remnant in whom hope for the future lies.[5] This remnant will finally perform a transformative role upon the majority just as Arnold had outlined years before in *Culture and Anarchy*. The result of Carey's omission of Arnold makes his discussion, especially that of Eliot and Leavis, simply incomplete, but I am interested

[2] Terry Eagleton, *The Function Of Criticism: From The Spectator To Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 48-9.

[3] John Carey, *The Intellectual and The Masses* (London: Faber, 1992).

[4] Arnold later said that *Discourses in America* was the book by which, of all his prose writings, he should most wish to be remembered: *Complete Prose Works* vol. X, notes to 'Preface to *Discourses in America*', p. 534.

[5] The problems with this statement only begin with its curious arithmetic. It is followed in the lecture by an astonishing statement of Anglo-Saxon superiority, occasioned by race and puritan heritage, to the other races of America which, though it was well received by audiences, surely attracts our attention now to the composition of the audience. Speaking in New York in the mid-1880s Arnold cannot have been unaware of middle class anxiety precipitated by huge immigration. What hope for the future there may be is tempered by this fear: *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 10, p. 162-4.

here in suggesting why Arnold cannot be accommodated to the simple scheme of antagonism between the intellectuals and the masses that Carey sketches.

Carey's second chapter is entitled 'rewriting the masses' and this is in a sense exactly what Arnold set out to do in his valorisation of culture. The work of culture and the critical spirit that Arnold prescribes can be understood as the scripting of new relations between the classes in the drama of national life. The leading to perfection of the many by the few, the transformation of each member of society, and by extension society itself, into their best selves, is an attempt to rewrite relations between the intellectual and the mass of the population. The ambivalence which lies at the heart of Arnold's writing is basically that between a genuinely humane man who retains faith in man's progress towards perfectibility and the shrill author of the conclusion to *Culture and Anarchy* where, in the face of a mob of his own imagining, he affirms the employment of 'fire and strength' as a means for the lovers of culture to protect the status quo from anarchy.[6] The rewriting that Arnold is most often understood now to have attempted, replacing religion with culture as the guarantor of the moral authority in response to a crisis of faith, is concerned with the issues of which Carey treats, but perhaps where Arnold presents a problem to Carey is that the ambivalence written in to Arnold's description of culture offers the positive possibility of strong creative rewriting of that very narrative of culture.

Central to Arnold's theory of culture is an intermediary subject position, a position between the future perfect state of each individual man and civilization, and the present state of each. This position is occupied by the 'great man of culture' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 113), who manages the evolution of the classes and civilization towards perfection. It is the critical spirit which enables this evolution and we can best see this by examining the series of analogies Arnold uses to structure his argument. The first analogy is between the action of the critical spirit within the individual and the effect of the example of the alien on the class to which they belong. The critical spirit, which Arnold calls 'the supreme characteristic of a highly developed, a modern age' in 'On the Modern Element in Literature' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 1, 25). In *Culture and Anarchy* he writes that the critical spirit acts on the individual's own 'ordinary' self and 'best' self, spurring him on towards perfection:

> Religion says: *The Kingdom of* God *is within you*; and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper ... not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of

[6] A point made by Raymond Williams in his reading of *Culture and Anarchy*. Raymond Williams, 'A Hundred Years of Culture and Anarchy', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, ed. by Raymond Williams (London: Verso, 1980), p. 3-10.

> perfection as culture conceives it; and here, too, it coincides with religion (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 94).

Three key-notes are sounded here: a progress towards human perfection through individual perfection; change 'managed' by the critical spirit; and culture assuming the role and authority that religion had previously exercised.[7] Arnold's insistence on inward transformation makes the critical spirit an intermediary between the individual's ordinary and best self just as the alien is an intermediary between the ordinary and best selves of the class to which they belong. The analogy identifies the alien with the critical spirit and by extension the critic with the alien. When Arnold identifies the alien as one of the 'great men of culture', one 'mainly led not by class-spirit but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 146), he might easily have substituted 'critic' for 'alien' without disrupting his argument.

Arnold finds the authority for this intermediary position in a genealogy of critics that includes from his own time Sainte-Beuve and Renan, traced back to classical roots in the Socratic tradition. Two qualities in particular are singled out as essential characteristics of this tradition - disinterestedness and curiosity. The disinterestedness of the critic, his aloofness from the worldly, finds sanction, Arnold writes, in 'Gorgias' when Socrates says that by standing aloof from politics he is the only true politician. This simultaneously aloof and involved position is the one that Arnold emphasises:

> Serious people at the present day may well be inclined, though they have no Socrates to help them, at any rate to stand aside, as he did, from the movement of our prominent politicians and journalists, and of the rank and file who appear to follow, but who really do oftenest direct them - to stand aside, and to try whether they cannot bring themselves, at all events, to a better sense of their own condition and of the condition of the people and things around them.[8]

Culture and Anarchy begins and ends with Socrates. In the introduction to the book, Arnold answers Frederic Harrison's charge that 'The man of culture is in politics one of the poorest mortals alive' by reiterating Socrates' invocation 'Know thyself'.[9] The last pages of the conclusion parade Socrates before the reader:

> Socrates has drunk his hemlock and is dead; *but in his breast does not every man carry about with him a possible Socrates,* in the power of a disinterested play of consciousness upon his stock notions and habits,

[7] This section echoes other areas in Arnold's writings where he works to find in culture a source of truth and authority to replace that of a Christian faith suffering at the hands of Victorian science and materialism. For a succinct discussion of this background see the first chapter of Douglas Sterner's recent *Priests of Culture: A Study of Matthew Arnold and Henry James* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp.1-23.

[8] 'The Incompatibles' (1881), republished as part of *Irish Essays* (1882): *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 9, p. 268.

[9] Harrison, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* of March 1867, is quoted by Arnold in the introduction to 'Culture and Anarchy': *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, p. 87.

> of which this wise and admirable man gave all through his life the great example, and which was the secret of his incomparable power? And he who leads men to call forth and exercise in themselves this power, and who busily calls it forth and exercises it in himself, is at the present moment perhaps, as Socrates was in his time, more in concert with the vital workings of men's minds, and more effectually significant, than any house of commons' orator, or practical operative in politics (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 228-9)

Socratic disinterestedness allows the critic to survey the world and to exercise the critical spirit upon it unhampered. But the grave and generous critic is as busy as any politician. He is busy trying to call forth the Socrates in each of us. The practical mission of Arnold's critic, disguised by his stress on disinterestedness, is social change. The paradox of a commitment to disinterestedness which still allows active practical participation in change is only apparent, as is evident from Arnold's own life and work. Raymond Williams justly defends Arnold against those who would make an idle metropolitan dandy of him by pointing to his life as a much travelled inspector of schools familiar with all England as well as the Continent, and to his intense and sustained efforts to establish a general and humane education system.[10]

The second crucial characteristic of the tradition that Arnold highlights is what he calls the *curiosity* of the critic, 'a desire after the things of the mind for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 91). However this characteristic curiosity is unfortunately not an English trait, and Arnold highlights the connotations of the word in English; 'It is noticeable that the word *curiosity*, which in other languages is used in a good sense, to mean, as a high and fine quality of man's nature, just this disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects for its own sake ... this word has in our language no sense of the kind, no sense but a rather bad and disparaging one' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 268). What is necessary is that the English-speaking critics break out of their provincial conception of criticism and curiosity, and that they follow the example of writers like Montesquieu and Sainte-Beuve. Sainte-Beuve had a curiosity, Arnold writes, which was *unbounded* and which revealed him as a 'naturalist, carrying into letters, so often the domain of rhetoric and futile amusement, the ideas and methods of scientific inquiry' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 306). Man was Saint-Beuve's object of study and his range of interests make him Arnold's ideal critic. The curiosity of the ideal critic knows no boundaries and the combination of curiosity and receptiveness allows such critics to perform the process of their own development, their movement towards their best selves. Arnold argues that this advance towards perfection on the part of the individual critic has an effect on the class to which the critic belongs. The critic or alien acts upon their class in order to bring its members to

[10] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 128.

perfection, to their 'best selves'. Criticism and education are the means by which this shift will be accomplished: 'Criticism ... tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 261). Compulsory education provides one of the mechanisms by which the best that is thought and known will reach society. The classes need to be brought to perfection because 'the era of aristocracies is over; nations must now stand or fall by the intelligence of their middle class and their people' (*Complete Prose Works*, Vol. 5, 15). It is the critic and culture (understood as beauty and poetry) that can educate these two groups. Arnold distinguishes between the secular, materialistic success of contemporary Western European capitalist societies and the movement towards a more perfect state that he argues may be brokered by the aliens of each class. This progressive movement can only be achieved by freeing the middle classes from their reliance on the *machinery* of everyday life; this machinery consists in all the words and ideas that politicians and commentators employ to stir up debate, or as shorthand to discuss contemporary affairs; 'freedom ... population ... coal ... railroads ... wealth ... even religious organisation' are machinery because they are means mistaken as ends, the means towards the establishment of perfection rather than perfection itself: 'almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves, and therefore had some of the characters of perfection indisputably joined to them' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 96). These voices mistake this machinery for realized aspects of perfection but culture, Arnold avers, instructs us that this machinery may well be consequent on the achievement of perfection but it does not in itself constitute perfection.

In part this is because much of this machinery rests upon inequalities between the classes and one of the actions of culture is to eliminate material and spiritual inequalities. Culture 'seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in a an atmosphere of sweetness and light' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 113): Culture 'will not be satisfied until we *all* come to a perfect man' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 112). In this aim politics and culture are united. In 'The Future of Liberalism', he writes that politics deals with man in society and how he might arrive at perfection; 'that the whole body of society should come to live a life worthy to be called *human*, and corresponding to man's true aspirations and powers. This, the humanisation of man in society, is civilization' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 9, 141-2):

> This is the *social idea;* and men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have

> laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 113).

Once again the intermediary subject position is crucial to Arnold's scheme. We have moved beyond the achieving of the 'best' self of the critic, and beyond the 'best' self of each member of society, moving finally towards the achievement of the 'best' self of the nation, *the state*. The state is the best self of the country and it is the critic that not only brings into existence the necessary conditions for the erection of the state, but is also on hand to mediate between states, and finally bears witness to the supercedence of all states into the totality of mankind. Culture, which leads us to conceive of no perfection that is not '*general* perfection, embracing all our fellow-men with whom we have to do', unites all mankind (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 215).

Following this argument to its logical conclusions Arnold finds himself in an uncomfortable self-contradictory position. Each nation may realise its best self in a strong state, but that state will be logically superceded as all humanity reaches perfection. This is the teleology for which Arnold has argued. But he is also committed to a racialist view of mankind that posits certain races, identified as national groups, as superior to others and to fulfilling what Peter Hohendahl has called 'the paramount task of the nineteenth century critic ... to define the "national cultural identity"'.[11] That Arnold's narrative of culture depends upon a racial hierarchy is detailed most clearly in *Culture and Anarchy* and in 'On The Study Of Celtic Literature' (1866). In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold writes:

> Science has now made visible to everybody the great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race, and in how signal a manner they make the genius and history of an Indo-European people vary from those of a Semitic people. Hellenism is of Indo-European growth, Hebraism is of Semitic growth; and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong naturally to the movement of Hellenism (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 173).

In the midst of arguing for the need to educate, and therefore transform, the English people, in each of their classes, into a Hellenistic way of life, Arnold imputes to them an innate Hellenism. Arnold's move to ally his argument with the hypotheses of the developing human sciences gains his cultural criticism a share of the authority that scientific discourse claims for itself, and identifies his narrative of culture with the 'great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race', and specifically, with how these differences can be recognised in the 'genius and history' of the material and cultural triumph of the modern European races. Frederic Faverty details the use Arnold makes of

[11] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution Of Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 15.

the philological researches and arguments of Ernest Renan and other philologists to ground his theory of culture in racial difference and in a racial hierarchy. [12] In 'On the Study of Celtic Literature', Arnold writes:

> Modes of life, institutions, government, climate and so forth ... will further hinder the development of an aptitude, *but they will not by themselves create the aptitude or explain it.* On the other hand, *a people's habit of and complexion of nature* go far to determine its modes of life, institutions, and government, and even to prescribe the limits within which the influence of climate shall tell upon it.[13]

It is the weakness of the Celts as a race that vindicates English rule. Arnold's commitment to race is evident in his early description of each alien as 'born' with an 'original instinct' for seeking out their best self; they have an innate predisposition towards this movement. The result of Arnold's immersion in the contemporary racialist sciences of ethnology and philology is that his utopian imaginings remain always shackled to both his fear of change and his belief in a racial hierarchy.

His commitment to this hierarchy results in the arrest of the movement from the individual to the whole of mankind at the level of the nation state. The contradictions in Arnold's argument, in particular the problems that his stress on constant change pose for his overall argument, are laid bare when he finds himself arguing for the maintenance of the nation state as the 'appointed frame and prepared vessel of our best self' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 224). By analogy, the state is the best self that the community is working towards, just as the individual discovers through their encounter with culture their best self. In Britain, Arnold argues, the problem is that 'every one of us has the idea of the country, as a sentiment; hardly any one of us has the idea of *the state*, as a working power' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 134). This working power is characterised as that 'familiar on the continent and to antiquity', the state, 'the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 117). The state is needed to allow culture to do its work but the work of culture implies the dissolution of the state; Arnold senses this problem and draws back from affirming the power of culture which is implied by the terms of his own argument. Individual and collective transformation occasioned by the action of culture, an action that requires a constant dialectical examination of one's notions, is subordinated to the state and its stringent powers. The cessation of this conceptual

[12] Frederic Faverty, *Matthew Arnold the Ethnologist* (Evanston: NorthWestern University Press, 1951).

[13] 'On The Study Of Celtic Literature', *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, p. 353, emphasis added. For a succinct discussion of Arnold's and Wilde's use of contemporary ethnology see Michael S. Helfand and Philip E. Smith II, 'Anarchy and Culture: The Evolutionary Turn of Cultural Criticism in the Work of Oscar Wilde', *Texas Studies In Literature And Language*, 20 (1978), pp. 199-215.

movement has implications for Arnold's idea of culture, implications that are well summed up by Edward Said:

> It is Arnold's insight that what is at stake in society is not merely the cultivation of individuals, or the development of a class of finely tuned sensibilities ... but rather the assertively achieved and *won* hegemony of an identifiable set of ideas, which Arnold honorifically calls culture, over all other ideas in society.[14]

Said argues that 'the best that has been said and thought' very quickly becomes identified with the hegemonic social formations. Said's reading of the conclusion to *Culture and Anarchy*, when Arnold describes any challenges to the authority of the state, in the shape of strikes or demonstrations as *anarchy*, makes clear that:

> With the assimilation of culture to the authority and exterior framework of the state go as well such things as assurance, confidence, the majority sense, the entire matrix of meanings we associate with "home", belonging and community. Outside this range of meanings - for it is the outside that partially defines the inside in this case - stand anarchy, the culturally disenfranchised, those elements opposed to culture and the state: the homeless, in short (11).

The action of Arnold's *culture* is normative and totalizing; it is involved in the creation of subjects whose identities are secured by their acceptance of the authority of the state. Said is concerned with the deliberate exclusion, as an originatory gesture, of specific groups from the community, but there is a further striking aspect of this logic in Arnold's writing. The image that drives Arnold is that of the crowd, figured as a threatening mass; the enfranchised masses threaten the existing community (despite being the very group in which the community consists). Arnold sees this crowd wherever he looks.

We can recognise Arnold's anxieties and his rhetorical strategies in the style and substance of his response to two poets, the young Scots poet and critic Robert Buchanan and Walt Whitman. He responds to these poets' positive recognition of the crowd with horror, envisioning the crowd rather as a threat and invoking culture as a strategy of containment. Buchanan figures in *Culture and Anarchy* as a foil for Arnold's reasonable and disinterested critical voice. In 1868 Buchanan wrote that God 'would *swarm* the earth with beings. There are never enough. Life, life, life - faces gleaming, hearts beating, must fill every cranny. Not a corner is suffered to remain empty. The whole earth breeds and God glories.'[15] Arnold responds with apparent concern for children born into poverty, yet alongside this concern his response to Buchanan's praise of multiplicity is to develop

[14] Edward Said, 'Secular Criticism', in *The World, The Text and The Critic*, ed. by Edward Said (London: Random House, 1983), pp. 1-30 (p. 10).

[15] Buchanan was writing in his *David Gray, And Other Essays, Chiefly On Poetry* (1868). Arnold quotes him at length: *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, p. 214-5.

an implicit sense of *swarm*. That word, repeated for emphasis by Arnold, comes to signify a plague of insects or a numberless host rather than actual human beings, and Arnold further associates the word with the east end of London. The 'gleaming faces and beating hearts' are that of the swarming mob of East End poor whose human heterogeneity is masked by the threat that resides in their characterization as mob. Faced with the prospect of newly enfranchised masses, Arnold abandons dialectical thought for the refuge of political quietism; he falls prey to his own stock notions when he characterizes the inhabitants of the East End as a mob, as Raymond Williams notes.[16] Arnold disparaged Whitman in 1867 because, 'at this time of day it is not enough to be an American voice, or an English voice, or a French voice; for a real spiritual lead it is necessary to be a European voice.'[17] Arnold seems to suggest that Whitman's attempt to find an authentic 'American' voice is presumptuous and only an index of his provinciality; he wilfully mistakes Whitman's interest in new poetic forms for a jettisoning of tradition. The poet and the critic would be better absorbed in assessing the best that each nation has to offer, Arnold suggests, than in exploring new forms. But can we not hear in this response to the heterogeneity that Whitman celebrates in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a further index of Arnold's attempts to defuse, by his totalizing narrative of culture, the threat of a mass democratic movement? Whitman reappears below as an emblem of resistance to exactly that narrative (Oscar Wilde finds in him a prophet of the future, a prophet of new democratic types); here Whitman stands as a challenge to Arnold's idea of the critic and of the poet.

I have indicated above that the critic is a powerful figure within the cultural matrix that Arnold staked out. However this heterogeneous figure whose very role depends upon curiosity and their openness to change is cast by Arnold as the familiar figure of the Victorian man of letters. Arnold's critic is classically educated, possesses 'a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 43), as well as the firm grounding in mathematics and physics which Socrates prescribes in *The Republic*. This learning results in a figure of a certain age - Socrates prescribed ten years study to attain such a grounding - as well as one possessing a certain international air (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 44). The English critic in particular should actively resist the provincial and 'dwell much on foreign thought [...] every critic should try and possess one great literature, at least, besides his own' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 245, 283-4). The critic, like the poet, ought 'to know life like Goethe' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 262), and, though he keeps 'aloof from the practical view of things' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 270), aloof from 'the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian

[16] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 132.

[17] 'Theodore Parker' *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 81

sphere' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 275), neither is he only a scholar. Rather the critic, 'neither a man of action nor a practical man', is one who understands 'the free play of the mind upon all subjects [as] a pleasure in itself.' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 268, 284). This critic seems to be the very type of the gentlemanly Victorian man of letters, who else could possess each of these characteristics? This closure and reduction of an idea and a role that implied an openness and a multiplicity is the movement that is reversed by the rewritings of James and Wilde when they cast the critic as a similar character but in a costume of irony and ambivalence that highlights the serious problems that Arnold's narrative of culture and figure of the critic holds.

The first serious problem is the relation of this critic to the marketplace. How can one be a critic once one recognises the cash nexus? That Arnold does recognize it is incontrovertible. His discussions of liberalism, free trade, *machinery*, 'doing what one likes', are all predicated on the problem caused by the question of what relations subsist between men. His response indexes his horror. His valorisation of culture, the didactic role of the 'alien' critic, his racialist theories of national identity, and concomitant emphasis on the nation state all strive to deny the power of the current dominant relations and to alter them. The substantial power with which Arnold endows the intermediate subject position of the critic or alien is ceded when he assimilates culture to the state. The self-conscious dialectical process for which Arnold argues is the action of the critical spirit, which demands that the individual and the society examine their fundamental ideas, their 'stock notions'. This movement petrifies in the face of the heterogeneous enfranchised masses. Arnold's culture comes, finally, to seem like another of the naïve mantles which disguise 'the icy waters of egotistical calculation'; the disinterestedness of the critic is a veil or mask, not an essential quality of the mind.[18]

The second major problem is the suspicion that critical authority and Arnold's narrative of culture disguise the economic and political imperative of the hegemonic imperial discourses. This is implicit in both Arnold's theorising of culture in *Culture and Anarchy* and in his writings on Ireland. In the discussion below I will examine how Oscar Wilde and Henry James read Arnold's alien against type as a self-conscious cultural critic, in order to provide, at the heart of an adversarial or 'antithetical' culture, a space for themselves as critics which is also a space which is open or available to exactly those individuals and groups, modes of being and ways of life that the dominant hegemony excludes and makes "other".[19]

[18] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of The Communist Party', in *Karl Marx, Revolutions of 1848*, ed. by David Fernbach (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 62-98 (p. 70).

[19] 'Antithetical' is Declan Kiberd's term. Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 38, 40.

The Alien Henry James

Henry James's personal connections to Matthew Arnold date back to his earliest adult days in Europe. Aged thirty he had the thrill of meeting Arnold socially in Rome, principally in the Palazzo Barberini, the temporary home of his American friends the Wetmore-Storys. Writing to his sister Alice, Henry said; 'I have met [Arnold] several times and had a little talk with him. He is not delicately beautiful, but he has a powerful face and an easy, mundane, somewhat gushing manner' (*Letters*, vol. 1, 371). This Roman scene provides a tableau of emblems crucial to James's imagination in the coming decades: exotic Rome, the palazzo with its American incumbents stands as an example of the international theme; Story the sculptor is the artist as resident alien; and Matthew Arnold, the Englishman abroad, the famous apostle of culture offers a human face to the written voice of a British culture that James made the object of artistic study for the rest of his life. It is as an emblem of that culture that Arnold figured most importantly for James. Fred Kaplan astutely notes that as an ambivalent Victorian at best, James marked Arnold's passing in 1888 with shock, regretting his loss as one might the loss of a loveable distant elderly uncle, but that James's admiration was qualified; Arnold the genial man was no intellectual parent (Kaplan, *Henry James*, 349).

James's response to Arnold was a discriminating one; he recognised the international range and influence of Arnold's version of the cultural critic, and the public role of that figure but he avoided adopting it publicly himself. In 1882 James refused a commission from James Thomas Knowles at the *Nineteenth Century* to answer Arnold's 'A Word About America' because, he wrote to Edwin Godkin, he refused to enter 'the arena of controversy ... Let the English discuss America amongst themselves; meanwhile it does well enough' (Horne, *A Life in Letters*, 139-40). What James does in the 1880s is not to confront Arnold in the pages of the periodical press on his own terms and ground as a cultural critic, but to rewrite Arnold and to re-script the role of the critic, and to retrieve the power of criticism that Arnold allowed to slip through his grasp. In 1883 James wrote a review piece on Arnold that he willing admitted to Grace Norton was *fulsome* (Horne, *A Life in Letters*, 149-51). This review essay, written contemporaneously with 'The Art of Fiction', catches James in the act of transmuting Arnold's terms and concepts to create his own cosmopolitan cultural figure, one who lives up to Arnold's demands that the critic be committed and aloof, disinterested and ever curious. James writes approvingly of Arnold's cosmopolitanism and his positive resemblance to Sainte-Beuve, and suggests that Arnold has:

> a genius, a quality, all his own, and he has in some respects a largeness of horizon which Sainte-Beuve never reached. The horizon of Sainte-Beuve was French, and we know what infinite blue distances the French see there; but that of Matthew Arnold, as I have hinted, is

> European, more than European, inasmuch as it includes America (*Literary Criticism I*, 723).

If we compare this with Arnold's own comments on Whitman above, we can see James's rewriting in progress. James makes of Arnold the transnational figure that he requires for his ideal of the critic. The phrase 'infinite blue distances' carries a doubled ironic charge. James suggests that French criticism, so extensive and elaborate and summed up in the figure of Sainte-Beuve is often bounded by the horizons of Paris.[20] This infinite blue distance also suggests the gaze across the wide Atlantic that James gives to Arnold (there is a further irony of course since the significance of Arnold's 'largeness of horizon' is ironically what I am suggesting Arnold himself finally denies). This international vision that Arnold possesses is significant, James asserts, on two fronts. It gives Arnold an authority as a general critic, which is the 'character ... he may really be said to have invented' (*Literary Criticism I*, 727). This character has the authority to be 'the commentator on English life, the observer and expostulator, the pleader with the dissenters, the genial satirist'. James's choice of words identifies his sense that Arnold's critic is a role separate from the man; the general critic is a *character* on the stage of public life. The range James attributes to Arnold results in Arnold managing to be simultaneously 'among the English writers of our day, the least the matter-of-course Englishman' and '*en fin de compte* (as the foreigner might say) English of the English' (*Literary Criticism I*, 722-3). This ability to be 'most conscious of the national idiosyncrasies', to be of the culture and apart from it, recalls Arnold's own description of the alien. James plays on the idea of Arnold's alien, using it first to describe the more usual idea of someone *outside* a given group, then also to cast ironically Arnold himself as a resident alien. James's alertness to the possibilities of Arnold's terms and concepts alerts us in turn to the use that he makes of these terms. The critic as ironic alien strikes James powerfully not only because it fits so well with his own personal experience and his sense of place, but also because as part of Arnold's narrative of culture it offers a powerful agency to the contemporary writer.

Arnold's alien seems to resemble James's alien, just as James's conception of culture and its importance seems to resemble Arnold's ideas, but James is everywhere intent on rewriting Arnold's narrative. James's essay 'The Art of Fiction' (1884) is part of this process. One of the aims of the essay is to suggest how art, as Arnold had hoped, may educate the bourgeois reader. The middle classes along with the newly enfranchised mass need ethical education and the critic is well placed to manage this process,

[20] 'Sainte-Beuve ... was a Frenchman to his finger-tips; and his intellect, his erudition, his taste his tone, his style, were of a deeply national stamp. It cannot be said that he spoke without authority on any subject whatever; but his authority in speaking of foreign writers was diminished by half' (*Literary Criticism II*, 673).

providing through the example of his response a 'companion and clue', as Arnold describes it, to the reader of the correct response.[21] Both men believe that the critic's self-conscious dialectical relationship with the artwork provides a model of the transformation wrought by culture, but James also recognises that Arnold's narrative finally arrests the 'free play of consciousness' when he assimilates culture to hegemonic authority. The disinterested critic relinquishes his curiosity, and with it his authority, in the face of change. The necessity of transformation that Arnold argued for comes to signify an anarchy to be resisted, rather than a further difficult but irresistible step as it is for James. What James attempts in his articles on Arnold and in his explicit theorizing of criticism and fiction is to recuperate the notion of the transformative power of culture without this being simultaneously a process of subjection to the dominant social formations.

In 'The Art of Fiction' James suggests that this is to be achieved through the work of form in art. James answers Walter Besant's explicit exhortations for the novel to be didactic with a careful and subtle transformation of Arnold's terms. James echoes Arnold when he writes that the *good* novel 'subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection' (*Literary Criticism I,* 49). *Light* and *perfection* are key terms in *Culture and Anarchy.* James uses them here to assert that the 'good' work of fiction will in some way encourage readers towards some change or shift: The work of art becomes the ethical re-education of the reader.[22] Only the processes of illusion enable a work to transform its reader, though not in the obvious sense that Besant had posited. James denies that the subjects of fiction should be circumscribed since such selection suggests that the education that a reader receives from a work is in some way the result of the subject. Scornfully, he writes 'For many people art means rose-coloured window panes and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs. Grundy' (*Literary Criticism I,* 58), suggesting that commercial fiction, with its necessary bowing before the pressures of the marketplace in choice of subject matter and treatment, is no art at all. He insists instead that it is the intimate interaction between the form of the work and the reader, the communication with the putative other, that is decisive, that educates and raises the work to the status of art.

James's complex narrative forms seek to dramatise the self-consciousness that he adopts from Arnold and, in so doing, to locate this self-consciousness in the works. This self-consciousness demands both that the reader experience their reading as an immersion in the fictional world, surrendering themselves just as the critic does to the

[21] 'The Function Of Criticism At The Present Time', *Complete Prose Works,* vol. 3, p.283.

[22] Throughout 'The Art Of Fiction' James addresses himself to 'the keen young fabulist'; he writes for the benefit of other writers. But he also addresses readers, for what is a teller of a tale 'but a more developed reader': Letter to William James, 18 November 1878 (Edel, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 193).

fictional other, and that they recognise that surrender as a moment of sympathy and empathy. The modern philosopher Paul Ricoeur makes this point the basis of his elaborated relationship between the self, narrative identity, and ethics: 'the thought experiments that we conduct in the great laboratory of the imaginary are also explorations in the realm of good and evil'.[23] Ricoeur claims for the experience of reading a primacy in ethical experience and judgement that registers the power of narrative and imagination to transform readers' selves. It is this power that James's self-conscious artworks register in the demands they make on their reader. James dramatises the entry of the critic into the house of fiction as a means of escape from the cultural economy of the late nineteenth century, and as part of a wider sense that the experience of narrative has a profound relationship to our experience as subjects. The evasion of the dominant capitalist narratives of criticism and culture is directly related to this understanding of narratives of self as contested and contestable, not simply given. 'The Art of Fiction' gestures towards an ethics of fiction that James will understand and articulate more fully only in the years to come, in particular in the late novels and in the prefaces; it provides the basis for the method of *What Maisie Knew* and the novels that follow. Recent critics have noted that James recognised a need to create his own audience, and strove to do so.[24] Though this is undoubtedly true, I am suggesting a further reflexive motivation for James's efforts in his understanding of the power of art, and especially of the literary form of the novel, to construct human relations in ways other than those of the cash-nexus.

The critic provides a figure as a model for this experience because of the critic's openness to experience in the form of new works. This openness is troped as a sacrifice. In the *New Review* of May 1891 Henry James, Andrew Lang, and Edmund Gosse each contributed an article entitled 'The Science of Criticism'.[25] James's essay stands out from the others because each of the other two seem only concerned to protect the status of the critic as the necessary explicator of works for the mass reading public. By contrast James begins by employing the language of economics to describe the contemporary state of criticism: Literary criticism is a *commodity* whose existence is dominated by *supply* and *demand*: 'Periodical literature is a huge, open mouth which has to be fed - a vessel of immense capacity which has to be filled, [the] great business of reviewing, in its roaring

[23] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 164.

[24] Two influential recent books based in part upon this suggestion are *The Prefaces of Henry James: Framing The Modern Reader*, ed. by John H. Pearson (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and Michael Anesko, *Friction With The Market: Henry James And The Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[25] Henry James, 'The Science of Criticism', *New Review* , iv (May 1891), pp. 398-402. Reprinted in *Literary Criticism I*, p. 95-99.

routine [is] a new and flourishing industry ... which beguiles one into rendering an involuntary homage to successful enterprise' (*Literary Criticism I*, 95-6). James turns the full glare of his scorn on the *reviewer* who is central to 'the vulgarity, the crudity, the stupidity which [the] cherished combination of the off-hand review and of our wonderful system of publicity have put into circulation on so vast a scale' (*Literary Criticism I*, 95) because reviewers abdicate their potency, the potential of their critical authority, to become merely the means by which mercantile commodifying relations dominate literature. This domination reduces what ought to be a crucial encounter between self and other to simply a mime of the dominant productive relations. This is a sacrifice of an individual's agency to these relations, but James has a more complex sense of sacrifice that he wants to develop. He contrasts the 'high' critic, who he identifies as 'the real helper of the artist, a torch-bearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother', a 'noble figure' (*Literary Criticism I*, 96), with the reviewer, whose only function is mercenary:

> There is something sacrificial in [the critic's] function in as much as he offers himself as a general touchstone. To lend himself, to project himself and steep himself, to feel and feel till he understands, and to understand so well that he can say, to have perception at the pitch of passion and expression as embracing as the air, to be infinitely curious and incorrigibly patient, and yet plastic and inflammable and determinable, stooping to conquer and serving to direct - these are fine chances for the active mind. (*Literary Criticism I*, 98)

The critic seems here to become all at once the ideal reader, the artist themselves and the director of the work. The critic as ideal reader seems to be an actor, able to 'lend himself, project himself and steep himself', able to take on roles in the author's drama. This power of assumption necessitates a mobile free subjectivity, one which resembles precisely Arnold's disinterested critic, possessed of infinite curiosity and incorrigible patience. James's critic becomes a touchstone where for Arnold the touchstone is the work: the object becomes the subject. This mobility is also that of an artist, one who has 'perception at the pitch of passion and expression as embracing as air'. James agrees with Arnold that 'criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge',[26] but he also emphasizes the sacrificial aspect of the critic. Critics are exalted as those who risk themselves in the crucible of culture. Tony Tanner provides a succinct description of this idea of criticism, 'Criticism is not, hereby, as we are often told, the passive consumption of substitute pseudoexperience; it is, rather, the *doubling* of experience. One has one's own experience; then one has the experience of the experience of another'.[27] Here is the encounter between self and other, and it takes place, says James, in the house of fiction

[26] 'The Function of Criticism At The Present Time', *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, p. 285.

[27] Tony Tanner, *Henry James and the Art of Nonfiction*, Jack N. and Addie D. Averitt lecture series (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 28.

where the critic dwells. The critic is *saturated* by experience, and the house of fiction is, in Tanner's lovely formulation, 'the house of writing, which is the house of the experience of others' (29). James calls the sacrifice of the critic *heroic* precisely because it makes their life vicarious: 'his life is heroic, for it is immensely vicarious. He has to understand for others, to answer for them; he is always under arms' (*Literary Criticism I*, 99). This critic is doing battle with and for readers in his role as intermediary between the artwork and the reader. The critic allows themselves to be taken over by the work in order to direct readers; if the critic stoops, he does so *to conquer*. James makes clearer his point when he writes that 'any vocation has its hours of intensity that is so closely connected with life':

> that of the critic, in literature, is connected doubly, for he deals with life at second-hand as well as at first; that is, he deals with the experience of others, which he resolves into his own, and not of those invented and selected others with whom the novelist makes comfortable terms, but with the uncompromising swarm of authors, the clamorous children of history. (*Literary Criticism I*, 99)

This 'answering for others' is the key to the ethical core of James's rewriting of Arnold. The critic has the duty of establishing relations between readers, writers and writings that avoid the commodified relations engendered by the cash nexus. James's curious ironic figuring of the critic's sacrifice as noble enacts a shift in aesthetic productive relations. By allowing the critic entry into the house of fiction, and thus situating him in an analogous position to that of the author, the artwork internalises the productive relations which engulf it, potentially transforming the conditions of production and reception. Sardonically, James inverts the customary relationship between author and critic making the critic the puppet master of the author-puppet (*Literary Criticism I*, 99). The crucial turn in the relationship is understood when we recognise that the critic, in the act of criticism, comes to seem both within the work - he 'lives *in* the house, ranging through its innumerable chambers' - and outside the work, holding the strings of the author-puppet: the critic is, curiously, paradoxically both puppet and puppet master, both controlling and held by the work. As the critic gives himself up to the work, enters into the house of fiction, he 'knows that the whole honour of the matter, for him, besides the success in his own eyes, depends upon his being indefatigably supple' (*Literary Criticism I*, 99). This careful modulation of inside-outside registers the complexity of the shift in the critic's position. The *function* of this kind of criticism is the transformation of the critic through reading, troped first as a battle - 'always under arms' - then as a kind of dumbshow or spectacle. In this pantomime of the critic leading and led, a spectacle of the responsibilities immanent in the reader and the writer, in all the parties who meet in the artwork, appears. Never able to escape their position as lackeys in the modern literary marketplace, critics nevertheless offer a spectacle of agency. When James affirms the critic's double connection with life, 'he deals with life at second-hand as well as at first',

he affirms the self-consciousness of the critic in his or her response to both art and the world. We might almost say that to add to this doubled connection with life, James's critic has a doubled double responsibility: a responsibility to the works and a responsibility to the authors, 'the clamorous children of history'; and these responsibilities entail further responsibilities, those owed to the individual consciousnesses understood as readers, and to history understood as the record and analysis in imaginative writing of human social consciousness and experience.

The house of fiction, James's favourite and most famous architectural metaphor, provides him with a home for his critic. While describing the importance of Arnold for the foreigner, he writes that the English, unconscious of their own way of life, live with 'their tacit assumption that their form of life is the normal one'. This makes their collective life a:

> huge blank surface, a mighty national wall, against which the perceptive, *the critical effort* of the presumptuous stranger wastes itself, until, after a little he espies, in the measureless spaces, a little aperture, a window which is suddenly thrown open, and at which a friendly and intelligent face is presented, the harbinger of a voice of greeting. With this agreeable apparition he communes - the voice is delightful, it has a hundred tones and modulations; and as he stands there the dead screen seems to vibrate and grow transparent. (*Literary Criticism* I, 721)

Arnold the critic, within the monolithic national home, allows the foreigner an insight into the English mind. The face of the critic appears at a window in the liminal surface of the nation-wall, which is at once a barrier and a text, a blank slate or 'dead screen' which represents the unreadable national consciousness. The voice of the critic makes intelligible this text, turning the wall or dead screen into an enormous window. The critic as intermediary may remain set apart from his fellow men but s/he is not homeless - theirs is the house of fiction.

Oscar Wilde: the critic as alien as Irishman

Matthew Arnold provided Oscar Wilde with an example of a critical persona that he impersonated, parodied, and, in so doing, transformed. This role-playing occurs in the complex staging that Wilde directs in his critical essays of the dominant discourses of criticism and culture. The ideas of Arnold, Ruskin and Pater appear in the essays in various (dis)guises, and these appearances allow Wilde to interrogate the assumptions, complicities and weaknesses of contemporary critical discourse. Wilde, costumed as an Arnoldian general critic, employs Arnold's terms to destabilise the very formations to which Arnold made criticism bow. Wilde emphasises the multiple subjectivity of the critic as an intermediate subject position with similar ethical possibilities to those

discussed above. Wilde's rewriting of Arnold reveals the complicities of Arnoldian criticism with colonialist discourses of race, and suggests the political possibilities of the intermediate subject position his rewriting scripts. This subject position makes a political agency available to the artist, the critic, and the reader.

Wilde, no less than James, followed the career of Arnold. Richard Ellmann notes that as a talented young man with his way to make in the world, newly graduated from Oxford, Wilde turned quite literally to Arnold's example - he applied to be an inspector of schools (Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 104). The incongruity of the application disguises the very real respect in which Wilde held Arnold. In 1881 Wilde sent Arnold an effusive letter along with a copy of his first volume of poetry to which Arnold replied with thanks to a fellow-worker in poetry and prose (*Complete Letters*, 112; Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 137-8). Both men visited America early in the 1880s to lecture on art and culture, and the idea of America as the new democratic mass society is an important component in Wilde's response to Arnold. Examining their lectures, we can recognise both some early similarities and some moments when Wilde's concerns bring him up against the limits of Arnold's narrative.

Wilde's main lecture during his tour was 'The English Renaissance in Art' (which became after revision 'The Decorative Arts'), a lecture arguing for the transformation of everyday life by art, a transformation which is also a dramatic shift in the relations of production. Decorative art will 'hallow the vessels of everyday life,' it will be 'a democratic art made by the hands of the people and for the benefit of the people' (*Complete Works*, 926). Wilde charges that 'art is no mere accident of existence which men may take or leave, but a very necessity of human life, if we are to live as nature intended us to live, that is, unless we are content to be something less than men.' The problem is not only that art at present is 'confined to the few ... a luxury for the rich and idle' (*Complete Works*, 927) but that the very relations of production are creating a 'now-widening chasm between capital and labour' (*Complete Works*, 933). Wilde follows Ruskin when he asserts that the meaning of decorative art is 'the value the workman places on his work, the pleasure that he must take in making a beautiful thing' (*Complete Works*, 926), and not its value as a commodity. The dishonesty of the present day, Wilde argues, lies in the false utility of modern consumer goods which do not last and are ugly because they are not the product of loving work but the product of alienated labour. These goods are emblems of the widening gap. The deliberate mundanity of Wilde's examples - carpets, stoves, machine-made furniture - actively embraces his theme of art in the everyday, and should not disguise the radical transformation of society implied. At a material level reinvesting the artisan with the necessary stature can only be achieved Wilde argues, by transforming the very shape and appearance of modern cities (*Complete Works*, 929). Wilde asks how is the workman 'to supply beautiful incident and action in

his work unless he sees beautiful incident in the world about him?' Artisans also need schools of art where they can learn rational design and accompanying museums of decorative art where they can study the decorative work of the ages. Venturing into this museum, Wilde says, 'the man of refinement and culture comes face-to-face with the workman who ministers to his joy; he comes to know more of the workman, and the workman, feeling the appreciation, goes away with a heightened sense of the nobility of his calling' (*Complete Works*, 931); in the museum the classes of the modern democracy come face to face. The reciprocity of this meeting is crucial for it is what art fosters:

> Art will do more than make our lives joyous and beautiful; it will become part of the new history of the world and a part of the brotherhood of man; for art, by creating a common intellectual atmosphere between all countries might, if it could not overshadow the world with silvery wings of peace, at least make men such brothers that they would not go out to slay one another for the whim or folly of some king or minister, as they do in Europe, for national hatreds are always strongest where culture is lowest. (*Complete Works*, 934)

The similarities of Wilde's concerns to Arnold's are clear: education, along with art and culture, can transform society; the present age is dishonest and mistakes means for ends; and art and culture add 'something spiritual to life' (*Complete Works*, 936). The differences in Wilde's address to these shared concerns mark his careful reconsideration of Arnoldian terms. Wilde embraces the mundane, the everyday. His education does not accustom the people to the stringent powers of the state, but reunites them with their own labour. The 'something spiritual' that art and culture add to life is explicitly linked to the *material* transformation of the relations of production, rather than Arnold's nebulous suggestion that culture, working though education, will alter how people think. Wilde indicates the dishonesty of the present day with concrete everyday examples which stand metonymically for the circulation of commodities, rather than as Arnold does by abjuring all responsibility for the current situation, implying that it is the philistines and the populace that have in their ignorance and avarice brought about this condition themselves and now need to be saved. Wilde is as concerned with future relations between states as Arnold, but he is more pointed about the actual gains that future peace might offer; fewer deaths occasioned by whim and folly. Wilde's similarities to Arnold identify the shared concerns of the two men, while the differences of his address begin to mark the limits of the Arnoldian discourse of criticism.

Late in the 1880s Wilde was still impersonating Arnold quite sincerely. In 'The Poets and The People, by one of the latter' an unsigned article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1887, Wilde seems sincere when he echoes Arnold - poets are the men to whom we must look now to inspire the people with hope and courage, 'to fill them with a desire after righteousness and duty' (*The Artist as Critic*, 43). The obvious joke in the title here is

still an important one. Wilde identifies himself as one of the people, not one of the poets, suggesting both that a poet can be of the people and that though he does not necessarily assume the role of one who will inspire hope and courage, neither does he refuse it. I read this as a play upon his public persona as dilettante, and as a coded announcement of the serious political basis of his criticism. He does not shy away from unambiguous statements of social concerns; 'The struggle to live in all parts of Western Europe, and perhaps especially England, is so fierce that we are in danger of having all that is idealistic and beautiful crushed out of us by the steam engine and the manipulations of the stock exchanges' (*The Artist as Critic*, 45). Wilde chooses similar metonyms to Arnold when he chooses steam engines and stock exchanges as emblems of modern *machinery*, though 'the manipulations of the stock exchanges' aims opprobrium rather more pointedly than Arnold normally manages. Another difference of emphasis is Wilde's explicit concern with suffering, 'The people are suffering and are likely to suffer more; where is the poet who is the one man needful to rouse the nation to a sense of duty and to inspire the people with hope?' (*The Artist as Critic*, 45) Wilde continues to share Arnold's terms and concerns but his language registers their insufficiency, their lack of real power of address.

Wilde's volume of criticism *Intentions* (1891) is suffused with Arnold's legacy. Richard Ellmann, in an astute throwaway observation, notes that *Intentions* 'was written during the three years following Arnold's death and published in 1891, as if to take over the critical burden and express what Arnold had failed to say' (*The The Artist as Critic*, xi). The centre-piece of that volume, the two part dialogue 'The Critic As Artist' is a careful comic manipulation of Arnold's cultural legacy and appropriates his terms. When Gilbert tells Ernest that the 'critical spirit' was prevalent throughout Hellenic society and that it remains our principal debt to the Greeks, he follows Arnold's valorisation of Hellenistic culture, and echoes Arnold in his use of the phrase. The importance and power of this critical spirit is substantiated by Wilde when he writes:

> The nineteenth century is a turning point in history, simply on account of two men, Darwin and Renan, the one the critic of the Book of Nature, the other the critic of the books of God. Not to recognise this is to miss the meaning of one of the most important eras in the progress of the world. Creation is always behind the age. It is Criticism that leads us (*Complete Works*, 1154).

This statement comes late in 'The Critic As Artist' and is important because it suggests three things; it suggests the authority Wilde wants for his protean critic, the authority of a Darwin or Renan; it provides examples of his *flawless type*, the aesthetic critic, who will 'concern himself not with the individual, but with the age, which he will seek to wake into consciousness' (*Complete Works*, 1149); and it registers his complicated strategy in the dialogue, his attempt to rewrite Arnold's narrative. It also indicates some of the common

ground between Arnold and Wilde. Where they agree is on the power and authority of the critic and criticism, and in their characterisation of the mid-to-late nineteenth century as an age of criticism; Arnold wrote that before the epoch of expansion begins, criticism is necessary (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, 269). Where they disagree is on how this society might be reconstructed: Arnold sees culture as the agent that occasions transformation, Wilde asks 'whose culture?'

The punning title of Wilde's dialogue in its periodical publication - 'The True Function and Value of Criticism: With Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue' - publicly parades his rewriting of Arnold's terms and indicates the dominant strategy of his criticism.[28] This is a paradoxical double movement which asserts the aloofness of the critic by explicitly denying the utility of criticism, while simultaneously asserting the necessity of criticism:

> The contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming* - that is what the critical spirit can give us. [...] There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours. [...] We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid. The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make oneself useful (*Complete Works*, 1138-9).

With this almost direct quote from Walter Pater's essay on Wordsworth in his volume *Appreciations* Wilde impersonates Pater rewriting Arnold.[29] Pater adapts Arnold's idea of criticism when he writes that the work of the critic is 'not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends, but to withdraw the thoughts for a while from *the mere machinery of life*, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects.'[30] Pater stresses the contemplative aspect of the critic at the expense of the critic's contribution to change, refusing the equation that Arnold had drawn between the action of the critical spirit on the individual critic and the spectacle of the critic's disinterestedness and curiosity which educates as it informs. Wilde's impersonation records this refusal, the rejection of Arnold's stress on utility, as a metonymy for a refusal of the hegemonic social formation which demanded that intellectual and aesthetic labour be situated in the sphere of commodity exchange, contributing to that economy. Wilde's staging of the interaction

[28] Oscar Wilde, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism: With Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue', *Nineteenth Century*, XXVIII, (1890); in two parts - pt. I, (July), no.161, pp.123-147; pt. II, (September), no.163, pp. 435-459.

[29] Walter Pater, *Appreciations* (1889), in Walter Pater, *The Complete Works of Walter Pater*, 6 vols (London: Macmillan & Co, 1900), vol. 5, p. 61-2.

[30] Wilde quoting Pater in his review of *Appreciations*: 'Mr Pater's last volume', *Speaker* I: 12, 22 (March 1890); reprinted in *The Artist as Critic*, p. 229-34 (p. 233): emphasis added.

between Arnold and Pater allows him to critique both critical prescriptions. Pater's concentration on 'the narrow chamber of the individual mind', on experience 'ringed around for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world' is noted for its narrow focus and the retreat from the social world that it implies.[31] Though Wilde may seem to be concentrating on the impressions and personality of the critic in 'The Critic As Artist', he never reaches the solipsistic extreme that Pater outlines. The opposite pole of this inward turn by Pater is recognised by Wilde in the final utility of Arnold's critic and his criticism. Arnold's disinterested criticism is put to very practical uses - it provides a legitimising rationale for political oppression.

This is particularly apparent in Arnold's essay 'The Incompatibles', written during the preparation of the Irish Land Bill, and which appeared first in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1881 and was reprinted in *Irish Essays* (1882). I earlier quoted some of these words written by Arnold, but they gain a new reference when quoted in their context. Arnold writes:

> Serious people at the present day may well be inclined, though they have no Socrates to help them, at any rate to stand aside, as he did, from the movement of our prominent politicians and journalists, and of the rank and file who appear to follow, but who really do oftenest direct them; - to stand aside, and to try whether they cannot bring themselves, at all events, to a better sense of their own condition and of the condition of the people and things around them (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 9, 268).

This is critical disinterestedness along Socratic lines but in the context of Arnold's essay this disinterestedness seems a high price for the critic to pay. In Wilde's essay this aloofness becomes the 'high tower of thought', from which Gilbert says, the critic can 'look out at the world ... calm, self-centred, and complete ... he is safe' (*Complete Works*, 1139). In his essay Arnold goes on to write that 'I do not object, wherever I see disorder, to see coercion applied to it': the Irish need to be kept in line while the English middle class are educated the better to govern the Irish who are incapable of governing themselves (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 250, 314). In 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', Arnold states the relation of his critic's aloofness to the transformation of society. Citing Joubert he writes, '*Force till right is ready;* and till right is ready, force, the existing order of things is justified, is the legitimate ruler' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3,

[31] Walter Pater, 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* (1873), in *The Works of Walter Pater*, (London: Macmillan & Co. 1900), vol. 1, p. 235.

265-6). The dangerous, ugly face that Wilde sees lurking behind Arnold's formulation of the critic is that of the absentee landlord, the metropolitan beneficiary of colonial wealth, both material and cultural; and the echoes that Wilde hears in such statements are of those moments when Arnold's mask of sincerity and good conscience slips:

> The difference between an Irish Fenian and an English rough is so immense and the case, in dealing with the Fenian, so much more clear. He is so immensely desperate and dangerous, a man of conquered race, a Papist, with centuries of ill-usage to inflame him against us, with an alien religion established in his country by us at his expense, with no admiration of our institutions, no love of our virtues, no talents for our business, no turn for our comfort! (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, 121)

This critic is not simply impotent in the face of coercion, nor does he only acquiesce in it, his whole conception of his role and its place in culture registers his unwitting participation on the theatricalized stage of the dominant imperial culture.

This awareness on Wilde's part of the legitimising part that the contemporary discourses of criticism played in England's treatment of her dominions can be recognised in his review of James Anthony Froude's 1889 novel *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*. Wilde's review is explicit concerning the relations of fictional, non-fictional and critical discourse to England's oppression of Ireland. He begins by equating Froude's fiction with the non-fiction parliamentary Blue Books, and goes on to write that the Blue Books on Ireland represent 'the record of one of the great tragedies of modern Europe. In them England has written down her indictment against herself, and has given to the world the history of her shame'.[32] Froude was best known as a historian, author of a twelve-volume *History of England* (1856-70), rather than as a novelist and Wilde, as well as other reviewers, recognised this latest novel as historical and political exposition in the form of a romance.[33] The novel concerns the confrontation between Colonel Goring and Morty Sullivan, 'the Cromwellian and the Celt' (*The Artist as Critic*, 137). Colonel Goring, Froude's hero, has the words, Wilde writes:

> Law and Order ever on his lips, meaning by the one the enforcement of unjust legislation, and implying by the other the suppression of every fine natural aspiration. That the government should enforce iniquity, and the governed submit to it, seems to be to Mr. Froude, as it certainly is to many others, the true ideal of political science. Like most pen men he overrates the power of the sword (*The Artist as Critic*, 137).

[32] Review of J. A. Froude's *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy* (1889) in *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 1889; reprinted in *The Artist as Critic*, pp.136-140.

[33] The *Scotsman* reviewer also felt that Froude's novel bore (pun intended) more than a passing resemblance to a parliamentary report. Contemporary reviews are quoted in Waldo Hilary Dunn, *James Anthony Froude: A Biography 1818-1894*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

Froude's fictional discourse is explicitly concerned with legitimising the present historical situation by providing a historical narrative that represents the origins of that situation. Wilde's final *mot*, 'like most pen-men he overrates the power of the sword', plays ironically on and against Froude. In attempting to pen a legitimising narrative Froude cannot escape emphasising the need for such a narrative; in his turn to the might of the pen, he employs a weapon that cuts both ways. Wilde closes his review with a series of strange aphorisms reputedly drawn from Froude's novel. These aphorisms, some obviously Wilde's inventions, others of more ambiguous origin, simultaneously mock Froude's pomposity while also emphasising that the similarities between fiction and non-fiction are not simply coincidence: 'The Irish are the best actors in the world' is pure Wilde, but what of 'The Irish peasants can make the country hot for Protestant gentlemen, but that is all they are fit for'? Wilde is playful and serious when he writes 'Order is an exotic in Ireland. It has been imported from England, but it will not grow. It suits neither soil nor climate. If the English wanted order in Ireland, they should have left none of us alive' (*The Artist as Critic*, 140). Wilde emphasises the crossing and recrossing of the boundaries between non-fictional and fictional discourse that Froude's novel enacts to reveal the rhetorical strategies that these discourses share and, in so doing, pinpoints the motives which impel the denial of this commonality. Froude's novel is commensurate with Arnold's criticism and the contemporary racialist ethnography; fiction, criticism, and science are linked as Wilde stages their shared assumptions, and we recognise that behind Arnold's reasonable facade lies Froude's naked aggression.

This staging of the encounter between different facets of the discourses of the dominant imperial culture reveals them for the masks they are. Wilde apes Arnold when he writes in 'The Critic as Artist'; 'England will never be civilized till she has added Utopia to her dominions. There is more than one of her colonies that she might with advantage surrender for so fair a land' (*Complete Works*, 1140). This neatly exposes as a mask the ideal of the civilizing role for the critic. Arnold's worldliness is revealed by applying the terms of imperial discourse to the colonisation of an utopia. Here is another impersonation of Arnold:

> What we want are unpractical people who see beyond the moment, and think beyond the day. Those who try to lead the people can only do so by following the mob. It is through the voice of one crying in the wilderness that the ways of Gods must be prepared. (*Complete Works*, 1140)

This disinterested critic is a voice crying in the wilderness for a better world. Wilde's practice in his critical dialogues has been dismissed as simple parody, aphorism for aphorism's sake, without a closer examination of what parody entails. His impersonation of Arnold is parodic and a parody is a performance which shifts the terms of the original. Parody allows Wilde to stage the encounter between Arnold and his opposite. But

Wilde's response to Arnold does more than parody when it goes on to offer an alternative view of the critic. The voice heard above is not that of an Arnoldian critic, nor that of Arnold himself. It is not the voice of a critic concerned explicitly with the *function* of criticism at the present. The critic occupies an intermediary position not simply between the artist and the public, nor between the work and the public, but between the present and the future: the critic thinks beyond the day in order to recognise and realise the future. This voice crying in the wilderness shares with the artist a self-consciousness, a 'fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection', yet is one who does not suffer from the blindness of the creative artist, a blindness which results from the 'very concentration of vision that makes a man an artist [which] limits by its sheer intensity his faculty of fine appreciation' (*Complete Works*, 1150). Wilde's critic is at once an artist and sees further than the artist, sees into the future.

The foresight of Wilde's critic is a crucial political power that I will return to in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that Wilde understood criticism as a discourse within which identities could be contested and ethical judgements made. The critic Gerry Smyth theorises criticism as 'a discourse in which both colonial and anti-colonial strategies gain their force and their coherence', and he is concerned to investigate how criticism, which he argues functions in a 'structurally similar way to colonialism', became 'during the eighteenth century, with the consolidation of a new Anglo-Irish community and the beginnings of the modern phase of catholic Irish resistance ... the specific location for the production and consolidation of colonialist representations.'[34] It is within a genealogy of Irish critical discourse that Smyth locates Oscar Wilde as a writer set against the dominant Irish critical tradition, a tradition which as it 'construed a definite and vital relationship between literature and nation' repeats the logic of the colonizer, familiar from the writings of Arnold and Renan. [35] This logic of colonialist representations of the Celtic 'races' can be traced through Renan's *La Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854), and in Arnold's 'On The Study Of Celtic Literature' (1866).[36] Wilde, along with George Bernard Shaw, Smyth suggests, 'foregrounds the role of the critic' as a means of 'refusing the dominant narrow national basis' which dictates the Irish *function* of criticism; which is in

[34] Gerry Smyth, 'Decolonisation And Criticism: Towards A Theory Of Irish Critical Discourse', in *Ireland And Cultural Theory: The Mechanics Of Authenticity*, ed. by Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 29-49 (p. 31-2).

[35] Gerry Smyth, *Decolonisation And Criticism: The Construction Of Irish Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 79-83.

[36] See especially Ernest Renan's *La Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854), first translated into English by William G. Hutchison as *The Poetry Of The Celtic Races And Other Studies* (London: W. Scott, 1896), and Matthew Arnold 'On The Study Of Celtic Literature' in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, pp. 291-395.

itself merely a shade of the dominant English conception of criticism's utility.[37] Wilde, by contrast, suggests:

> that the critic will indeed be an interpreter, but he will not be an interpreter in the sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has been put into his lips to say. For, just as it is by contact with the art of foreign nations that the art of a country gains that individual and separate life that we call nationality, so, by curious inversion, it is only by intensifying his own personality that the critic can interpret the personality and work of others (*Complete Works*, 1131).

Wilde's critic is no unconscious mimic of the colonizer, not the citizen who dwells in Barney Kiernan's as Joyce will comically characterise Irish nationalists in *Ulysses*. Rather, his critic is a site where the competing cultural discourses are self-consciously recognized for what they are and the dangers they hold. Wilde's impersonation "performs" in two senses a critique and it is guided by his deeply grasped understanding that Arnold's project is nothing less than a continuation and perpetuation of the colonizing of the mind and the imagination by which the colonizer maintains mastery over the colonized. Wilde the Irishman has an almost uncomfortably high profile now, though this is in itself a recent phenomenon, as Owen Dudley Edwards notes. Yet Edwards seems correct in stating that 'Ireland had given Wilde the main impetus to a democracy of friendship and a socialism of ideas because he had to violate totems and taboos of his specific Irish heritage'.[38] Declan Kiberd has argued that Wilde learned to be Irish only as he became more English than the English; 'Wearing the mask of the English Oxonian, Wilde was paradoxically freed to become more "Irish" than he could ever have been back in Ireland.'[39] Kiberd rightly stresses that Wilde understood identity to be dialogic:

> The other was the truest friend since it was from that other that a sense of self was derived. A person went out to the other and returned with a self, getting to know others simply to find out what they think of him or herself. This seeing of the entire world through the other's eyes was an essential process in the formation of a balanced individual [...] Identity was predicated on difference, but the colonizers of the 1880s and 1890s were conveniently forgetting that fact in their anxiety to make over the world in their image; and they would have to be reminded. A somewhat similar jolt must also be given to those national chauvinists who were too eager to deny any value to occupier culture; and Wilde, by announcing the Irish

[37] Smyth, *Decolonisation And Criticism: The Construction Of Irish Literature*, p. 80.

[38] Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Oscar Wilde: The Soul of Man Under Hibernicism', in *Reviewing Ireland: Essays and Reviews From Irish Studies Review*, ed. by Sarah Briggs, Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (Bath: Sulis Press, 1998), pp. 105-14 (p. 111).

[39] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, chapter 2, 'Oscar Wilde: The Artist As Irishman', pp. 31-50 (p. 48).

> renaissance with works that appeared to be set in England, administered that rebuke.[40]

Walking this tightrope, Wilde argues for criticism and the critic to bring into being the next age of humanity. The critic of literature who realises 'himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways', and who is 'ever curious of new sensations and fresh points of view' indicates the openness and curiosity that Wilde's critic shares with Arnold's and James's critic. The mobile subjectivity that Wilde calls for enacts dialogic identity in its dialectical relation to the artwork, refusing the usual hierarchy of relations between producers and consumers. Like Arnold before him Wilde stresses constant change as the paradoxical, elusive, essential characteristic of the critic's identity:

> Through constant change, and through constant change alone, [the critic] will find his true unity. He will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions. For what is the mind in motion in the intellectual sphere? The essence of thought, as the essence of life, is growth. You must not be frightened of words, Ernest. What people call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities (*Complete Works*, 1144-5).

This performance of personality, not 'being' but 'becoming', is dialogic. To refuse to be a slave to one's own opinions is to recognise and resist the hardening of theory into dogma. The multiplication of personalities enacts the embrace of the other, not as an aggressive act of mastery, as Lord Henry attempts with Dorian - 'to influence a person is to give him one's own soul ... he becomes an echo of someone else's music' (*Complete Works*, 28) - nor of containment, as Arnold theorises the relation between English identity and Irish, but as a recognition of the value of difference. Such a critical practice 'will annihilate race prejudices, by insisting upon the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms' (*Complete Works*, 1153). The result of this openness to difference, Wilde argues, is that 'we shall be able to realise, not merely our own lives, but the collective life of the race, and so as to make ourselves absolutely modern, in the true meaning of the word modernity' (*Complete Works*, 1137). Other readers of Wilde have recognised this possibility of an 'alternative critical politics', as Gerry Smyth terms it.[41] This politics is apparent in Wilde's writing as early as 'The Rise of Historical Criticism', his 1879 essay submitted for the Chancellor's essay prize at Oxford. Opening the essay he writes:

[40] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 49.

[41] Smyth's suggestion that 'the very situation which allowed Wilde to adopt and develop this attitude - his Irish 'otherness' located at the heart of the metropolitan power - also denied him full access to a nomenclature dominated by cultural nationalism', and that 'with his exclusion an alternative critical politics, based upon an alternative version of the relationship between culture and nation was lost' is compelling within the genealogy that he traces: Smyth, *Decolonisation And Criticism: The Construction Of Irish Literature*, p. 80-1.

> Criticism is part of that complex working towards freedom which may be described as the revolt against authority. It is merely one facet of that speculative spirit of innovation, which in the sphere of action produces democracy and revolution, and in that of thought is the parent of philosophy and physical science; and its importance as a factor of progress is based not so much on the results it attains, as on the tone of thought which it represents, and the method by which it works. (*Complete Works* 1198)

This spirit of innovation certainly appears to be similar to Arnold's idea of the critical spirit as the modern element in literature, but Wilde characteristically holds fast to the commitments of this 'complex working towards freedom', commitments at which Arnold baulks. The kinship of historical criticism is with democracy and revolution, and with epistemological change. The importance of this kind of criticism is its dialogic character which sets 'the tone of thought which it represents, and the method by which it works'. That method is a theatrical one which offers the reader, through the example of the critic, an understanding of identity which is characterised by 'an insistence on the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms', an insistence not on the homogeneity of identity, but on the existence of heterogeneous identities. We can follow the development of Wilde's understanding of the political significance of dialogical identity if we attend to the links that Wilde makes between the Irish situation and the American, and the problem they present for the dominant discourses of imperialism. America also presents Wilde with an example of an avowedly democratic, inclusive poetics in the form of Walt Whitman's political poetic project, an example of an alternative to the established English discourses of criticism.

The important new fact that English writers like Froude and Arnold do not consider, Wilde notes, is that of the Irish-American: 'America and American influence has educated [the Irish]; their first practical leader is an Irish American', meaning Charles Stewart Parnell. 'There are others who will remember that Ireland has extended her boundaries and that we have now to reckon with her not merely in the Old world but also in the New' (*The Artist as Critic*, 140). The internationalist view across the Atlantic has here for Wilde a similar importance to that which we recognised in James's writings. America stands here as a positive powerful idea and emblem of diversity that affronts the Imperial English hegemony. This diversity affronts, amongst other things, one of the dominant categories of imperial discourse, namely race. In 'The Critic As Artist' Wilde targets race and heredity, nimbly reworking their significance in a positive fashion:

> By revealing to us the absolute mechanism of all action, and so *freeing us from the self-imposed and trammelling burden of moral responsibility*, the scientific principle of Heredity has become, as it were, the warrant for the contemplative life. It has shown us *that we are never less free than when we try to act*. It has hemmed us around with the nets of the hunter, and written upon the wall the prophecy of our doom. We may not watch it , for it is within us. We may not see it, save in a mirror

> that mirrors the soul. It is nemesis without her mask. It is the last of the Fates, and the most terrible. It is the only one of the Gods whose real name we know (*Complete Works*, 1137; emphasis added).

Beginning with the most exaggerated claims of what heredity might explain - an 'absolute mechanism' governing 'all action' - Wilde puts the notion of heredity through its logical paces. If heredity determines action then it undermines agency resulting in a mechanistic and painful inhuman view of existence. So far this is nothing more than a familiar contemporary response to the consequences of evolutionary science. The twist that Wilde gives heredity is that he emphasises that as a doctrine it implies that our essence, our soul is not ours alone: 'the soul that dwells within us is no single spiritual entity, making us personal and individual, created for our service, and entering into us for our joy' (*Complete Works*, 1138), it is rather 'concentrated race experience'. He takes what offers superiority and singularity through essence in the familiar formulation and inverts the reasoning to highlight the multiplicity of the soul. This multiplicity is realised in the poetics and poetry of Walt Whitman whom Wilde read, reviewed, and visited in the 1880s.

Wilde's laudatory review of Whitman's *November Boughs* gives some indication of the importance of Whitman for Wilde as an alternative to Arnold and the English establishment. Whitman's version of the intermediate subject position of the critic and artist enacts the mobile multiple subjectivity that I argue Wilde seeks. What Wilde lauds in Whitman is 'a grand free acceptance of all things that are worthy of existence' (*The Artist as Critic*, 124-5).[42] For Whitman, Wilde writes, 'Literature ... has a distinctly social aim. He seeks to build up the masses by "building up grand individuals." And yet literature itself must be preceded by nobler forms of life. "The best literature is always the result of something far greater than itself - not the hero but the portrait of the hero. Before there can be recorded history or poem, there must be the transaction."... Certainly in Walt Whitman's views there is a largeness of vision, a healthy sanity, and a fine ethical purpose' (*The Artists as Critic*, 125). One of the unusual qualities of the review is that Wilde quotes Whitman at considerable length, allowing him to speak effectively both for himself, and for Wilde. Wilde quotes Whitman writing, 'I have allowed the stress of my poems from beginning to end to bear upon American individuality and assist it':

> Not only because that is a great lesson in Nature amid all her generalizing laws, but as a counterpoise to the levelling tendencies of Democracy. ... I avowedly chant "the great pride of a man in himself," and permit it to be more or less a motif of nearly all my verse. I think this pride indispensable to an American. I think it not inconsistent

[42] Oscar Wilde, 'The Gospel According To Walt Whitman', unsigned review of *November Boughs*, *Pall Mall Gazette* XLIX, 7444, (25th January 1889), p. 3; reprinted in *The Artist as Critic*, pp. 121-5.

> with obedience, humility, deference, and self-questioning. (*The Artist as Critic*, 124)

Wilde values Whitman's insistence that literature and criticism can provide 'counterpoise to the levelling tendencies of democracy'. Wilde adeptly notes that it is precisely when Whitman rejects notions of artistry and seeks to make himself one with the quotidian, the everyday of the people, that he is most an artist (*The Artist as Critic*, 122). The value of Whitman is that he 'stands apart' and, 'the chief value of his work is in its prophecy not in its performance. He has begun a prelude to larger themes. He is the herald to a new era. As a man he is a precursor of a fresh type. He is a factor in the heroic and spiritual evolution of the human being' (*The Artist as Critic*, 125). Whitman negotiates the difficult relationship of the individual to the mass of people and he does so through a dialogic conception of a multiple subjectivity, through adopting and performing multiple subject positions. Wilde's review makes the link between evolutionary science, the development of democratic subjects, and the role that the poet and the artist play in that development.

In *Democratic Vistas*, republished in London in 1888 as Wilde was working on his review, Whitman acknowledges and faces, he claims, 'the appalling dangers of universal suffrage' and addresses 'him or her within whose thought rages the battle, advancing, retreating, between democratic convictions, aspirations, and the people's crudeness, vice, caprices'.[43] What is wanted, argues Whitman, 'is a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatuses, far different and higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern':

> Fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision, affecting politics far more than the popular universal suffrage ... accomplishing ... a religious and moral character beneath the political and productive and intellectual bases of the states. For know you not, dear, earnest reader, that the people of our land may all read and write, and may all possess the right to vote - and yet the main things may be entirely lacking? (364)

Whitman's class of literatus resemble at least superficially Arnold's 'great men' and aliens. The important difference, and the one that Wilde marks, is that Whitman is committed to balancing the competing demands of individualism and communal living by emphasising both the value of the individual and of the mass, unlike Arnold who hesitates fatally whenever he needs must consider the enfranchised. Whitman asserts a reciprocity between the individual and the group to which Arnold cannot accede: 'The master' writes Whitman, 'sees greatness and health in being part of the mass; nothing

[43] Walt Whitman, 'Democratic Vistas' in Walt Whitman, *Prose Works*, ed. by Floyd Stavall, 2 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1964), vol.2, p.361-425 (p. 363).

will do as well as common ground' (381). In other words, the teacher may recognise and establish possible new democratic types, and they do this not at the expense of the mass of mankind, with a secret contempt and fear of that mass, but with a love of that mass. The emblem of this reciprocity is Whitman's openness to all aspects of modern American life, an embrace of heterogeneity that is the antithesis of Arnold's drive to homogenize. For Wilde this openness implies an ethics which he locates in what Whitman calls *suggestiveness*: 'The reader will have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. I seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought - there to pursue your own flight' (*The Artist as Critic*, 123). The ethical purpose that Wilde lauds in Whitman is this meeting and mingling, literature as the site of the accomplishment of 'a religious and moral character beneath the political, and productive, and intellectual bases' in modern states. Whitman the artist comes to seem the very type of Wilde's critic-artist whose similarities with Henry James's 'torch bearing outrider', who is 'sentient and restless, reacts and reciprocates and penetrates', are pronounced (*Literary Criticism I*, 98).

Wilde recognises in Whitman an attempt to negotiate the political relationship of the individual to the mass, and of the artist to the mass of people, through a poetics which depends upon subjective mobility, registered in an openness both to safe and dangerous experiences.[44] This openness is the action of the critical spirit that Wilde understands from his classical training and that he develops from Arnold; in Whitman's example he sees the performance of a willed mobile subjectivity. Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (first published 1851, revised insistently thereafter) provides the clearest examples of this performance. Whitman sets out to sing America and himself, to imagine every possible individual, from the carpenter to the slave, the youngest member of the community to the oldest. The poet traverses time and space imaginatively thinking himself into Americans. Whitman insists on the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms, and the poem enacts the variety of those forms in its sharply etched vignettes of American life - the trapper's marriage, the runaway slave, the butcher boy - and in its compendium of individual lives glimpsed for a moment - the carpenter, the duck-shooter, the lunatic, the deckhands making fast the steamboat. These are the leaves of grass, each individual, each standing beside the next. Whitman writes:

> I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
> Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
> Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
> Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff
> that is fine, (Lines 330-33)

[44] I consider in greater detail the complexities of Wilde's use of the term 'individualism' in my third chapter.

Neither age, gender, nor wisdom are barriers to inclusion in Whitman's song. This principle of acceptance necessarily problematises the usual hierarchies which generate identities, as Whitman notes: 'What is a man anyhow? What am I? And what are you?/ All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,/ else it were time lost listening to me' (lines 391-3). This identity is a willed act of creation shared with the other, identified by Whitman as the *message* of the song. The poet asserts that he recognises in himself each of the many that make up the mass:

> In all people I see my self, none more and not one a barleycorn less
> And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them. (401-2)
>
> [....]
>
> I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
> And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
> And I say there is nothing greater then the mother of men. (426-8)

This is the optimist Whitman, acknowledging the many in the one. The basis of this unity is an adhesiveness based in amativeness or love. In the preface to the 1876 edition of 'Leaves of Grass' Whitman 'makes a full confession'. He wrote the poems 'to arouse and set flowering in men's and women's hearts ... endless streams of living, pulsating love and friendship, directly from them to myself, now and ever.' The desire for this love is the 'terrible, irrepressible yearning (surely more or less down underneath in most human souls) - this-never satisfied appetite for sympathy, and this boundless offering of sympathy - this universal comradeship -this old, eternal, yet ever-new interchange of adhesiveness' (784). The erotic meeting of individuals figures the love that binds each to all for Whitman. Without a recognition of this principle, the revolutionary impact of Whitman's song is lost as Wilde is well aware. In his review he quotes at length Whitman's response to William Rossetti's *bowdlerised* (the word is Wilde's) 1868 edition of *Leaves of Grass*:[45]

> "Leaves Of Grass" is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality - though meanings that do not usually go with these words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall say only the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted ... Universal as are certain facts and symptoms of

[45] Walt Whitman, *Poems*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Hotten, 1868).

> communities there is nothing so rare in modern conventions and poetry as their normal recognizance. Literature is always calling in the doctor for consultation and confession, and always giving evasions and swathing suppressions in place of that 'heroic nudity' on which only a genuine diagnosis can be built. (*The Artist as Critic,* 124)

Amativeness, the espousing principle of the poem, is the literal embrace of collective individualities. The significance of Wilde's choice of quotation though is, I think, twofold. Coded here is a recognition of the possibilities of Whitman's statement that the 'meanings that do not usually go with these words are behind all, and will duly emerge': Whitman's amativeness is that of the relations between the sexes, as Wilde writes (*The Artist as Critic,* 124), and also that of 'The Wound-Dresser'. It rests in the playful syntactical ambiguity of 'O maidens and young men I love and that love me,' (line 13, 334), to the open homoeroticism of '(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd/ and rested,/ Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)' (lines 64-5). Explicit in Wilde's review is the recognition that 'for the true creation and revealing' of Whitman's democratic, poetic, erotic personality 'a new stimulus was needed. This came from the civil war' (*The Artist as Critic,* 123). Implicit is the recognition that it is the very eroticism of Whitman's lines which is their palpable principle, the excision of which means that Whitman's lines may as well have remained unwritten. Wilde endorses Whitman's response to Rossetti's censorship, and implicitly keeps faith with the power of Whitman's encoded eroticism.

At one level then I argue that Wilde understands Whitman's 'word of the modern ... a word en-masse' as the embrace of the American democratic masses.[46] At another level he knows himself as that one Whitman recognises in 'Among The Multitude', the one 'picking me out by secret and divine signs,/ Acknowledging none else, not parent, wife, husband,/ brother, child any nearer than I am,/ Some are baffled, but that one is not - that one knows me':

> Ah lover and perfect equal,
> I meant that you should discover me so by faint indirections,
> And I when I meet you mean to discover you by the like in you.[47]

I am primarily interested here in the first of these levels, Whitman's complex imagining of the many in the one, but it is not possible to divorce this prospect from the second level that I argue Wilde understood; his understanding the first is enabled by his deeply felt connection with the second level. Richard Ellmann has suggested that Wilde after 1886

[46] Walt Whitman, 'One's-self I Sing', in *The Complete Poems,* ed. by Francis Murphy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 39.

[47] Walt Whitman, 'Among The Multitude', *The Complete Poems,* p. 166.

and his seduction by Robert Ross, 'was able to think of himself as a criminal, moving guiltily among the innocent' (*Oscar Wilde*, 261). Whatever the truth of this imputation of seduction and guilt, it is clear that Wilde recognised, as did Whitman, the implications of the mobile subjectivities he was scripting. To be many voiced necessitates the inclusion of all, the unconventional, the dangerous, the renegade, the abhorrent even. When Whitman writes, 'And I am not the poet of goodness only ... I do not decline/ to be the poet of wickedness also' ('Song of Myself', line 467), he acknowledges the extent of the inclusiveness of his poetics

> indifferent,
> Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me ... I stand
> My gait is no faultfinder's or rejector's gait, (lines 470-1)
> [...]
> Through me forbidden voices,
> Voices of sexes of lusts, voices veil'd, and I remove the veil,
> Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured. (lines 518-20)

The animating principle of Whitman's poem demands the inclusion of these dangerous voices, and through this inclusion they are *transfigured*. Whitman asserts that he is 'No sentimentalist ... No stander above men and women/ or apart from them ... No more modest than immodest' (line 501). The forbidden voices are channelled along with all others, and are as worthy and necessary as the others. It is this courageous commitment to multiplicity that Wilde acknowledges when he writes of Whitman's 'fine ethical purpose'. This commitment is one that Wilde himself in his turn makes, in his critical formulations and in his fictions.

In 'The Critic as Artist', Wilde writes, 'What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress':

> without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from the monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics (*Complete Works*, 1121-2).

Rather than follow the dominant Victorian ideal that would eliminate sin, Wilde tropes sin as experience which contributes to the development of civilization. This manoeuvre allows him to reveal through parody the incoherencies of the hegemonic positions and to suggest an alternative; the dominant notion of morality is unmasked as in thrall to an ethic of sincerity, which in its turn follows a logic of exclusion. Morality is no more than manners, codes of behaviour, not ethical responsibility. *Sin* in this context means more than the dangerous curiosity of man for sensations. Curiosity, the characteristic which Arnold claimed as crucial to his idea of the critic, gives the clue that sin is not the doing of evil but the experiences excluded from those sanctioned by the dominant Arnoldian

discourse of culture. Maintaining this twist, Wilde writes: 'Virtues! Who knows what the virtues are? Not you. Not I. Not any one. It is well for our vanity that we slay the criminal, for if we suffered him to live he might show us what we had gained by his crime. It is well for his peace that the saint goes to his martyrdom. He is spared the sight of the horror of his harvest' (*Complete Works*, 1122). This troping of sin as experience links the intermediate subject position of the critic with the multiplication of personalities that Wilde proposes as an alternative to the subject positions established and regulated by the discursive categories of the hegemonic social formations. The critic's curiosity stands as the example to readers of the receptiveness and openness to experience and sensation through which the action of change occurs. The critical spirit enacts the process of transformation:

> The culture that this transmission of racial experience makes possible can be made perfect by the critical spirit alone, and indeed may be said to be one with it. For who is the true critic but he who bears within himself the dreams, and ideas, and feelings of myriad generations, and to whom no form of thought is alien, no emotional impulse obscure? And who the true man of culture, if not he who by fine scholarship and fastidious rejection has made instinct self-conscious and intelligent, and can separate the work that has distinction from the work that has it not, ... develop the spirit of disinterested curiosity which is the real root, as it is the real flower, of the intellectual life, and thus attains to intellectual clarity, and, having learned "the best that is known and thought in the world" lives - it is not fanciful to say - with those who are Immortals (*Complete Works*, 1138).

The Arnoldian terms reappear here but their reference has been transformed by Wilde's argument. This critic reflects on his own and others' experience in order to make it intelligible both to himself and to others and this, as a function of criticism, is socially important and the contrary of academic criticism as Ian Small notes in *Conditions for Criticism*.[48] Wilde is rejecting the increasingly dominant specialized professionalized model of criticism, holed up in the academy, for a version of the Arnoldian critic freed from the complicities of that critic's position but remaining recognisable as an inheritor of Arnold's terms. The *disinterested curiosity* of the critic admits of no limits: 'no form of thought is alien, no emotional impulse obscure' not even the criminal and the murderous. The multiplicity of personality that the critic performs is achieved through receptiveness to the experiences and sensations that art provides, sensations and experiences that themselves admit of no limits, 'We sicken with the same maladies as the poets, and the singer lends us his pain. Dead lips have their message for us, and hearts that have fallen

[48] Ian Small, *Conditions For Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 20.

to dust can communicate their joy ... There is no passion that we cannot feel, no pleasure that we may not gratify' (*Complete Works*, 1135). Art provides, as in my discussion of Henry James earlier, a laboratory of thought in which we learn to analyse and judge, or as Wilde puts it: 'Art does not hurt us. The tears that we shed at a play are a type of the exquisite sterile emotions that it is the function of Art to awaken. We weep, but we are not wounded. We grieve, but our grief is not bitter' (*Complete Works*, 1135); and these sensations and experiences educate:

> to arrive at what one really believes, one must speak through lips different from one's own. To know the truth one must imagine myriads of falsehoods. For what is Truth? In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived. In matters of science, it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of art, it is one's last mood. (*Complete works*, 1143)

It is the critic who performs these roles and 'speaks through lips different from one's own'. This performance by the critic of the different roles made available by artworks offers the public an example of the proper response to artworks: 'The critic has to educate the public; the artist has to educate the critic' (*Complete Letters*, 447) was how Wilde phrased these relations during his defence of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The manufactured controversy and wilful misrepresentation on the part of the periodical writers of Wilde's only novel demonstrates the distance between the critical role Wilde scripted and the role that contemporary critics played out in their columns and reviews. In one of his letters to the editor of the *Scots Observer* he points out that 'Keats remarked that he had as much pleasure in conceiving the evil as in conceiving the good', and that 'Shakespeare ... had as much delight in creating the one as he had in creating the other' (*Complete Letters*, 439). Wilde defends the artist's freedom of intellect and demands a criticism that attends to the treatment of the subject rather than the subject itself, a point he had previously made in 'The Critic as Artist' and one that echoes Henry James's response to Walter Besant in 'The Art of Fiction'. The pressing question is not the morality of the work of art, and by extension the artist, but the ethical implications realised by the reader in their encounter with the narrative artwork. Wilde is committed to an art that educates without being didactic. Writing to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* he states the real moral of the story:

> The real moral of the story is that all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its punishment, and this moral is so artistically and deliberately suppressed that it does not enunciate its law as a general principle, but it realises itself in the lives of individuals, and so becomes simply a dramatic element in a work of art, and not the object of the work of art (*Complete Letters*, 435).

Didactic moral revelation is not the *object* of the work, but the supple critic who can shift from position to position in the work, who can see through the eyes of a Basil Hallward, a

Henry Wotton, and a Dorian Gray, and register, analyse and judge their experience will recognise that Wilde's novel condemns the positions, views and actions of each of these characters. The critical reception of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides an index of the distances between Arnold and Wilde, and an indication of their contrasting commitments to a cultural criticism that seeks to alter the existing social formations.

Conclusion

Like the actress, the critic is an economically and socially marginal figure whose cultural prominence derives from the part they play in securing hegemony. This curious doubled marginality and centrality makes these figures powerful sites for the contestation of the discourses of hegemony. Matthew Arnold provides key formulations that define the role of the critic and of culture in an increasingly capitalist consumer economy. Arnold's narrative of culture begins with the aim of providing an alternative to the materialist, capitalist discourses. The disinterestedness of his critic conceals the aim which his critic works towards achieving, the awakening of the Socrates within each individual. This work was to be achieved by a critic who filled an intermediate subject position, neither belonging wholly to the class from which they appeared, nor belonging wholly to another class, an alien nowhere at home. These aliens were to lead the different classes to their best selves, a process to be achieved through the power of culture to alter individuals' consciousness. Initially in Arnold's formulation this movement admits of no boundaries, including the boundaries of the nations and of national culture. However, Arnold turns away from the implications of the narrative movement to which he seems committed when he argues that the best self of the community is the nation state. The identities of the subjects his discourse of culture creates are secured by their acceptance of the authority of the state. The arrest of the dialectical pattern of development which he had sketched reveals the limits of his discourse of criticism.

The pressing problem that Henry James recognises in Arnold's narrative is its failure to extricate the critic or the artist from the rapacious literary marketplace where critic, artist, and work find themselves enmeshed in the creation and circulation of commodities. James does not abandon Arnold's narrative of culture rather he rewrites it. He adapts the intermediate subject position of the critic, exploiting the critic's ambivalent relation to author and work. He emphasises the vulnerability of this intermediate position only to make that vulnerability a strength. The sacrifice of the critic reveals the work that art does. The receptiveness of the critic offers a paradigmatic example of the ethical power of narrative. The critic, 'answering for others', has the duty of establishing relations between readers, writers and writings that avoid the commodified relations over-determined by the capitalist cultural economy. In this sense James remains close to

Arnold's valorisation of culture. Arnold's alien remains a prominent figure, and the legacy of the authority of Arnoldian cultural criticism is employed to make space for the outsider at the heart of the dominant social formations. The appearance on the public stage of the artist in the guise of the critic involves the artist directly in the struggle with the logic of commodity fetishism. The usual sacrifice that the critic is thought to make is that of the privilege of 'authentic' production, that is the Romantic notion of originality, but this is a spurious privilege if we recognise that the critic is the artist, and the privileged originality of the Romantic artist, as John Goode notes, serves only to mystify the conditions of production.[49] The primacy of the "original" artist over the critic, of creative art over criticism, seeks to locate art outside systems of exchange while simultaneously ascribing value to art within those systems, a value derived from art's imputed transcendence of such systems. The result of this inconsistency is that the romantic ideal of the artist is no longer tenable when, in a commodity culture, this mystification serves only to enshrine art as the commodity par excellence. James's complex figuring of the artist as critic evades precisely these problems and suggests an alternative set of relations which reveal James's hopes and claims for the power of narrative art.

While James is concerned with the critic and the market, Wilde is concerned to unmask the part played by the dominant discourses of criticism in the creation of colonialist representations which secure colonial authority. Wilde is the critic as ironic alien Irish artist. Like James he retains key components of Arnold's narrative: the intermediate position of the critic; the curiosity that impels discovery; and the openness of the critical spirit which transforms a singular, monological identity into dialogical, dialectical self, being as a process of becoming. The multiplication of personality that Wilde argues for as the action of the critical spirit transforms relations between readers, writers and works in ways that mirror the shifts I argued Henry James achieved in his rescripting of the parts played by participants in an aesthetic encounter. Finally, Wilde, like James, is concerned with the ethical education and experience of the individual. The dialogical basis of identity for which he argues implies an ethics that does not depend upon an external authority but upon the self-conscious analytical powers and judgements of the individual who recognises themselves as other.

[49] Goode, 'The Decadent Writer as Producer', p. 115.

Chapter three: 'A lively inward revolution'; the revolutionary and the *fin-de-siècle* artist

The previous chapter ended with the figure of the critic as a positive and fruitful trope for the artist at the *fin-de-siècle*. I want now to examine instances when Wilde and James addressed themselves more explicitly to the relationship between the individual artist and political, social, and cultural crisis. I will argue that the figure that each chose to employ in the 1880s to examine the political position of the artist was that of the revolutionary. Both men stress the intermediary position of the revolutionary as analogous to that of the artist in contemporary society and both stress that the strength of this position lies not in the threat of violence and violent change that it offers to the dominant social formations, but in its vulnerability; the revolutionary in this formulation is less an active agent, more a scapegoat. Revolutionaries in the texts of Henry James and Oscar Wilde are sacrificed in order to reveal the failings of the logic of both the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary movements. The intermediary subject position theorised by Henry James and Oscar Wilde is revolutionary in an inward direction.

In the last chapter we saw how the intermediary position of the critic is an instance of a theatrical, multiple subjectivity. The subjectivity of the critic with their commitment to 'the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming*' (*Complete Works*, 1138) is a mobile, multiple subjectivity, open to change and transformation during the aesthetic encounter. In 'The Critic as Artist' this mobility is asserted as part of a historical process, the development of human consciousness. The critic of literature, who realises 'himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways', and who is 'ever curious of new sensations and fresh points of view' points the way forward; the mobile subjectivity of the critic, Gilbert tells Ernest is one with the essence of life - 'For what is the mind in motion in the intellectual sphere? The essence of thought, as the essence of life, is growth' (*Complete Works*, 1144-5). The subjective mobility that Wilde calls for enacts a dialogical identity in its dialectical relation to the artwork, refusing the usual hierarchy of relations between producers and consumers.

The pattern of development of consciousness that Wilde employs throughout his critical writings is a Hegelian one. Wilde adopts and develops Hegel's dialectical account of the progressive development of human consciousness. Hegel's emphasis on the theatrical nature of the development of subjectivity, his characterisation of the social functions of art and aesthetics in this process, and the importance that he places on the example of Christ, and Christ's sacrifice, provide Wilde with the concepts that he

employs in his exploration of subjectivity. The coherence of Wilde's intellectual synthesis of aesthetic, scientific, and political ideas has been argued for by Philip Smith and Michael Helfand in their detailed and exhaustive introduction to Wilde's Oxford notebooks (*Oxford Notebooks,* 1-106). They suggest that Wilde's careful staging of competing political and economic arguments in his essays has been too often ignored due to his rhetorical employment of paradoxes. Their discussion of his Oxford readings in Hegel and contemporary evolutionary science make the case for Wilde as an intellectual whose paradoxical display of serious radical ideas confounded both contemporary and later critics of his writing. They argue that 'the synthesis that is developed in his notebooks and revised and incorporated in his cultural criticism' had four implications:

> the first was the establishment of a non-authoritarian socialist policy and economy. 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' proposed a 'scheme for the reconstruction of society' which, Wilde said, 'trusts to Socialism and to Science as its methods'. Second, his ideal society was individualistic and pluralistic: 'There is no one type for man. There are as many perfections as there are imperfect men'. Third, given this utopia, Wilde envisioned an ideal situation for autodidactic education for all persons. Fourth, he suggested that sexual selection (eugenics) would contribute to the continuing improvement of culture (*Oxford Notebooks,* 83).

The important point here is the deliberate synthesis that Wilde attempts. Rhetorically these radical ideas are masked by paradoxes, such that Wilde's use of the term 'individualism' almost seems to align him with a conservative writer like W. H. Mallock. In an exchange in the January and February 1891 issues of *The New Review,* William Morris and George Bernard Shaw were ranged against W. H. Mallock and Charles Bradlaugh. Morris and Shaw appeared together under the heading 'The Socialist Ideal', while Mallock and Bradlaugh replied with 'The Individualist Ideal'.[1] 'Socialism' and 'Individualism' were used as explicitly antithetical terms by commentators just as Wilde trumped their debates, suggesting a more radical, more complete program. Smith and Helfand argue that:

> [Wilde's] proposals for cultural improvement, based on his synthesis of idealist philosophy and evolutionary and ethnological theories of his day, represent a coherent plan in which socialism, self-education, and biology would function to perfect both individual and society (*Oxford Notebooks,* 86).

[1] 'The Socialist Ideal', *The New Review,* (1891), 20, January, pp. 1-28; 'The Individualist Ideal', *The New Review,* (1891), 21, February, pp. 100-18

Though Smith and Helfand's strong claim for the coherence of Wilde's ideas may seem overstated, they represent an important evaluation of Wilde as an intellectual, and they provide valuable details concerning Wilde's studies.[2]

Wilde's time at Oxford was dominated by the Oxford Hegelians, principally William Wallace and Benjamin Jowett. Wallace's "Prolegomena" to *The Logic of Hegel* (1874) and Jowett's Hegelian introductions to the second edition of *The Dialogues of Plato* (1875) are texts frequently quoted and paraphrased in Wilde's Oxford notebooks, and Smith and Helfand suggest that Wilde followed Wallace and Jowett in their belief 'that Hegel's philosophy encompassed and reconciled evolutionary theory with a metaphysical explanation of human life' (*Oxford Notebooks*, 17). The metaphysical argument that Hegel offers concerning Being and Non-Being denies Cartesian dualism, rejecting the conception of the individual consciousness as a fixed centre, and positing instead a relational quality to metaphysics. It is the developmental conception of the nature of consciousness that Wilde returns to again and again in his critical essays.

Consciousness, reason, and spirit

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) Hegel is concerned with tracing the phenomenological development of the human mind as it moves dialectically towards full self-consciousness. This full self-consciousness will only be achieved, Hegel claims, when human consciousness comes to know itself as God knows himself, which is to achieve "absolute knowing" (*Phenomenology*, 483). This absolute knowing consists in human consciousness knowing itself as both divine and human. This is the projected end of the dialectical development of human consciousness. In his essays Wilde employs Hegel's pattern of specific stages of the development of consciousness, as well as his emphasis on a progressive teleological movement.

In his discussion of Religion Hegel discusses the nature of the work of art and the *work* that art does. Hegel analyses the place of art in his genealogy of consciousness in the late section entitled 'Religion in the Form of Art'. He begins with the artefacts and rituals for religious worship that serve to figure forth for worshippers their relationship to the divine. This process, he writes, begins with the attribution of spiritual qualities to plant life, and then to inanimate man-made objects. This development is important because the creative struggle signifies an attempt to achieve a degree of self-consciousness. His example is the art of the sculptor:

[2] Ian Small's praise of their work is acidly qualified but is devalued by his own narrowing critical focus: Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde Revalued: An Essay on New Materials and Methods of Research* (Greensboro, N. C.: ELT Press, 1993).

> The soul of the statue in human shape does not yet come forth from the inner being, is not yet speech, the outer existence that is in its own self inward; and the inner being of multiform existence is still soundless, is not immanently differentiated and is still separated from its outer existence to which all differences belong. The artificer therefore unites the two by blending the natural and the self-conscious shape, and this ambiguous being which is a riddle to itself, the conscious wrestling with the non-conscious, the simple inner with the multiform outer, the darkness of thought mating with the clarity of utterance, these break out into the language of a profound, but scarcely intelligible wisdom. (*Phenomenology*, 423-4)

The sculptor struggles to give form to the inner multiform existence but the very medium resists his attempts and any unity the sculptor achieves produces only 'a scarcely intelligible wisdom': it is speech that is 'the outer existence that is in its own self inward'. This is a hint of what is to come when Hegel will identify dramatic art as the realisation of a complex theatrical self-consciousness that unites the individual self-consciousnesses of actor and spectator in an awareness of their shared inter-subjectivity.

The forms of classical drama offer Hegel a means of illustrating how he understands art to contribute to the development of consciousness. He uses the example of the stage as both a concrete instance of self-consciousness and a metaphor to help him describe the theatrical qualities of consciousness. First he describes the results of the features of Epic. An Epic figures Gods as human: 'the universal powers have the form of individuality and hence the principle of action in them; what they effect appears, therefore, to proceed entirely from them and to be as free an action as that of men' (*Phenomenology*, 441). Epic presents to consciousness the relation of the divine to the human (*Phenomenology*, 441), but it does so by locating in individualised figures universal notions, creating a split that cannot be overcome within that form. Tragedy by contrast:

> gathers closer together the dispersed moments of the inner essential world and the world of action: the substance of the divine, in accordance with the nature of the Notion, sunders itself into its shapes, and their movement is likewise in conformity with the Notion. In regard to form, the language ceases to be narrative because it enters into the content, just as the content ceases to be one that is imaginatively presented. (*Phenomenology*, 443-4)

The substance of the divine remains however sundered. Hegel suggests that this substance, which is the "absolute knowing" that human consciousness is moving towards becoming, finds in comedy a greater unity than is offered in Tragedy. This greater unity marks the movement of spirit from substance in plastic art to the very subject of art, 'it produces its [outer] shape, thus making explicit in it the act, or the self-consciousness, that merely vanishes in the awful substance, and does not apprehend itself in its trust' (*Phenomenology*, 453). The action of Tragedy, and the figures of the chorus, present subjectivity in conflict. The figure of the hero and the chorus are

separated by a gulf, the same gulf that separates the actor from his mask. The consciousness displayed is not self-consciousness since the chorus remains in fear of the divine life represented by the hero, as 'something alien' (*Phenomenology*, 450).

Comedy on the other hand unites the chorus with the hero in the narrative, just as it draws attention to the similarity between the identities of the characters and those on and off the stage. Fate, which in Epic and Tragedy is separate from consciousness, is now united with it: 'the actual self of the actor coincides with what he impersonates, just as the spectator is completely at home in the drama performed before him and sees himself playing in it' (*Phenomenology*, 452). The uniting of the actors, their roles, and the spectators in a shared self-consciousness is the key to Hegel's conceptualisation of comedy. This self-consciousness reveals the fixed essentialist categories of the self as *pretensions*, 'pretensions of universal essentiality' (*Phenomenology*, 450). Hegel likens these pretensions to theatrical masks, adopted first by the self as a means of denying the similarities between 'the genuine self ... the actor ... [and] the spectator'. The achievement of Comedy is that in the shared self-consciousness of actor and spectator the subject and the object of consciousness come closer to recognising themselves as the same: 'The individual consciousness in the certainty of itself [...] as this absolute power, [...] has lost the form of *something presented* to consciousness, something altogether separate from consciousness and alien to it, as were the statue and also the living beautiful corporeality, or the content of the Epic and the powers and persons of Tragedy' (452). By representing the chorus and the hero as the same, and the audience and the players as similar to the characters of the drama, Comedy also represents a particular instance of the action of the Master-Slave dialectic. J. N. Findlay writes, when he glosses the passage from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* below, 'In comedy the common man asserts himself in his revolutionary disrespect for everything. But he also makes a mock of his own self-assertion' (584):

> This *Demos*, the general mass, which knows itself as lord and ruler, and is also aware of being the intelligence and insight which demand respect, is constrained and befooled through the particularity of its own existence, and exhibits the ludicrous contrast between its own opinion of itself and its immediate existence, between its necessity and its contingency, its universality and its commonness. (*Phenomenology*, 451)

The *general mass* which begins as a slave knows itself to be rather the cohesive power of the state. However this knowledge does not prevent the general mass living an existence which does not reflect this power. In comedy the audience revels in the presentation of the ironic contrast between what it is, 'lord and ruler ... the intelligence and insight that demand respect', and the *immediate existence* that it lives. This is Hegel's particular version of a familiar idea: the latent power of the commons, along with the terrible power

of their ironic, demotic laughter, and their contemporary abeyance. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* this idea is important because it credits individuals with a complex, shifting and self-consciously multiple subjectivity, and identifies the specific relations between the individual subjectivity and the group. Alexandre Kojève in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1969) makes clear Hegel's objective. The history of the 'Christian World ... is the history of the progressive realization of the ideal state, in which Man will be "satisfied" by realizing himself as Individuality - a synthesis of the Universal and the Particular, of the master and the Slave, of Fighting and Work'.[3] Here the Particular is the value of each personal individual and the Universal is the recognition that the individual gives to the ideal state. When the individual realises this universal value of the state they become a citizen.[4] For Hegel it is the history of the Christian world that offers this development because Christianity depends upon the idea of individuality and the example of Christ.

In the figure of Christ Hegel finds the divine being and absolute knowledge presented to human self-consciousness as a consciousness no different from itself. The moment of self-conscious recognition comes when what is presented to consciousness is recognised as not alien, but as identical with consciousness (*Phenomenology*, 459). In this respect Christianity and the example of comedy discussed above are similar; both are resistant to the pull of abstraction, Hegel's 'picture thinking', and both must be understood as further instances of the action of the Master-Slave dialectic. The important difference lies in the power of the example of Christ. The gap between the idea of the divine and the knowledge of the divine is closed through the recognition of Christ as the divine man and man as divine. Spirit is understood as self-consciousness: 'and to this self-consciousness it is immediately revealed, for spirit is this self-consciousness itself. The divine nature is the same as human, and it is this unity that is beheld' (*Phenomenology*, 459-60). The sacrifice of Christ achieves the synthesis of man with God, and this synthesis achieves both the death of Man (as he had been), and the 'death of the abstraction of the divine being':

> The death of the mediator is the death not only of his *natural* aspect or of his particular being-for-self, not only of the already dead husk stripped of its essential Being, but also of the *abstraction* of the divine Being. For the mediator, in so far as his death has not yet completed the reconciliation, is the one-sidedness which takes as *essential Being* the simple element of thought in contrast to actuality [...] The death of this picture-thought contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as self. (*Phenomenology*, 476)

[3] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel Lectures on The Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. by Allan Bloom, trans. by James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1969), p. 67.

[4] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel Lectures on The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 58.

Christ incarnates God in man and Man-in-God. The transcendent master and the corporeal slave come together and their synthesis produces a self-consciousness that is Individuality, a synthesis of the Particular and the Universal. Christ as mediator achieves this extension of Individuality. I will be arguing below that it is this vision of Christ, the mediator whose sacrifice ushers in a new political state, that Oscar Wilde develops in his conceptualisation of the figure of the artist as revolutionary, and in his development of Hegel's theory of comedy. I explore Wilde's critical writings and his earliest dramatic work *Vera; or, The Nihilist* (1880-3) and suggest that he adapts Hegelian patterns of argument and motifs in his theorisation of the social role of art and artists.

Individualism, the artist and the revolutionary

The social function of art that Wilde outlines in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', and in his earlier essay 'The English Renaissance in Art', follows Hegel's thought. Art is neither entertainment, nor mimetic, but the privileged site of humanity's encounter with its own consciousness. Wilde employs Hegel's dialectical pattern and emphasises that the threat to this progress rests in the bourgeois self and the market that determines it: 'Art is what makes the life of each citizen a sacrament and not a speculation, art is what makes the life of the whole race immortal' (Ross ed., *Complete Works*, 274). Wilde's aesthetic individualism is politically radical because it dissolves the very foundations of the bourgeois self. That self is characterised by *having*, first in the sense of possessing innate, inalienable, essential characteristics, and secondly in the sense of being defined by property. The logic of the market creates a subjectivity defined and dominated by property. This same logic makes commodities of art and of people. Wilde's aesthetic individualism dissolves this subject, making the life of each citizen 'a sacrament and not a speculation'. *Speculation* is a term that Wilde uses as a metonym for the whole apparatus of capital (as suggested in chapter one) and here its antonym, *sacrament*, suggests a link between the soul of man and his material conditions. Wilde's choice of *citizen* is also significant: *citizen* suggests the full involvement of the individual in the state, as well as identifying a particular relationship between the individual and the state. It is the encounter with art that achieves this shift away from the logic of the capitalist social formations. This encounter, which in Hegel's thought provides an illustration of the development of consciousness, provides Wilde with an opportunity to offer a concrete example of the transformative power of the aesthetic. Art makes 'the life of the whole race immortal' because in an aesthetic encounter - a meeting between artist, aesthetic object and the reader or audience - each individual comes closer to recognising, as Hegel described, that the subject and the object of consciousness are the same. The work of art is to develop this self-consciousness. The artist who is true to himself, argues Wilde, demonstrates the truth of this union, a union that is possible also for all, not simply the

right of the few. This is the artistic temperament that each individual can develop. In 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' Wilde identifies this artistic temperament with the individuality of Christ, and with that of the revolutionary. The artist, the revolutionary and Christ have in common that they stand as intermediaries between past and future states of being. I will be suggesting below that what they also have in common is that the action of this intermediary position is achieved through sacrifice and that Wilde's dependence on this logic throughout his essay links his behaviour before and during his trials with his aesthetic theories.

Oscar Wilde begins 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' by claiming that what the nineteenth century has precluded is the development of freedom of expression for all men. He invokes the same figures (Renan and Darwin, Keats and Flaubert) which in previous essays he has held up as examples of Critical Spirits; and he repeats a familiar formulation adapted from Arnold concerning the 'men of culture' (*Complete Works*, 1154). What is new is Wilde's insistence on explicitly linking the individualism that these figures have achieved with material conditions. After emphasising the importance of the achievements of these writers he suggests that the individuality that they achieved is a limited one:

> At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them, and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture – in a word the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation.[5]

The link is direct: only privilege and good fortune enable the achievements of these figures. Rhetorically, Wilde exaggerates in order to highlight the disparity; he contrasts the *great many* who achieve this compromised individuality with the *great many* who, 'having no private property [...] and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden.' This compromised individuality never escapes the material cost of its own achievement, as Wilde emphasises when he gives full reign to his invective: '*the best among the poor are never grateful.* They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. [...] Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it' (294/ *Complete Works*, 1176).

[5] Throughout this chapter I provide page references to both the original journal publication of 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' and to the HarperCollins *Complete Works*. Though the differences between the two texts are not many, there are a number of omissions of style, mainly cases of italicisation, in the HarperCollins text. These omissions distort Wilde's text, obscuring his emphases: 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism, *Fortnightly Review*, New Series XLIX, no. 290 (January 1891, pp. 292-319 (p. 293); *Complete Works*, pp.1174-97 (p.1175).

The echo of Arnold in the paragraph quoted above - the 'men of culture' - links Wilde's formulation in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' with his other prose writings. These 'real men, the men who have realised themselves', are to stand between the classes just as Arnold's men of culture will. But Wilde uses a word that Arnold is unlikely to have accepted, even ironically; the men of culture will be 'agitators':

> Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilization. (295/ *Complete Works*, 1176)

These agitators are of course Arnold's aliens. The OED defines *agitators* first as a rank in the parliamentary forces of Cromwell's army. These agitators were elected representatives of the foot soldiers, the common men of the army, who petitioned the officers on their behalf. It may be fanciful to suggest that Wilde had this particular political sense in mind, but not fanciful to suggest that he was aware of another sense, that of one who works for others. The Latin root of the verb 'agitate', *agitāt*, includes not only the senses to move or to excite, but also to discuss and to 'keep before the public'. Etymologically as well as metaphorically, Wilde's term is well chosen, as is his use of it in the context of the Abolitionists. These agitators strove for justice and were regarded as heroic, rather than seditious. By figuring Renan and Darwin as agitators Wilde links the figure of the revolutionary positively with the 'advance towards civilization.' This is in accord with Wilde's earliest prose statements on the nature of revolution. In 'The Rise of Historical Criticism', when discussing classical political economy, he notes that Aristotle understood what remains 'incompletely appreciated': 'that where the superficial observer thinks he sees a revolution the philosophical critic discerns merely the gradual and rational evolution of the inevitable results of certain antecedents' (*Complete Works*, 1218). Revolution is evolution for Wilde, the gradual and inward transformation of consciousness.

During the 1880s Wilde travelled and wrote and promoted himself. A significant part of those travels was his lecturing in America and England. The details and texts of the lectures he gave demonstrate his concern to relate Art to social life. 'The House Beautiful and 'The Decorative Arts' are the two lectures collected in the HarperCollins *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, but these are revisions of an earlier lecture collected only in the 1908 *Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Robert Ross. This earlier lecture, entitled 'The English Renaissance in Art', is more abstract and academic than its revisions but it is an important document that can help us understand Wilde's concerns. His revisions substitute practical examples for abstract points in the earlier piece, as well as witty references presumably designed to win over restive audiences. Richard Ellmann describes Wilde's sense that his earlier lectures were not as well received as he would

have liked, and that Wilde made substantial changes to his lectures the better to carry his argument to his audience.[6]

Wilde is exact in 'The English Renaissance in Art' concerning the link between art and the 'progress and movement of social life':

> Yet I think that in estimating the sensuous and intellectual spirit which presides over our English Renaissance, any attempt to isolate it in any way from the progress and movement and social life of the age that has produced it would be to rob it of its true vitality, possibly to mistake its true meaning [...] Alien then from any wild, political passion, or from the harsh voice of a rude people in revolt, as our English Renaissance must seem, in its passionate cult of pure beauty, its flawless devotion to form, its exclusive and sensitive nature, it is to the French Revolution that we must look for the primary factor of its production, the first condition of its birth: that great Revolution of which we are all children though the voices of some of us are loud against it (Ross ed., *Complete Works*, vol. 14, 245).

Art cannot be separated from the life of the society of which it is part without robbing it of *its true vitality* (a succinct answer to the charge of art for art's sake!). Wilde suggests that the late nineteenth century art revolutions are actually the visible signs of the previous century's social revolution, and he goes further yet when he argues that these social revolutions were themselves the product of explorations by artists. The French Revolution was a progeny of 'the critical spirit of Germany and England which accustomed men to bring all things to the test of reason or utility or both', and 'the discontent of the people in the streets of Paris was the echo that followed the life of Emile and of Werther [...] the prelude to the wild storm which swept over France in 1789 ... was first sounded in literature' (246). The claim that Life imitates art simultaneously locates the *work* of art in the world of its day and foregrounds the artist as someone whose work is inextricably bound up with the progress of civilization. In both 'The English Renaissance in Art' and 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' Wilde claims for art the freedom that he recognises is now granted to science and philosophy:

> If a man of science, [...] if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all - well nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. Yet it is really a very few years since both philosophy and science were subjected to brutal popular control, to authority in fact - the authority of either the general ignorance of the community, or the terror and greed for

[6] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 156, 183.

> power of an ecclesiastical or governmental class (304-5/ *Complete Works*, 1184-5)[7]

Wilde uses the public response to Henry Irving's very particular style of theatre performance as an example of the benefits of the artist's self-absorption. Theatre critics lambasted Irving's style of acting before it was recognised as a new and valid style. They treated Irving the artist as though 'Art [were] a mere matter of supply and demand' (310/ *Complete Works*, 1190). However, Irving persevered: 'His object was to realise his own perfection as an artist [...] At first he appealed to the few: now he has educated the many. He created in the public both taste and temperament' (311/ *Complete Works*, 1191). The responsibility of the artist is to himself and to History, not to the public: the responsibility of understanding lies with the audience who should be receptive to new forms: 'no spectator of art needs a more perfect receptivity than the spectator of a play' (*Complete Works*, 1190).

The example of the drama is an important one. Wilde notes in 'The English Renaissance in Art' that the drama 'is the meeting place of art and life; it deals, as Mazzini said, not merely with man, but with social man, with man in his relation to God and to Humanity' (Ross ed., *Complete Works*, vol. 14, 264-5). The theatre provides both an example of social art and a metaphor for the complex role that a modern subject must adopt. Wilde describes the relations between the artwork and the spectator:

> If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. *The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art.* The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. (311/ *Complete Works*, 1190)

This openness is the lesson that the critic has to teach the public (as was suggested in the previous chapter). This receptiveness transforms the consciousness of the spectator in very specific ways. When the spectator allows the spirit of the artwork to master him or her, then s/he becomes like an artist: 'the honest man is to sit quietly, and know the delightful emotions of wonder, curiosity and suspense. He is not to go to the play to lose a vulgar temper. He is to go to the play to realise an artistic temperament. He is to go to the play to gain an artistic temperament' (312/ *Complete Works*, 1191). Wilde's metaphor of the virtuoso violinist should not be mistaken; though the spectator is over-mastered by the artwork, this mastery is that of language over the subject, not of the artist over the spectator. The social function of art is achieved in this process of openness and receptiveness: a process that works at the level of the individual but that transforms

[7] A similar recognition led Brecht to write *The Life of Galileo* (1943).

finally all society. The work of art is to provide the crucible of change for individuals and this change is achieved through the creation of self-consciousness on the part of the audience. These statements on the power of dramatic art predate Wilde's theatrical success of the nineties and ought to throw an alternative light onto his project in the society comedies. The drama is the popular site, far more contested and fraught than poetry for instance (which Wilde says has been successful in the nineteenth century because it has been ignored by the public), for the encounter between art, the social sphere and the individual.

Wilde asserts that what the spectator of art stands to gain by approaching the artwork in the 'proper mood' is an 'artistic temperament' (311/ *Complete Works*, 1190-1). This is the 'temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative conditions, new and beautiful impressions' and this receptivity allows the transformation of the individual consciousness in an aesthetic encounter. An *artistic temperament* is not only the possession of a few artists or connoisseurs, those who can afford to consume art, but a state available to all, and a step on the road to the transformation of humanity. In 'The English Renaissance in Art' Wilde paraphrases Théophile Gautier, who, Wilde says, understood that '"Everybody is affected by a sunrise or a sunset." The absolute distinction of the artist is not his capacity to feel nature so much as his power of rendering it' (Ross ed., *Complete Works*, vol. 14, 255). There is a democracy in sensation; the possession of the artist is not a particular distinctive essential nature, an artistic temperament, but the power to render sensation. Temperament becomes the ability to render and this ability can be cultivated. The spectators at the play lose their sense of themselves in the contemplation of the drama enacted before them: '[the spectator] is admitted to contemplate the work of art, [...] to forget in its contemplation all the egotism that mars him - the egotism of his ignorance, or the egotism of his information' (312/ *Complete Works*, 1191); the ignorance of the spectator is what he does not know, the 'egotism of [the spectator's] information' is what the spectator thinks they know already, the stock notions provided by the existing discursive formations. The individualism that art enables is important and powerful because it 'is a disturbing and disintegrating force.' (306/ *Complete Works*, 1186) which dissolves these stock notions. It promises continual change in the individual and the dissolution of all ties between individuals: individuals are able to realise their own physical and spiritual being completely, without restriction by the common habits of thought, '*Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known*' (304/ *Complete Works*, 1184). What is called *artistic temperament*, the seeming possession by the artist of a characteristic of self not given to all, whether called talent, or genius, is really 'the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally' (296/ *Complete Works*, 1178). The advantage of socialism Wilde argues, would be to remove the bar of ownership that presently prevents

all people from achieving this latent potential; '*The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.* Private property has crushed true individualism, and set up an individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them' (296/ *Complete Works*, 1178). What Wilde terms 'latent Individualism' contrasts with the atomistic model of the Bourgeois subject and is a collective identity in the sense that this individualism depends upon the theatrically multiple subjectivity that I argued Wilde theorises. The dialectical process that enables a shift in the relations of production would entail huge alteration in patterns of ownership, alterations that would result from the institution of socialism. The worker as artisan produces goods whose use value is their exchange value, rather than their exchange value depending upon the phantasmal glamour of the commodity. The false individualism depends upon a conception of human nature that defines the self as fixed, unchanging, metaphorically like a possession and, Wilde anticipates, those who understand the self as such will say that the scheme of change he describes is impractical. This is no objection at all, he suggests:

> A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions. But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The conditions will be done away with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality that we can predicate of it. The systems [of government] that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not its growth and development. The error of Louis XIV was that he thought human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. (315/ *Complete Works*, 1194)

What Wilde here calls the 'existing conditions' and systems of government are his terms for what I have called the existing discursive formations, or hegemony. Wilde provocatively links his ideas concerning the development of the individual with the idea of revolution, the very spectre that most terrified the European ruling classes, and he goes further when he aligns his thinking with contemporary evolutionary thought: 'To ask whether Individualism is practical is like asking whether Evolution is practical. *Evolution is the law of life, and there is no evolution except towards Individualism*' (316/ *Complete Works*, 1194).

The figure that brings together Wilde's idea of the artist, his concept of Individualism, his emphasis on evolution and self-consciousness and his developments of Hegel, is that of Christ. The movement of Wilde's argument as I have outlined it so far, follows that of Hegel: the encounter of the individual with the work of art is a privileged one in which the individual comes to a greater self-consciousness. In particular, dramatic art, says Wilde, is the mode in which the greatest number of nineteenth century

individuals experience this encounter. Christ offers Wilde a further link with Hegel's phenomenological thought, but he also presents a problem. Wilde identifies, in 'De Profundis', the example of Christ as that of a receptive, artistic temperament:

> The very basis of his nature was the same as that of the nature of the artist, an intense and flame like imagination. He realised in the sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation. He understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich [...] whatever happens to another happens to oneself. (*Complete Works*, 1027)

This sympathy is the imaginative self-consciousness and receptivity that Wilde claims Art fosters, but the example of Christ is limited because, Wilde argues, Christ 'made no attempt to reconstruct society, and consequently the Individualism that he preached to man could be realised only through pain or in solitude' (317/ *Complete Works*, 1195-6). Christ's individualism is not the final aesthetic individualism that Wilde argues for, because self-realisation through pain is 'merely provisional and a protest' (319/*Complete Works*, 1197). The individualism that Wilde argues for will be achieved through socialism and science which together will transform the existing conditions.

The close of 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' makes a very specific set of connections which indicate a deliberate reiteration by Wilde of some of his earliest prose writings. The Nihilist whose example is cited at the end of the essay, one who 'rejects all authority, because he knows authority to be evil, and who welcomes all pain, because through that he realises his personality, is a real Christian' (319/ *Complete Works*, 1197), is not a revolutionary bomb thrower but an individual who sacrifices themselves for the advancement of society, a kind of secular Christ. The example of Christ is revolutionary because he represents a significant stage in the evolution of human consciousness, the stage that develops the imaginative sympathy of the individual. The artist, the revolutionary and Christ come together as aspects of a theatrically multiple subject position that depends upon receptiveness and change. There remains the problem of negotiating the competing demands of the individual and the group. This is the problem Wilde addresses in his earliest dramatic work.

Vera; or, The Nihilist

The eponymous hero of *Vera; or, The Nihilist* (1880-3), is a revolutionary figure in a number of ways. She is a revolutionary in plot terms - the play concerns revolutionary struggle in contemporary Russia. Generically the play significantly, if imperfectly, manipulates melodramatic stage conventions in creating a female hero whose active choices stand in direct contrast to the behaviour of other stage heroines familiar from earlier melodramas. A précis of the plot of *Vera* suggests Wilde's strategic moves. A

young woman, seeing her brother led off by government troops decides to ally herself with his friends, revolutionary activists called by Wilde 'nihilists'. She becomes a feared figure, though quite why she is to be feared is left implicit. Amongst her group of conspirators is the disguised Czarevitch who is sympathetic to the plight of the people. Just as the conspirators are to be discovered the Czarevitch reveals himself and protects them, pretending they are players rehearsing. The Czar is assassinated and his son is enthroned against his will by the chief minister, the wily Prince Paul Maraloffski. In return the new Czar banishes Prince Paul who then joins the conspirators. Vera is chosen to kill the new Czar, with whom she is in love. In the final scene Vera kills herself rather than the Czar, claiming that she has 'saved Russia' in so doing (*Vera*, 73).

Before discussing the problematic of the play's ending I want to identify the generic elements that Wilde employs. From melodrama he gains the love interest that runs alongside the plot, but is not the motor of the action. Also from melodrama he gains the stage villain, Prince Paul, a prototype for some of the dandies to recur in the later plays and stories. This dandy seems ill placed in this melodramatic scenario however and his wit seems to undermine his role as villain. A five act structure suggests a seriousness for this piece as tragic, a prospect emphasised by Vera's echo in act five of Lear's words from act five of Shakespeare's play (*Vera*, 71-2). What Wilde does is to modify each of these elements, raising and frustrating audience expectations, and in so doing emphasising his play's altered structure.

A helpful example of this strategy is the dialogue that Wilde includes at the climax of the fifth act between Vera and the Czar. He awakens to find her stood over him, knife raised. His speech emphasises the role he imagines for himself as romantic hero, altogether denying Vera her all too tangible role as assassin. He identifies their (his) romance with his position: 'When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you; but I said I will bring the woman I love, a people, an empire, a world. O, Vera, it is for you, for you that I have kept this crown, for you alone I am king,' (*Vera*, 70). His words include her in the familiar worldview, yet there is a significant inversion. The Czar effaces millions of subjects when he repeats the formula that he is Vera's king, and implicitly her master. Throughout the play Wilde has staged the conflict between, on the one hand, Czarevitch Alexis's romantic dreams of Vera and the other male characters' prurient regard for Vera's 'fine figure' (the words of general Kotemkin in acts one and two), and on the other Vera's active political role as a conspirator. The public and private spheres are confounded drawing attention to Vera's transgressive role. Her sense of herself undergoes an inward revolution during the course of the play, and Wilde directs the audience to the ways in which the other characters seek to script her actions for her.

As Vera turns away from Alexis in his role as dominator, Wilde records his understanding that the swift move from political to personal on the Czar's part hides his acquiescence to the established order. Vera turns away from him and all that he represents. Wilde reinforces these points when he has Alexis say 'I do not know if I be king or slave; but if a slave what should I do but kneel, and if a king - where should kings sit, but at the feet of some democracy casting their crowns before it!' (*Vera*, 72). Early in act two Vera identifies liberty as a woman and Alexis as a lover. Though we do not imagine that she has herself in mind, Wilde clearly has. Vera, the image of liberty, is torn between fulfilling that role and personal love for another, in this case, Alexis. Immediately after Vera calls herself a *traitor* because, she says, she cannot fulfil the correct womanly role, she has strangled her own nature, 'sworn neither to love or to be loved' (*Vera*, 24).[8] The same relations are identified at the political and the personal level. This is emphasised when Vera goes onto say, 'why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be?'. Michael says to Vera after Alexis's 'betrayal' and Paul's conversion: 'He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of revolution, the torch of democracy' (*Vera*, 58). All the men, Paul, Alexis, Michael and the general, stand to Vera, this symbol of revolution, as lovers, as men to a woman (only the old Czar accords her, in his paranoia, the status of a threat). She is idealised and positioned by these views of her, views that she resists.

What is successful about *Vera* is Wilde's balancing of competing demands in terms of structure, characterisation and theme (themes of love, sacrifice, duty). The melodramatic structure is maintained by the dramatic tableaux that close each act, the exotic air of secrecy that the rituals of the nihilists lend to the beginning of two of the four acts, and the audience's anticipation of romance between Vera and the disguised prince. However the failure of the play lies also in these elements. The sacrifice of Vera at the close of the play frustrates audience expectations, confronting the audience with an enigmatic scene of death.

The play offers the spectacle of the revolutionary as a scapegoat, one whose sacrifice highlights the logic of the systems of representation to which they belong. Vera as a symbol of revolution is intriguing and inspiring to those around her in the play-world, but this fascination depends upon their sense of her as a symbol of revolution or as a vision of beautiful womanhood. Vera remains always a spectacle, whether to the

[8] Melissa Knox makes much of these lines as covertly autobiographical on Wilde's part, recording a very early acknowledgement of his conflicted sexuality. Her project is explicitly psychobiographical and as such deserves the full weight of Lacan's scornful description of such endeavours as 'housecleaning': Melissa Knox, *Oscar Wilde: A long and Lovely Suicide;* Jacques Lacan, 'Lituraterre', *Littérature*, 3 (Paris: Larousse, October 1971), pp. 3-10, translated and quoted in Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Jacques Lacan*, transitions (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p. 32-3.

General, the conspirators, Prince Paul and Alexis, or the men of the audience in the theatre. The emphasis in the play is on the conflict between what those who view Vera want her to be, and her own conflicted sense of her duties. This emphasis parallels the revolutionary view with the counter-revolutionary revealing their similarities. Neither side can countenance the idea of a self-willed woman whose actions define her rather than their projections. Her sacrifice is a supreme act of individualism and Wilde is careful to suggest that in her self-consciousness and her sacrifice she is Christ-like. Shakespeare provides Wilde with an aestheticised image of crucifixion in act five which establishes a connection between Vera the revolutionary, and Christ as revolutionary. Vera tells Alexis, 'Now I know/ life's meaning and the secret of this life, and bent/ and broken on this wheel of love, bent back and broken/ on love's fiery wheel' (*Vera*, 71-2); the echo of Lear's words links Vera with the Passion, and this identification works both ways since Christ is also an agitator, a revolutionary; the identification of the revolutionary with Christ and the Passion tropes the revolutionary as a scapegoat, one whose sacrifice mediates between the present state of the world and the future to come.

Christ, the scapegoat, Wilde and his trials

The figure of Vera is a telling one precisely because her choice can be described as Wilde's choice: she dies because she loved a man, and so did he. The idea of Wilde as a martyr is a now familiar formulation. Wilde has become a key token in cultural debates on sexuality and homosexual identity; Melissa Knox is happy to call him a 'homosexual prophet' and in so doing endorses the dominant representations of Wilde and his legacy, a legacy that makes sacrifice, suffering, and martyrdom central elements in the creation of gay identities.[9] The historian Jeffrey Weeks in *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the present* (1977) begins by identifying '"Scapegoating" [as] a major constituent of the homosexual role as it developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.[10] He contends that the *scapegoating* of the homosexual registers and contains the threat that same sex desire poses to the normative heterosexual relationships which form the basis of the 'capitalist family' (the phrase is Weeks'). He quickly moves from these broad establishing statements to asserting that the trials of Oscar Wilde provide the highly visible origins of the modern 'type' of the homosexual. More recently, Ed Cohen in *Talk on the Wilde Side* (1992) has made this version of Wilde the basis for his examination of contemporary press reports of Wilde's trials. Cohen asserts that even as the trials close Wilde had become 'the paradigmatic example for an emerging public

[9] Melissa Knox, *Oscar Wilde: A Long and Lovely Suicide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 185.

[10] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the present*, revised and updated edition (London: Quartet Books, 1990), p. 294.

definition of a new "type" of male sexual actor: "the homosexual"', and that this type prevailed throughout the twentieth century.[11] Both Cohen and Weeks of course depend upon Michel Foucault's analyses of the ways in which nineteenth century medical, juridical, and scientific discourses made the homosexual an individual, someone with 'a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life-form, a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology ... the homosexual was now a species'.[12]

The narrative of Wilde as martyr whose example creates a powerful cultural representation of a specific sexualized identity presents problems however. Jonathan Dollimore is more careful than Weeks and Cohen when he notes that the idea of Wilde as a victim is a version of 'a familiar political move: the benighted past as scapegoat': if Wilde is a victim in the past he is also a victim of the complacency of the present.[13] This complacency is two fold. It is apparent in retellings of Wilde's story that rely, as Cohen does, on reading Wilde's current status back into his own time, and it is apparent in the uses to which Wilde's sacrifice has been put as a legitimating token. Neil Bartlett sums up these problems succinctly in two remarkable imaginary letters addressed to Wilde which dramatise the complexities and ambiguities of Wilde's gift to posterity. *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (1988) is a mesmerising, infuriating investigation of the identities that representations of Wilde have made possible and the limits of the contemporary discourses of homosexual identity. Bartlett scrutinises 'the new orthodoxy of Wilde as a gay pioneer and martyr'.[14] His two letters never-sent dramatise competing roles that Wilde's example has been used to legitimise. The first letter provides a naïve modern view of the advances in civilization since Wilde's time: same sex acts are no longer criminalised; public displays of affection are possible (if not common); gay men are out of the closet, and in the bar of their choice with their peers and beers (211). Bartlett captures exactly the irony of the contemporary constructions of Wilde as prophet when he has the imagined writer of the letter reflect on Wilde's intentions: 'I think that you didn't know things were going to change, and that really you weren't trying to change anything. You weren't thinking about us'. However, this lack of foresight on Wilde's part does not prevent hindsight from rewriting his role to make him a figure who legitimates present struggles; 'We're doing it all for you, It's all for you'. Wilde becomes, all at once, an emblem of what a man can achieve, and what he can suffer, and he is owed

[11] Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 261.

[12] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981; repr. 1990), vol. 1, p. 43.

[13] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 78.

[14] Bartlett, *Who Was that Man?*, p. 33.

a debt. This familiar view is made problematic in the second imaginary letter. Here Bartlett imagines a man dreaming of waking with Wilde in his bed. Where, in the previous letter Wilde's example and sacrifice author(ised) gay male narratives of selfhood, this ghost provides no answers, and tells no stories. For the dreamer this silence is more than disarming, it is suffocating; it prevents the dreamer from speaking:

> I couldn't say what I wanted to say. I don't pity you. I don't even want to ask your advice, just to hear your stories; I'll work out what they might mean to me. Please, say anything at all to me, and I can use it. You old queen, you've got your hand on my face, I can't talk now (213).

This spectre of Wilde does not offer a narrative that can be interpreted and employed, and dependence upon his example actually prevents the creation of new identities. Bartlett understands that the choice of Wilde as the paradigmatic gay man, and the emphasis on sacrifice and the homosexual as scapegoat as defining components of homosexual identity, enact the creation of a subject position that prevents individuals who experience same sex desire from imagining themselves otherwise. This is not to suggest that Wilde and the many men who suffered persecution before and after him did not suffer, but it is to question the logic by which their sacrifice becomes a defining characteristic of a particular identity. Bartlett follows Wilde when he says that the duty we owe to history is to rewrite it, and his book rewrites the narrative of Wilde as scapegoat by uncovering a wide range of alternative nineteenth and twentieth century gay men whose lives have been glossed over, using stories that have been told about Wilde and 'those of his sort' to make a plea for recognising what is lost as well as what is gained in accepting the subject positions offered by the dominant social formations, even those positions which seem at first to be marginal and vulnerable, positions that seem to run counter to those formations (223).[15]

Wilde in the dock brings together the three aspects of the *fin-de-siècle* artist that I am examining in this chapter: the artist as mediator, as Christ-like, and as a revolutionary. The artist on trial was a familiar figure to Wilde. Before Ruskin and Whistler's celebrated case, Flaubert and Baudelaire both provide examples of the artist cross-examined. 1880s London provided a further example in the trial and imprisonment of Henry Vizetelly, Zola's English publisher. Vizetelly, aged seventy, was tried twice during 1887-8 for publishing translations of Zola's *La Terre* (1887), bankrupted in the process, and finally imprisoned for three months. The risks of the courtroom were clear, as was the example of those predecessors who had cast themselves as willing causes

[15] E. M. Forster's Maurice famously declares himself 'An unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort'. E. M. Forster *Maurice* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin), chapter thirty-one.

célèbres. H. Montgomery Hyde provides a number of examples of moments when Wilde's friends and supporters urged upon him the necessity of leaving Britain. Hyde quotes Wilde himself referring to the example of Lord Arthur Somerset who, when a case was brought against him, was allowed sufficient time to leave the country (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, 240).[16] Both before his first case against the Marquess of Queensberry and towards its disastrous close Wilde was warned of the likely outcome of his actions. Frank Harris and Bernard Shaw together warned Wilde of the un-likeliness of an English jury finding against a father (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, 265-7) and Sir Edward Clarke wrote in his memoir that when he and Wilde had agreed to withdraw from their case against the Marquess he told Wilde that there was no need for him to be in court when the announcement was made since he was likely to be immediately arrested. Clarke writes that he fully expected Wilde to take this opportunity to flee the country (quoted in Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, 284). Later still after his second trial, when events seemed to be moving towards a clearly predetermined end, Wilde was urged to jump bail by his friends and even by those who had stood surety to his bail bond (Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, 346).

What the court room provided Wilde was a final stage upon which to perform the role that he had already scripted for the artist, to make a spectacle of the sacrificial, receptive theatrically multiple subjectivity that he had developed in his writing and in his public persona. A court though is a theatre where the basis of modern bourgeois society in property is the only show that plays and Wilde's rewriting of that script fails. In 'De Profundis' Wilde shows himself conscious of the terrible ironies of his situation:

> Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, the broken words that come from the lips of pain, remorse that makes one walk in thorns, conscience that condemns, self-abasement that punishes, the misery that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses the sackcloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall - all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I was determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each one of them in turn, to feed on them, to have, for a season, indeed, no other food at all. (*Complete Works*, 1026)

Elaborating a subjectivity that depends upon a willingness to think even evil and pain the better to achieve ethical understanding, Wilde admits that his fear of failure and disgrace kept him from following his own injunctions. He acknowledges that he indulged in rhetoric rather than logic when he spoke of 'tasting all the fruits of knowledge' when he was 'in truth afraid of the other side of the garden, the side in shadow and gloom (*Complete Works*, p 1026). In 'De Profundis' these recognitions provide the context for a reiteration of the motif of the Christ-like artist as a revolutionary, an agitator:

[16] Hyde provides however no clear indication of where he found these words.

> I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist, and I take a keen pleasure in the reflection that long before Sorrow had made my days her own and bound me to her wheel I had written in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself, and had taken as my types not merely the shepherd on the hillside and the prisoner in his cell but also the painter to whom the world is a pageant and the poet for whom the world is a song. (*Complete Works*, 1027)

The scapegoat that Wilde sees here is the Christ of the Passion troped also as an artist and an agitator. The theatrically multiple subjectivity that I have argued Wilde adapts from Hegel provides the basis for Wilde's challenge to the dominant social formations and the subject they construct. Where the bourgeois subject is unified and singular, an individual with a soul, desires, needs and a will that is theirs alone, Wilde posits an alternative subjectivity based upon being rather than having. The artistic temperament is a model of the theatrically multiple subject because it offers the spectacle of an individual with a multiplied consciousness, and this consciousness is achieved through art and available to all. More radically yet, this consciousness avoids the allegiances and logic that implicates the traditional conceptions of the subject in the subjection of individuals to damaging and inhuman economies of exchange. Wilde's theory of 'types' depends upon understanding subjectivity as a form of desiring consciousness in search of recognition in the consciousness of another; the sacrifice of the single self represents the acknowledgement of this need for recognition and locates the single self within a collective desiring subject.

There is a sense in which Wilde's conception of the artist is at once anti-romantic and romantic. It is anti-romantic in its unmasking of the complicities of romanticism with the reifications of art and artists as commodities, but he remains committed to a privileged role for the artists and art in the transformation of society. In this Wilde is more optimistic than Henry James about the role that the artist can play in the development of a mass democratic society. In the analysis that follows I will examine Henry James's employment of the figure of the revolutionary and suggest that though there are a number of significant similarities James differs from Wilde in his commitment to the ideal of the artist as a revolutionary figure and to his sense that art can provide an alternative to the bourgeois self. The similarities between the two men's investigations are striking; both trope the revolutionary as an artist figure and both depend upon the idea of a theatrically multiple subjectivity. Each man sees the artist as a mediator between the past and the future states of society and individual.

The Revolutionary and the Artist in Henry James

James, like Wilde, turned in the 1880s to the figure of the revolutionary. Both his two large novels of social change - *The Bostonians* (1886), and *The Princess Casamassima* (1886)

– deal with characters actively involved in radical social politics. James chose the subject of *The Bostonians* because, he noted 'the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex' was a 'very national, very typical ... a very American tale, ... a tale very characteristic of our social conditions'.[17] James represents the lecture-goers and pamphleteers of radical Boston as self-absorbed, their political aspirations fatally compromised by their dependence on bourgeois proprieties, and the denouement of his novel spares no one. Verena Tarrant is led off by Basil Ransom in tears 'not the last that she was to shed'.[18] Her tears indicate her confusion and the hollowness of Basil Ransom's victory. Olive Chancellor loses her companion as a punishment for pride, but the novel's unsympathetic portrayal of her is mitigated by her bravery in appearing before the Boston audience in the last paragraph of the novel. These Boston women are revolutionaries in the sense that they are agitators as the Abolitionists were agitators. James shows the battle between the limited traditions of New England Puritanism, in the shape of Olive Chancellor, and the chauvinism of American social ideals, represented by Basil Ransom, for a cipher of a young woman, Verena Tarrant.[19] The small cast of characters in the novel manages to represent all the significant political discourses of the post-Civil War years.

After such an avowedly American novel addressing specifically American social crises, James chose specifically European settings for his next novel. Where *The Bostonians* surveys democratic American society after the Civil War, *The Princess Casamassima* surveys the European crises of democratic representation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Central to this crisis was the figure and the threat of the revolutionary (whether a Communard, or a Russian nihilist, or a Fenian activist). I will argue below that Henry James, like Oscar Wilde, employs the figure of the revolutionary as a figure for the artist, and that in *The Princess Casamassima* we can see James charting new relations between the modern artist and the city, and between the artist and the urban masses.

George Woodcock, the historian of Anarchism and revolutionary politics, is only one of many critics who have sought to characterise Henry James's relationship to this historic moment as one of painful ambivalence.[20] Woodcock claims that James aligned himself with the decaying established aristocratic order of Europe and especially England, while recognising that just those values of privacy and exclusivity and of taste

[17] *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, edited by Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 18-9.

[18] These are the last eight words of the novel: Henry James, *The Bostonians*, ed. by R. D. Gooder, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

[19] James gives Ransom a particularly explicit statement in chapter thirty-four concerning the 'damnable feminization' of America: James, *The Bostonians*, p. 322.

[20] George Woodcock, 'Henry James and the Conspirators', *Sewanee Review*, (1952), pp. 219-29.

and privilege which he revered were values that were already almost lost. The picture that Woodcock paints fails to do justice to James as an artist whose commitment to culture and society demanded that he turn his imagination to understanding the present as it passed and the future as it came into being. James's own family and intellectual heritage, composed in equal measure of democratic commitment and a conviction that the individual, and the right individual, was the most important, is far more complicated than Woodcock allows. James's long novels of the mid-1880s each have him address areas of cultural crisis that show an unswerving commitment to registering and analysing shifting social formations. Woodcock's charge stands as the opposite to assessments of James's political understanding such as Lionel Trilling's in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950). Trilling very accurately characterises James's understanding of society in terms of 'crowds and police, [...] a field of justice and injustice, reform and revolution. The social texture of James's work is grainy and knotted with practicality and detail.'[21] He goes on though to assert that the revolution that James foresaw and that inspired *The Princess Casamassima* was an anarchist one (69). I am concerned in the discussion below with the 'grainy and knotted' texture of James's imagining.

The period between 1848 and 1875 has been described by Eric Hobsbawm as the one when 'industrial capitalism became a genuine world economy and the globe was therefore transformed from a geographical expression into a constant operational reality. History became world history'.[22] Karl Marx has another, succinct way of expressing a similar analysis: 'The Bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilisation ... In one word, it creates a world after its own image.'[23] It is the cheap price of its goods that the bourgeoisie employs to subjugate the barbarians, and the creation and incorporation of new markets that moulds subject peoples into the mirror of the European bourgeoisie. Alongside this development of capital and the extension of markets, the foundations of European bourgeois society shifted to accommodate the increasing political awareness and activity of the urban working class. At the beginning of this period, the prospect of concerted class action, revolutionary action that would transform the organisation of society, remained a possibility; by the 1870s, the years immediately after the Paris Commune, this possibility had vanished. 'The Communist Manifesto' is a document that offers an index of these hopes. Marshall Berman notes that discontent in England and France was pervasive and

[21] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, first edition (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1951), p. 60.

[22] E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, Abacus edition. (London: Sphere Books, 1977), p. 63.

[23] Marx and Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', p. 71.

intense in the late 1840s and that the manifesto offers a program for change.[24] The events of 1848 however required a reassessment of that program and in his detailed analysis in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1851-2) Marx anatomises the events which allowed revolutionary hopes to be lost. He divides the months between February 1848 and December 1851 into three main periods: '*the February period; May 4, 1848, to May 28, 1849: the period of the constitution of the republic,* or *of the Constituent National Assembly; May 28, 1849, to December 2, 1851: the period of the constitutional republic* or *of the Legislative National Assembly*'.[25] The first of these periods, the shortest, seemed to promise that an actual transformation of the social organisation had occurred, one that altered for the better the lot of the proletariat, particularly that of the Parisian urban industrial workers. This period is crucial in Marx's analysis of the situation because this is one of the earliest moments when he describes the position of the Parisian proletariat as at odds with the rest of the country - later, in his pamphlet 'The Civil war in France' about the Commune of 1871, Marx identifies the Parisian workers as Paris herself and writes that 'Paris armed was the revolution armed'.[26] Throughout his analyses of the conflict, Paris as a privileged site of revolution plays an important symbolic part.

It is the period May 1849 to December 1851 that Marx identifies as the one in which the positive achievements of the 1848 revolution are destroyed. Not only is there the violent suppression of the June insurrection, but during this period the bourgeois republicans fail to prevent the shift of power towards the National Assembly. In government terms the creation of the Constituent National Assembly replaced the provisional social republic with a bourgeois republic. Marx identifies the June insurrection of 1848 as the literal human destruction of the proletarian revolutionary possibility. The brutal suppression of the Parisian workers announced the success of a bourgeois revolution. This is the key moment Marx argues because this is the moment when it is understood that the bourgeois republic was formed not as republicans had hoped 'through a liberal revolt of the bourgeoisie against the throne, but through a rising of the proletariat against capital, a rising laid low with grape-shot. What it [the republican bourgeois faction] had pictured to itself as the most revolutionary *event* turned out in reality to be the most *counter-revolutionary*'.[27] The last of Marx's three periods is characterised by the struggle between bourgeois republicans and royalists, and it ends with the *coup d'état* and the institution of the Second Empire.

[24] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 109.

[25] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Selected Works*, ed. by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp. 96-179, (p. 100).

[26] Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in *Selected Works*, ed. by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp. 271-309, (p. 271).

[27] Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', p. 105.

Marx's analysis makes clear that the possible futures raised by the armed insurrections of 1848 revolution are systematically dispelled by the manoeuvrings and political compromises of the months that follow. After 1848-51, the idea of revolution cannot be that of armed insurrection alone; an explanation must be sought for the failure of the earlier revolutionary movements, and an alternative method of revolution formulated. This method was sought in the creation of national and international workers' organisations, but these movements were associations whose aim was not insurrection, or the immediate transformation of the social formations. Eric Hobsbawm suggests that Marx's most extravagant hope for the years of the International was the establishment of independent political labour movements in the major industrial countries and the freeing of these movements from the intellectual influence of both liberal-radicalism and left-wing ideologies like anarchism and mutualism.[28] This is an important distinction: though the figure of the revolutionary was a terrifying one for the governments of the day, actual insurrectionary action was neither the aim, nor even the wish of the international workers' organisations.

Marx's analyses in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' and 'The Civil War in France' (1871) are important here because of their dependence on certain key tropes. These are: Paris as a site of revolution, a site distinct from and set against the rest of France and Europe; the sacrifice of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie in defence of the social order, a sacrifice that reveals the despotic brutal logic of capitalism; and the recognition of the need for a new mode of revolution. I will argue below that in his novel *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) Henry James takes these familiar tropes and employs them in an exploration of the position of the artist during periods of intense social change and the responsibilities of the artist to history. The novel responds to challenges to dominant realist modes of representation in order to retrieve those modes for the modern urban artist. This response results in a novel that dramatises transformations in the dominant discourses of representations of the urban, and which emphasises the operations by which these discourses interpellate individuals as subjects. James's revolutionary hero Hyacinth Robinson reveals through his inanition the ways in which the discursive mechanisms of the dominant discourses create and maintain subject positions. When James tropes Hyacinth as an artist-flâneur-revolutionary and sacrifices him at the close of the novel he emphasises the perilous position of the modern artist but he also emphasises the power of an alternative theatrically multiple subjectivity. My discussion begins with examples available to Henry James of the relationship between artistic form, the artist and political responsibilities.

[28] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, p. 140.

Two French models for the modern artist: Flaubert and Courbet

Two contrasting models of the political activities of artists were available to James in contemporary French culture. The first is dramatised in Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), and the second can be recognised in the person and paintings of Gustave Courbet. Flaubert's novel was an attempt, he told Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, to write 'the moral history, or rather the sentimental history, of the men of my generation'; it would be a story of passion but passion cannot exist any longer.[29] Flaubert's coruscating account of political quietism and opportunism, greed and immorality, dramatised through the blindness and moral inadequacy of Frédéric Moreau, charges Second Empire intellectuals with evisceration in the face of a regime based on political violence. There is no space in his novel for artists like Courbet only for Moreau's schoolboy poetry or the painter Pelerin's sterile pursuit of the ideal forms in which to transform his vulgar commissions into works of art (the portrait of the Marshal which Frédéric finally pays for stands as an emblem of the debasement of the artist before the demi-monde). James's response to Flaubert generally, and to *L'Éducation sentimentale* in particular, allows us to chart the complex ways in which *The Princess Casamassima* is a concerted contestation by James of the dominant narrative strategies of realism and the complicities of those strategies with the mechanisms of the hegemonic social formations.

Gustave Courbet (1819-77) provides a figure for the artist, one which stands in contrast to that which Flaubert represents. From his earliest works and his choice to display them outside the salon setting, to his activities during the commune, Courbet stands as a crucial politicised artist figure, as T J Clark discusses in *Image of the People* (1973). Clark writes that Courbet's realism endeavoured to keep four factors in play, 'nature, tradition, work and the public' and that for a short while after 1848 'the complex dialogue of artist, public, and the "ensemble of men and things" [as Courbet defined nature] actually took place'.[30] Courbet's painting 'l'Atelier du peintre, Allégorie réelle' (1855) offers a pictorial representation of some of the themes of *The Princess Casamassima*, just as Courbet's experience and example in the Paris Commune offers a model for the radical commitment that an artist may make to political change. James Rubin details in his study of Courbet the identities of each of the individuals in the painting.[31] To the right of the central figure of a seated painting artist are grouped friends and colleagues of the artist as well as patrons and admirers. Perhaps the most intriguing of these are the

[29] Letter of October 1864; quoted in *Sentimental Education* p. 7. 'Je veux faire l'histoire morale les homes de ma génération; «sentimentale» serait plus vai. C'est un livre d'amour de passion; mais de passion telle qu'elle peut exister maintenant, c'est-à-di inactive', Gustave Flaubert, *Œvres Complètes de Gustave Flaubert* 16 vols (Paris: Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1971-75), vol. 14, p. 217.

[30] T. J. Clark, *Image of The People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 155.

[31] James H. Rubin, *Courbet* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), p. 140-6.

figures of Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the seated figure of Jules Champfleury, and the seated, intently reading figure of Baudelaire. Courbet's earlier painting, *Les Baigneuses* (1853), had provoked Proudhon's first practical references to the role of art in society in his book *Philosophy of Progress* (published 1853 and almost immediately banned):

> Let the people, recognizing its misery, learn to blush at its cowardice and to despise tyrants; let the aristocracy, exposed in its fat and obscene nudity, receive on each limb the lashes of its parasitism, insolence and corruption. Let the magistrate, the soldier, the merchant, the peasant - all conditions of society - seeing themselves each in their turn in the epitome of their dignity and their baseness, learn through both glory and shame to rectify their ideas, to correct their habits, and to perfect their institutions ... This is how art must participate in the movement of society, both provoking it and following it (117).

Courbet visited Proudhon in jail and was present at his release in 1852. Proudhon's response provides a stark contrast with almost all other critical responses to Courbet's painting. Gautier and Delacroix, the first not an admirer of Courbet and the second a convert to Courbet's vigorous brushwork, were both equally appalled by Courbet's vulgarity in painting such an overweight, naked character. They rejected Courbet's choice of subject and its explicit critique of traditional forms, and rejected his engagée position. Courbet's works are expressly involved in meeting Proudhon's challenge that art represent society, provoke change and follow change.

The importance of *l'Atelier du peintre* is that it also gives a pictorial representation of the artist's political relation to society. Courbet figures himself as the politically engaged artist whose work brings into relation all the disparate elements of contemporary society. The figures on the left of the seated artist in the picture marshal, as James Rubin succinctly puts it, 'the whole range of social ideologies and nationalisms in order to present them with the uplifting educational lesson embodied by the artist at work' (143). Rubin goes on to identify each of the figures in turn and to suggest what part they might play in depicting the spectrum of social ideologies; from the prominent Jewish banker Achille Fould on the far edge of the painting to the Irishwoman and her child, referring to the social conditions engendered by the Industrial revolution in Britain, as well as to the famine in Ireland, to the figure of the hunter, the most prominent figure who is unmistakably Napoleon III (144). These figures represent the various and competing ideologies of the past while the figures on the right represent the supporters and companions of the artist. Seated in the middle of the painting the artist brings these groups into relation and also brings into relation the past with the present and the future. Rubin rightly asserts that overweening ambition lead Courbet to paint this picture. The seated artist, painting a traditional landscape scene, one without figures, suggests the past practice and position of the artist, as does the whole setting of the painting itself - if

we do not know who any of the figures in the painting are then we see emblematic past figures from Romantic art on the left balanced by the bourgeois, patrons and connoisseurs on the right, with the artist in the middle obviously occupying a complex ironic position; learning who the figures are does not dispel this impression, only complicates and develops it. Courbet achieves a further irony by staging this scene with its artist figure in the costume of a bourgeois rather than that of a bohemian (or that of an artisan, a costume he had earlier employed in the self-portrait *La Rencontre* (1854)). His work stages the artist's work-place as the site where very different facets of society can meet and be reconciled and transformed. The painting takes as its subject relations between the artist, the public, society and the work which are often dismissed as abstractions. It is in this sense that the painting is a 'real allegory'.

After these works of the mid 1850s Courbet's paintings became less successful and less focused. The coup d'état brought Napoleon III back to power and ended what had seemed like the chance for a new beginning in France. Courbet had to wait until the early 1870s before he could again make a determined contribution to the political life of the country and that was, for him, as T. J. Clark writes, disastrous.[32] It resulted in imprisonment and continual hounding after his release, persecution which lasted for the rest of his life, forcing him into exile in Switzerland. The common explanation given for the vituperativeness of his persecution was his involvement in the destruction of the Vendôme column. Despite the many caricatures of the time and repetition of the story by writers and historians afterwards, James Rubin notes that Courbet actually sought first of all only to remove the brass reliefs from the base of the column in order to safely preserve them in a museum, and that when the decree for the destruction of the column was issued on 12 April, Courbet had not yet been elected to the commune.[33] His experience in the commune stands as a painful reminder of the personal dangers of political involvement for any individual, and identifies the complex relations between Realism as a literary method, ideas of revolutionary change and Paris.

The importance of the contrasting examples of Courbet and Flaubert is as much in what they have in common as in their clear differences. Both artists were committed to realism as a method which allowed the artist to create works which challenged the established artistic forms and their ideological basis. For Courbet realism in painting transformed the method of representation and the subjects. For Flaubert realism provided a challenge to and a duty for the artist: the duty was to represent in the most impersonal style all that occurred and was experienced by the characters represented; the challenge was to achieve a representation that confronted the contemporary world with a

[32] Clark, *Image of The People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, p. 161.
[33] Rubin, *Courbet*, p. 276-8.

moral authority. For both writers realism in method and subject was part of their understanding of the relationship of art to social experience and to politics. However, realism as a method is not without its problems. The difficulties that the realist novelist faces can be made clear by examining Flaubert's representations of Paris, revolution and the flâneur in *L' Éducation sentimentale.*

Paris, revolution, realism and flânerie

Two ideas are central to the late nineteenth century image of Paris. The first is the idea of revolution, and the second the figure of the flâneur. Victor Hugo, writing an introduction to the *Paris-Guide* in 1867, directly associates Paris with revolution. He contrasts Paris with other European cities and says that the supremacy of Paris is an enigma; Rome has majesty, Venice has beauty and Naples grace, while London has riches: 'Qu'a donc Paris?' He answers 'La révolution.'[34] Paris is not only the site of revolutions past but is characterised as the site of a continuous revolution. Hugo was, as Christopher Prendergast notes, writing polemically from exile against Louis Napoleon's regime but his rhetoric nonetheless sounds a dominant note in the representation of the city.[35] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has explored this representation in detail and argues that Paris provides more than a background to the many tales set in the city: 'it furnishes the terms of the narrative itself. These writings do not just talk about the revolution in the city; they stage the city itself as revolutionary, and on many levels at once'.[36] Paris was at once the world-city and a metonym for the idea of revolution.

The streets of Paris, which had been the sites of battles, were also the scene of the artist's encounter with the urban mass. The artist, in the guise of the flâneur, the strolling individual, confronts the urban sprawl, its multiplicity of spaces and faces, and forges a sovereign self in acts of mastery over the spectacle afforded by the streets.[37] The individual writer's relationship to the urban experience becomes the very basis of their art, and the dominant strategy of representation. Balzac's *Ferragus* (1833), one of the trio of novels that became *Histoire des Treize* (1833-4), encapsulates this precisely, just as the novels grouped under the heading "Scènes de la vie Parisienne" in the Comédie Humaine do so in a more diffuse sense. The plot of *Ferragus* turns on the inquisitiveness of one passer-by about the life of a woman he sees in the streets. Similar strategies can be recognised in Dickens's early writings; *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and some of the key sections

[34] Victor Hugo, *Ouvres Completes,* edited by Jean Massin, 18 vols (Paris: Le club Français du Livre, 1967-70), 13, p. 586.

[35] Christopher Prendergast, *Paris in the Nineteenth Century,* Writing the City (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p.7-8.

[36] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1994), p. 2.

[37] Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution,* p. 81.

of *David Copperfield* (1850), lead the reader through London, marvelling at the spectacle of the streets, while simultaneously asserting a mastery over the multi-form spectacle. This flânerie implies mastery by the subject of a scene that threatens the very unity of that subject, and thus the realist artist realises a discursive subject position for himself - and it is always him - in the discourses of urban representation.[38] This identification of the flâneur and the artist lasts only for a brief historical moment. What separates Balzac and Dickens from Flaubert and James are the changes wrought on both the material urban text and on the discourses of representation concerning the urban. In France the results of the revolution of 1848, the rise of the Second Empire and Baron Haussman's modernizations are such that the flâneur, and therefore the artist, now bear a radically different relation to the urban environment. In this altered urban landscape the solitary stroller no longer commands the scene; the authority of the artist-flâneur is revealed as a sham. This is one of the apprehensions that drove Flaubert to his great stylistic efforts in *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869). The novel identifies flânerie after 1848 as a form of dispossession by urban networks of power, rather than of possession of city territories. What had been the dominant narrative strategy of the urban realist novel is inadequate when confronted by rival and more powerful 'city' representations of class and mass social movements, and the figure of the artist it enshrined is revealed as hopelessly compromised.

In Flaubert's novel, Frédéric Moreau's wanderings indicate that the artist-flâneur has become a figure of failure, unable to place himself in the modern city and in history. This is marked in the scene when he awaits Madame Arnoux's possible adulterous visit to the love nest he has rented in the Rue Tronchet. She does not appear and Frédéric lingers in the street waiting for her. Hearing unusual loud noises from behind the Madeleine he witnesses a riot suppressed by troops; but he is unable to think of anything except Madame Arnoux. The flâneur's aloofness has become a pathetic self-indulgence, shallow and blind to the actual spectacle of street life. Flaubert's style directs us to the failure of the flâneur as a narrative strategy. The deadpan narration of events from Frédéric's point of view is radically discontinuous. At the beginning of book three, Frédéric is awoken by sounds of battle and goes out into the streets (these are the same streets, those around the Madeleine and the Champs Elyseés, that James has Hyacinth walk in *The Princess Casamassima*). The narration of the street scene is dominated by

[38] Janet Wolff, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, and Mieke Bal all discuss the gender of the flâneur: Mieke Bal, 'His Master's Eye', in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. by David Michael Levin (California: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 379-404; Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, 'The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris', in *The Flâneur*, ed. by Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 22-42; Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, ed. by Janet Wolff (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 34-50.

unexpected events given no explanation, and by images that are ironically incongruous. Flaubert writes:

> Further on he noticed three paving-stones in the middle of the roadway, presumably the beginnings of a barricade, and then some broken bottles and coils of wire intended to obstruct the cavalry. Suddenly out of an alley, there rushed a tall, pale young man, with black hair hanging down over his shoulders, and wearing a sort of singlet with coloured dots. He was carrying a long infantry musket and running along on tiptoe, looking as tense as a sleepwalker and as lithe as a tiger (*Sentimental Education*, 285).[39]

This vision retains the jumbled nature of the events without any suggestion that Frédéric can make sense of them. The two sentences contrast ironically what Frédéric can see - literally spots, the polka dot vest - and the possible descriptive power of the narrative (the combination of the images of the sleepwalker and tiger in the description of the young man is surely beyond Frédéric). The subsequent paragraphs continue to highlight ironically the failure of the flâneur to master the scene. In writing the 'sentimental history' of his generation Flaubert eviscerates the dominant trope for the artist in the realist novel. Frédéric's emptiness and Flaubert's ironic presentation of him contrasts with James's over-determination of Hyacinth Robinson.[40] We can see the connections between Flaubert's novel and James's when we compare James's description from his New York edition preface to *The Princess Casamassima* of Hyacinth Robinson, and his response to Flaubert's portrayal of Frédéric Moreau.

The worry that James returns to time and again in the Prefaces to the New York Edition is the adequacy of his central consciousnesses to the demands that he, and the reader, make on them. In the 'Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*' he writes:

> I have ever found rather terribly the point - that the figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it. [...] We care, our curiosity and our sympathy care, comparatively little for what happens to the stupid, the coarse and the blind... (*Literary Criticism II*, 1088-9)

James's use of *figures* and *agents* here identifies his terms for the dramatisations of consciousness that he writes, and indicate that my thesis directly bears up his own sense

[39] 'Plus loin, il remarqua trios pavés au milieu de la voie, le commencement d'une barricade, sans doute, puis des tessons de bouteilles, et des paquets de fil de fer pour embarrasser la cavalerie; quand tout à coup s'élança d'une ruelle un grand jeune homme pâle, dont les cheveux noirs flottaient sur les épaules, prises dans une espèce de maillot à pois couleur. Il tenait un long fusil de soldat, et courait sur la pointe de ses pantoufles, avec l'air d'un somnambule et leste comme un tigre': Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Éditions Garnier, 1984), p. 289.

[40] Philip Grover also relates James's depiction of Hyacinth to the hero of *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, though he merely notes their resemblance rather than examining it. Philip Grover, *Henry James and the French Novel: A Study in Inspiration* (London: Elek Books, 1973), p. 103.

of his fictional campaign. His worry with Hyacinth Robinson was with the difficulty of fixing 'at a hundred points the place where one's impelled *bonhomme* may feel enough and "know" enough ... for his maximum dramatic value without feeling and knowing too much for his minimum verisimilitude, his proper fusion with the fable' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1094-5). James had earlier written that *L'Éducation sentimentale* was a failure because Frédéric Moreau is 'positively too poor for his part, too scant for his charge', as 'the personage bearing the weight of the drama, and in whom we are invited to that extent to interest ourselves' (*Literary Criticism II*, 327). This is James's repeated charge against Flaubert's novels. In his 1902 preface to a translation of *Madame Bovary* he asks why Flaubert should have chosen 'such abject human specimens' as Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau as the central characters of his fictions (*Literary Criticism II*, 326). Writing of Frédéric Moreau James reproves Flaubert's characterisation:

> Frédéric enjoys his position not only without the aid of a single 'sympathetic' character of consequence, but even without the aid of one with whom we can directly communicate. Can we communicate with the central personage? Or would we really if we could? A hundred times no, and if he can communicate with the people shown us as surrounding him this only proves him of their kind (*Literary Criticism II*, 328)

James invokes the question of the reader's sympathy with the central consciousness as one aspect of his attempt to overcome Flaubert's evisceration of the artist-flâneur. In Flaubert the artist-flâneur position, as a character and a narrative method, is represented by an ironic blankness. Of course, Frédéric's emptiness and Flaubert's ironic presentation of him is one of the triumphs of the novel, and, as Philip Horne notes, James seems wilfully to avoid this recognition.[41] James's decisive move in rewriting Frédéric Moreau as Hyacinth Robinson is to take the ironic blankness that is the subjectivity of Flaubert's artist-flâneur and to represent that subjectivity as a palimpsest. If the subject is a palimpsest then the city is one also and James's scraping of the 'vast smug surface' of London depends upon a complex figuration of the lived experience of the modern urban environment as a many-storied, oft over-written, over-determined text. This figuration is realised through the *scriptibility* of the artist-flâneur, the receptiveness of this subjectivity to competing, endangering discourses. Roland Barthes's distinction between *lisible* and *scriptible* can help me clarify here the alteration I am arguing for in James's recuperation of the artist-flâneur. Where the flâneur in earlier realist fiction masters the city, writes their story onto the city, and by extension realist fiction promises a narrative strategy that

[41] Philip Horne, 'The Lessons of Flaubert: James and *L'Éducation Sentimentale*', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 26 (1996), pp. 154-62 (p. 156).

unifies the chaos of the impressions that the city gives rise to, James's artist-flâneur is the textual surface upon which the powerful discourses of the city write.[42]

Earlier characterisations of the figure of the flâneur, and by extension the artist-flâneur, depended upon their possession of a secret. Baudelaire describes the perfect flâneur as the 'passionate spectator', someone who feels immense joy in the crowd:

> To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, impatient impartial natures ... The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.[43]

The secret of this prince incognito is his identity and his pleasure in the spectacle of the crowd. The secret of the artist-flâneur is, for Walter Benjamin, his self-conscious performance of his artistic work in the streets, a performance that attempts to cloak his place in the dominant productive relations. The artist-flâneur behaved, writes Benjamin, 'as if he had learned from Marx that the value of the commodity is determined by the working time that is socially necessary to produce it'.[44] The idleness of the artist-flâneur becomes that which gives value to his writing, and this value is guaranteed by the reification of artistic genius as a possession rather than a process. Benjamin argues that this is the logic by which the work of the artist and the artist themselves are assimilated to the marketplace.[45] Benjamin's analysis of the artist-flâneur's secret complements Flaubert's recognition that the modern urban artist as flâneur may be only a character scripted by the dominant discourses of urban representation, rather than vice versa. In *The Princess Casamassima* James adds a further term to the duo of flâneur and artist; the revolutionary. Just as Benjamin notes that the flâneur is a prototype for the detective, so he is also an early guise of the secret agent, the spy, or the underground revolutionary. The revolutionary as a marginal figure leads a double life; simultaneously private, underground, out of sight, and public. The secret of the revolutionary is their relation to the existing social organisation, and the threat of violence that their position often, though not necessarily, implies. In *The Princess Casamassima* James employs this triptych of artist-flâneur-revolutionary, located in the figure of Hyacinth Robinson, to reveal the anxious complicities between narratives of the city, politics and art.

[42] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

[43] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 399-400.

[44] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn, reprint edition (London: Verso, 1997), p. 29.

[45] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 35.

Hyacinth the artist-flâneur-revolutionary

In *The Princess Casamassima* James employs three characters to help him redefine a figure for the artist and to escape the 'failure' that he recognised in Flaubert. The three characters are Hyacinth Robinson, Millicent Henning, and the Princess Casamassima herself. Hyacinth is figured as a fractured subject, pulled apart by competing discourses, to each of which he turns as he attempts to fill his empty consciousness. The Princess Casamassima provides an alternative to Hyacinth Robinson as a figure for the artist but her glamour is the glamour of the commodity and she represents the artist as commodity broker. The guiding idea of the book is the glamour of secrecy and initiation, whether this is initiation into a secret society or into the spectacular commodity economy. Either of these possibilities represents the incorporation of the subject into impersonal discourses of power which drastically limit the agency of the citizen subject.

When first Millicent meets Hyacinth again as an adult she is quick to say that he looks like 'a little Frenchman'.[46] This is followed by a description of Hyacinth's greatest pleasure, that of strolling the city streets. He takes 'interminable, restless, melancholy, moody, yet all-observant strolls through London' (102). These strolls confront Hyacinth with the multiplicity of the city:

> He liked the reflection of the lamps on the wet pavements, the feeling and smell of the carboniferous damp; the way the winter fog blurred and suffused the whole place, made it seem bigger and more crowded, produced halos and dim radiations, trickles and evaporations on plates of glass (106).

Evaporations leave ghostly shadows of the past just as the intense inhabitation of the city space accretes the traces of previous inhabitants, previous lives and times. Hyacinth (and the reader) experience the sensations of the city streets as an indefinite suggestion of something always just beyond apprehension. This description, along with that of his ambiguous appearance, alerts the reader to Hyacinth's uncertain transgressive status. He is constantly described as neither one thing nor the other, not a gentleman but never vulgar, a worker yet given to idle pursuits, a revolutionary sympathiser whose greatest interest is occasioned by the luxuriant display of wealth. Related to this ambiguity is the consciousness that James gives to Hyacinth of the city streets as a stage upon which individuals act out their dramas, and of himself as an actor. Walking with Millicent Henning from Lomax Place to her rented rooms via the Edgware road he thinks of himself as one disguised:

[46] Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986), p. 101-2.

> He was on the point of replying that ... he wished to go through life in his own character; but he [reflected] that this was exactly what, apparently, he was destined not to do. His own character? He was to cover that up as carefully as possible; he was to go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle; he was to be, everyday and every hour, an actor (109).

Hyacinth's lack of a sense of a stable self is a direct result of not only his paternity but of his experience of city living. His flânerie is inseparable from two of his other qualities. The first is his recognition that he is shut out from a great section of the life of the city, due to his class, and the second is the qualities of the artist that James attributes to him. An important description of these qualities occurs when we learn that Hyacinth likes, during long summer evenings, to go to Hyde Park and observe *the crush*. Here the very spectacle of the late Victorian Imperial finery displayed itself to its own edification. James often in the '80s uses the riding ring in Hyde Park as a metonym for the vulgar luxuriant glory of aristocratic London parading itself: a particularly succinct example occurs early in 'Lady Barberina' (1884) when the young American narrator of the story is disgusted to find two 'low-rent' Americans of his acquaintance enjoying the show as if it were a theatrical spectacle, one for which they do not have to pay (*Complete Tales*, vol. 5, pp. 195-302, 195-6). His disgust vanishes when he too is caught up in the show and recognises a friend of his riding along conversing with a beautiful young English noble woman. James's satire is directed both towards the Americans caught up in the spectacle and the spectacle itself. Hyacinth Robinson's experience of these scenes is an exhaustive, imaginative one:

> He wanted to drive in every carriage, to mount on every horse, to feel, on his arm the hand of every pretty woman in the place. In the midst of this his sense was vivid that he belonged to the class whom the upper ten thousand, as they passed, didn't so much as rest their eyes upon for a quarter of a second. They looked at Millicent, who was safe to be looked at anywhere, and was one of the handsomest girls in any company, but they only reminded him of the high human walls, the deep gulfs of tradition, the steep embankments of privilege and dense layers of stupidity, which fenced him off from social recognition. (164-5)

This scene parallels one early in *L'Éducation sentimentale* when Frédèric Moreau visits a comparable Parisian location, the Tuileries Gardens and the Champs-Élysées (*Sentimental Education*, 35), as well as mimicking the feelings of Lucien Rubempré in the first part of *Illusions perdues* (1837-43). The young man is assailed by the glamour of wealth and privilege and the variety of experience that the city offers: 'the great, roaring, indifferent world of London seemed to him a huge organisation for mocking at his poverty, at his inanition' (164). Prosaically what are empty are Hyacinth's pockets of course, but James closely identifies Hyacinth's artistic sensibility with his sense of exclusion from the spectacles of luxurious city life. Hyacinth is 'a youth on whom nothing was lost' (164), a

phrase which echoes James's own description of the novelist in 'The Art of Fiction' (*Literary Criticism I*, 53), and his vivid sense of the spectacle depends both upon his qualities as an observer and upon his feelings of exclusion. These feelings create a specific dilemma. Hyacinth feels that 'he must 'either suffer with the people ... or he must apologise to others, as he sometimes came so near doing to himself, for the rich' (165). He worries that 'it might very well be his fate to be divided, to the point of torture, to be split open by sympathies that pulled him in different ways ... and from the time he could remember was there not one half of him that seemed to be always playing tricks on the other, or getting snubs and pinches from it?' (165). This flâneur is perhaps literally a prince incognito since Hyacinth is, 'the son of the recreant, sacrificial Lord Frederick' (167). James records bluntly the realities of the unequal social and sexual divide when he makes Hyacinth aware that gender is a further barrier to his being noticed. More strikingly the evisceration of the artist-flâneur figure is recorded in the schizophrenic self-division of Hyacinth. The consciousness that James gives to Hyacinth of his situation tropes him as an artist-flâneur, and indicates the dangers that this position holds. James's 'little bookbinder', with his 'revolutionary commission burn[ing] in his pocket' (563), becomes only a binding for the text of another. Artist-flâneurs run the risk of appearing on the stage of the city in a role that they have not themselves scripted but that has been scripted for them by hegemony.

The metaphor that James employs in the novel to represent this scripting is that of initiation; characters in the novel seek initiation into the mysteries or secrets of society and of the city. Initiation depends upon revelation and serves as a metonymic link between Hyacinth Robinson the character in James's novel, the figure of the artist, James and the reader. The earliest suggestion of initiation is expressed comically by James. Hyacinth is *initiated* into the mysteries of Eustache Poupin's domestic life (117). The chubby communard refugee combines his 'red hot impatience for the general rectification with an extraordinary decency of life and a worship of proper work [...] there was nothing of the Bohemian about the Poupins' (124). The spectacle this comic initiation reveals is the secret bourgeois life of the radical revolutionary. This interior however also holds other secrets. James gives the Poupins a double identity. They are comic surrogate parents to Hyacinth, a French duo to match Amanda Pynsent and Augustus Vetch, his English surrogate parents, and they also serve as the initiators of Hyacinth Robinson into the revolutionary underworld. What Hyacinth learns in Lisson Grove isn't only an alternative radical narrative of contemporary history but the vocabulary of the *interne* (128). At first this learning too is presented as comic; Hyacinth learns 'their vocabulary by heart' (123) but only because they discuss nothing else and he treats 'Monsieur Poupin ... with a mixture of veneration and amusement' (120). However, James also renders Hyacinth's simplistic understanding of this revolutionary discourse. He begins to worry

about the status of his acquaintances and tries to decide who is of the people and who not (123), and he insists that 'the people' is an expression that carries an overriding political and moral charge (140). James suggests that Hyacinth's humorous distance from the vocabulary of the Poupins does not last because the attractiveness of the vocabulary of the initiate is too great and it quickly comes to govern his understanding.

Hyacinth's first meeting with Paul Muniment at the house of the Poupins develops this treatment of revolutionary language. Paul undercuts the Poupins' usual fervour by mocking the catch phrases of their revolutionary talk and the simplicity of their historical narrative. The Poupins believe in the eruption of an 'irresistible force' that 'will make the bourgeois go down into their cellars and hide' and they argue that "89 was an irresistible force' (125). Paul Muniment points out that the repression of the communards also fits this description; '"And so was the entrance of the Versaillais, which sent you over here, ten years ago," the young man rejoined'. The prevalence of Paris and Parisian revolutions as counters in revolutionary debates will be explored below; this example indicates how James makes Paul Muniment a mysterious revolutionary figure. His dismissal of the language of the initiate - he mocks Hyacinth later when he uses the expression 'the party of action', telling him that he must have got that from a newspaper report or editorial (151) - paradoxically serves only to make him appear to Hyacinth as more mysterious, someone further initiated. That Paul seems someone possessed of a secret is highlighted by what are almost his first words to Hyacinth, '"Can you keep a secret?"' (128). What attracts Hyacinth to Paul is this aura and the promise of a revelation: 'Hyacinth ... had a happy impression that Muniment perceived in him a possible associate, of a high type, in a subterranean crusade against the existing order of things' (152), but this glamour is also a trick and it is what allows Paul to co-opt Hyacinth as an unthinking instrument in the hands of the revolutionary master Hoffendahl. James is explicit concerning the operation of this enchantment on Hyacinth. Later in the novel when the two men visit the Sun and Moon and Paul reveals his great secret (that the international revolutionary Hoffendahl is in London) this revelation moves Hyacinth to 'a faith that transcended logic' a faith in the efficacy of giving society a great scare (292). It is the glamour of secrecy and of initiation that trumps logic and makes Hyacinth Robinson a willing, unthinking instrument. Only moments after this revelation the bookbinder offers himself as someone 'willing to risk his precious bones' (294) in the revolutionary cause. It is in Hyacinth Robinson's susceptibility to the attractions of secrecy and initiation that James identifies the ways in which discourses script individuals. James makes Hyacinth always dimly aware of this process but only able finally to escape it at the close of the novel. The image that James gives to Hyacinth of the revolutionary underground depends upon a cult of personality and the willing ceding of individual will to a preternaturally aware, almost Mephistophelean, *master* (334):

> 'There is an immense underworld, peopled with a thousand forms of revolutionary passion and devotion. The manner in which it is organized is what astonished me; I knew that, or thought I knew it, in a general way, but the reality was a revelation. And on top of it all society lives! People go and come, and buy and sell, and drink and dance, and make money and make love, and seem to know nothing, and suspect nothing and think of nothing; and iniquities flourish, and the misery of half the world is prated about as a 'necessary evil', and generations rot away and starve, in the midst of it, and day follows day, and everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. All that is one-half of it; the other half is that everything is doomed! In silence, and darkness, but under the feet of each of us, the revolution lives and works. It is a wonderful, immeasurable trap, on the lid of which society performs its antics. When once the machinery is complete there will be a great rehearsal. That rehearsal is what they want me for. The invisible, impalpable wires are everywhere, passing through everything, attaching themselves to objects in which on would never think of looking for them'. (330)

This is the recognisable reactionary vision of the threat of revolution and James gives it to Hyacinth Robinson to point up his confusion. It terrifies and enchants him in equal measure, registering both his paranoid sense of himself as the puppet of another and the welcome sense he has of being freed from individual responsibility. The setting for Hyacinth's statement and his intentions in making it can help us understand James's complex analysis of secrets. Hyacinth makes this statement to the Princess because it represents his own sense of being an initiate and of having 'seen the holy of holies' (330), and because he senses dimly that a secret gains in value through its telling and the teller may gain power over the listener. In revealing this vision he feels he has 'charmed the Princess into the deepest, most genuine attention; she was listening to him as she had never listened before. He enjoyed having that effect upon her, and his sense of the tenuity of the thread by which his future hung, renewed by his hearing himself talk about it, made him reflect that at present anything in the line of enjoyment was so much gained' (334). James's point is that Hyacinth has been seduced by the glamour of secrecy, a point underscored by the double irony of this scene: his sense of the power he gains over her mimics in a reduced form the power Hoffendahl exercised over him; and he is telling the Princess something that she knows already.

There is a further complex action here; James figures secrecy as underground *machinery* and this figure connects the revolutionary underground with the glamorous world of wealth. James links both these worlds to specific new material urban networks of power. These are the London Underground and the rapidly developing electrical networks of the capital. The 1860s saw the most significant material development of this underground world as tunnels for the rail network were constructed and piping laid to distribute gas to streets, homes and businesses. Substantial sums were invested in

extending this network which significantly altered the experience of the city. Gas works were large, industrial and situated in the centre of the city.[47] In the 1880s electrical power rapidly became a serious challenge to the established gas companies, as well as the subject of two Parliamentary Acts, the Electrical Lighting Acts of 1882 and 1888. London's streets were once again excavated as wiring was laid. The Underground, gas power and electrical power each represent dramatic, modern urban networks of power, literally in the case of gas and electricity, but, just as importantly, figuratively. The Underground is the living circuit which conducts the citizens of the city. It allows the swift, often disorientating, movement of large numbers of people from place to place which is necessary to the economy of the modern city. On the Underground, this mass of people travels 'in silence, and darkness ... under the feet of each of us'. This mass movement is a *revolution* in two senses: the first is that of constant motion, a never-ceasing movement of people, and the second sense is that of an entirely new urban experience in which individuals are subjected to processing by an extended network of machinery. The citizen-agent of the modern urban scene is subsumed in this machinery. This is the experience that James identifies as revolutionary. Electricity represents a further potent emblem of unseen, abstract networks of power which transform the human scene, and James identifies this network as powerful and disturbing also. Hyacinth says that the power of Hoffendahl reaches everywhere and into everything but his trope tells us more than he can. His vision of the revolutionary network, which has 'invisible, impalpable wires [which] are everywhere, passing through everything, attaching themselves to objects in which on would never think of looking for them', connects the revolutionary underground with the glamorous world of wealth because both depend upon underground machinery: the revolutionary underground becomes the hidden, seething circulating mass of people and the glamour of wealth is troped as the mesmerising brightness of electrical light (a light which only money can buy). This mesmerising quality is clear in Hyacinth Robinson's dreams of polite society

Hyacinth Robinson's initiation into the secret underworld is not the only initiation for which he wishes. He has another vision of a world from which he is excluded, a 'brighter happier vision - the vision of societies in which, in splendid rooms, with smiles and soft voices, distinguished men, with women who were both proud and gentle, talked about art, literature and history' (145). James has Hyacinth rationalise his feelings thus: 'there was no possible good fortune ... no privilege, no opportunity, no luxury to which he should not do justice. It was not so much that he wished to enjoy as he wished to

[47] See Lynda Nead *Victorian Babylon* for an extended discussion of the historical details of the developing utilities and their effects on the lives of city-dwellers. Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, C.: Yale University Press, 2000).

know; his desire was not to be pampered, but to be initiated' (164). The world of privilege depends upon the glamour of initiation and the desire of individuals to belong just as the revolutionary underworld compels loyalty through granting individuals a sense of belonging. The fruits of civilisation - 'art, literature, history' - become in this formulation passwords used to gain entry into this 'secret' society and Hyacinth's debut into this society is managed by the Princess Casamassima, Christina Light. She dazzles him with her glamorous performance of aristocratic being:

> She might well be a princess - it was impossible to conform more to the finest evocations of that romantic word. She was fair, brilliant, slender, with a kind of effortless majesty. Her beauty had an air of perfection; it astonished and lifted one up, the sight of it seemed a privilege, a reward ... Her dark eyes ... were as sweet as they were splendid, and there was an extraordinary light nobleness in the way that she held her head. That head ... suggested to Hyacinth something antique and celebrated which he had admired of old - the memory was vague - in a statue, in a picture, in a museum. Purity of line and form, of cheek and chin and lip and brow, a colour that seemed to live and glow, a radiance of grace and eminence and success - these things were seated in triumph in the face of the Princess, and Hyacinth ... trembling with the revelation, wondered whether she was not altogether of some different substance from the humanity he had hitherto known. She might be divine ... (191-2)

Hyacinth's prostration before the Princess in this scene makes clear that this is an ironic portrayal on James's part of the processes by which the dominant social organisation masks its movements. James's choice of Christina Light as the Princess Casamassima confirms the sense in which her identity is a performance of the role of Princess, but this is only a small aspect of James's incisive critique of the corrupt theatricality of modern social life.[48] In particular, here he suggests the way in which art, literature and history are construed as the possession of the dominant classes, the guarantor of their tradition and the sense in which they become only a prop that supports the hegemonic social organisation. These formations script the role of Princess which Christina Light adopts and her identity depends upon her successful performance, not on heredity for instance. James's almost comic description of Hyacinth's stage struck state stresses that the *revelation* Hyacinth thinks he recognises is the one which the novel identifies as a mystification. Hyacinth has the privilege of contemplating privilege. Seeing her is a *privilege* or *reward* and her social power is troped as a kind of light; she is *brilliant*, she *glows* with 'radiance of grace and eminence and success'. The power of the established social order depends upon hidden networks of power, and the glamour of privilege is here identified as analogous to electricity.

[48] Readers of *Roderick Hudson* (1875) will recognise her as the opportunistic young American whom Roderick meets in Rome

The idea of the Princess as an actress is central to Hyacinth's first meeting with her at the theatre. Hyacinth feels *content* sitting in a 'dusky spacious receptacle which framed the bright picture of the stage and made one's own situation seem a play within a play' (192); and soon after when Hyacinth visits her at home he has 'much the same feeling [as] at the theatre', he imagines that he awaits 'the entrance of [a] celebrated actress [but] in this case the actress was to perform for him alone' (244-5). Hyacinth recognises her performance as an act but he cannot make the further inference of the emptiness of this act because he is dazzled by the glamour that she represents. This glamour does not depend upon the Princess alone as an individual, it is not an individual attraction, but a feeling impelled by a desire that Hyacinth thinks is his own but which James makes clear is fantasy that Hyacinth has adopted unconsciously.

Hyacinth's trip to Medley allows James to strengthen this sense while comparing Hyacinth's seduction by luxury with his seduction by the radical underworld. At Medley Hyacinth fulfils his earliest dreams of leisure and cultured living, but this initiation into country house living follows directly and jarringly on his pledging himself to radical action, a pledge he makes despite recognising that 'someone must be caught, always' (289). The structure of the novel emphasises that these scenes are comparable episodes of initiation. The Medley chapters have again that comic air with which James surrounds Hyacinth. The chapters are a litany of country house life - the walks, the talks, footmen and butlers who know their roles, unasked for visits from neighbours of similar social standing, breakfast at twelve, and tea on the lawn. Hyacinth Robinson worries that he is out of place and that the staff will treat him as an interloper, that they will make 'invidious distinctions' (300) between him and other guests but he finds that if he does not really know his role in this social comedy the staff do. The phantasmagoria of wealth and leisure at Medley, like the revolutionary underworld, performs a seduction and an initiation. The Princess represents initiation into a theatricalised social world which is dependent on the logic of the commodity.

The relationship between Hyacinth Robinson and the Princess Casamassima is an important one for my argument because they both represent figures for the artist-flâneur-revolutionary. The Princess represents a fatally flawed figure for the artist; the artist as rapacious seeker after sensations and as a figure she records the anxiety with which Henry James viewed the relationship between the modern bourgeois artist and the emerging democratic social movements. This is made clear in James's representation of the initiations that the Princess herself seeks. She tells Hyacinth Robinson:

> 'I don't want to teach. I want to learn; and, above all, I want to know *à quoi m'en tenir*. Are we on the eve of great changes, or are we not? Is everything that is gathering force, underground in the dark, in the night, in little hidden rooms, out of sight of governments and policemen and idiotic "statesmen" ... is all this going to burst forth

> some fine morning and set the world on fire? Or is it to sputter out and spend itself in vain conspiracies, be dissipated in sterile heroisms and abortive isolated movements? I want to know *à quoi m'en tenir,'* she repeated (200).

Again this is the paranoid view of secrecy, of the secret violence that may break out, but the Princess wants to know her relation to it, to know where she stands, and I think we can read this as a succinct description of James's interests in writing the novel. He shares the anxiety of many concerning the threat of violence and of violent change, but he is also alert to the ways in which the dominant social organisation depends for its cohesion on a promise of violence (a point that is made forcibly by his representation of Parisian spaces in the novel as I will detail below). Concerning the individual we could say that the Princess's interest to discover where she stands is James's too, but the Princess's statement captures another aspect of James's recognitions. She and he are interested in the hidden lives of the urban masses, but she has none of his sense that this prurient interest holds its own dangers and James has her try to discover their secrets by employing Hyacinth as her guide. James makes her prurience comic. She wants Hyacinth to introduce her to an 'intelligent mechanical' for a 'pleasant change' from the insipid upper classes (249), but he doesn't quite suit her sense of how such a worker should be dressed for their role: 'Her eyes wandered over him from head to foot, and their friendly beauty made him ashamed, "I wish you had come in the clothes you wear at your work!"' (249). She has chosen him as a representative of the workers because she wants to know 'the *people*, and to know them intimately - the toilers and strugglers and sufferers' (248) but he isn't representative enough. Hyacinth's reply shows that he at least recognises that her purportedly objective, scientific and yet sympathetic interest in him is self-interested and makes him less than a man; '"You do regard me as a curious animal"'. He recognises that she treats him like an object study and uses him as a means to an end. Despite this response it is important to note that Hyacinth is described by James as falling into a 'fascinated submission' (250) before the Princess's representation of the prevailing social organisation. He finds himself compelled by her narrative not because it is compelling but because the narratives of others always persuade him. James treats the narrative that the Princess proposes rather more critically however. Her personification of the *people* echoes the earlier play he made of the term (140) and suggests both James's grasp of the rhetoric of contemporary political discourse and his understanding of the energies that impel this rhetoric. The people, says the Princess, '"press upon me, they haunt me, they fascinate me. There it is (after all, it's very simple) I want to know them and I want you to help me!"' James could as well have written these words about himself. He too is haunted by the people but not, I am arguing, in a simple sense of being afraid of the threat of violence and violent social change attributed to the personified but depersonalised mass. *The Princess Casamassima* does not represent his getting to *know* the

people in the sense that he has the Princess use, rather James's novel dramatises his sense of the pregnancy of the contemporary social moment, and the precarious position of the artist and of art within that moment. The novel explores the discursive formations within which the artist must find a place for themselves without becoming the puppet of those formations. James represents the Princess's interest in revolution and revolutionaries as little more than an intellectual fad or fashion. Hyacinth is delighted to hear her describe 'the evolution of her opinions' and to hear her 'swear by Darwin and Spencer' (250-1), but Hyacinth's delight in her use of *evolution* can suggest for the alert reader the way in which the term became a late nineteenth century catchphrase. Hyacinth enjoys recognising the language of the initiated, while the reader may think that the Princess's language is merely fashionable. This suspicion receives some confirmation when the Princess describes having Hyacinth in attendance on her as 'awfully chic' (253). Hyacinth becomes her fashion accessory. Just as the Princess's interest in revolution and revolutionaries is ironised by James, as only a further role that she adopts, so James's representations of her flânerie suggests the ways in which she represents the acquisitive, rapacious logic of the gaze.

James represents the Princess's walks around London as the 'sounding, in a scientific spirit - that of the social philosopher, the student and critic of manners - the depths of British Philistia' (418), but these walks resemble more a search for new and surprising sensations and impressions, impressions for which she pays:

> On the Sunday that she had gone with him into the darkest places, the most fetid holes, in London, she had always taken money with her, in considerable quantities, and always left it behind. She said, very naturally, that you couldn't go and stare at people, for an impression, without paying them, and she gave alms right and left, indiscriminately, without enquiry or judgement as simply as the abbess of some beggar-haunted convent, or a lady-bountiful of the superstitious, unscientific ages who should have hoped to be assisted to heaven by her doles. Hyacinth never said to her, though he sometimes thought it, that since she was so full of the modern spirit her charity should be administered according to the modern lights, the principles of economical science ... Besides what did it matter? ... The Princess was an embodied passion - she was not a system; and her behaviour, after all, was more addressed to relieving herself than to relieving others (476-7).

In James's choice of 'the modern spirit' as 'modern lights, the principles of economical science' there is a further covert identification of the electrical field of science and culture. The Princess is at once inside and outside this impersonal field since she is 'not a system' but she is 'an embodied passion'. Here also there are ironic reflections on the egotism of the Princess and her severely circumscribed political understanding. James does give her an awareness of the incongruity of her situation, but the ironic simile that he gives to Hyacinth indicates the limits of her understanding. What the Princess pays for are

impressions, her action precisely replaces human sympathy with money. James emphasises that her flânerie makes a spectacle of the poor. The Princess Casamassima and Hyacinth Robinson provide contrasting figures for the artist in the city, and this contrast dominates the Preface that James wrote to the novel for the New York edition.

The process that James stresses in the preface is haunting: 'To haunt the great city and by this habit penetrate it, imaginatively, in as many places as possible - *that* was to be informed, *that* was to pull wires, *that* was to open doors, *that* positively was to groan at times under the weight of one's accumulations' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1101). To the 'habitual observer ... the pedestrian prowler' everything and everyone in the city makes 'a mystic solicitation, [an] urgent appeal ... to be interpreted ... "Subjects" and situations, character and history, the tragedy and the comedy of life' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1086) beset the mind of the artist. James recalls that he felt himself haunted by both Hyacinth Robinson and Christina Light. Hyacinth Robinson 'sprang up before him from the London pavement' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1087) like a twin or doppelganger whose experiences he compared to his own. Specifically James recognised the difference between Hyacinth's putative exclusion and his own sense of doors opening onto 'light and warmth and cheer'; the sense of 'one's own lucky share of the freedom and ease [...] was always there and that retreat from the general grimness never forbidden; whereby one's own relation to the mere formidable mass and weight of things was eased of and adjusted (*Literary Criticism II*, 1087). The heavy consciousness of 'the place as a whole' is disguised by the comfort of the 'furnished, peopled galleries, sending forth gusts of agreeable sound'. However this won't do. The 'formidable mass and weight of things' cannot be so easily ignored. It isn't just that Hyacinth Robinson is like James himself a stroller through the city, but that Hyacinth's consciousness <u>is</u> James's consciousness of the secrets of the city; 'the much-mixed world of my hero's both overt and covert consciousness, were exactly my gathered impressions and stirred perceptions, the deposit in my working imagination of all my visual and all my constructive sense of London (*Literary Criticism II*, 1101). The *habitual observer*, the artist-flâneur, who 'groans at times under the weight' of these deposits has an obligation to represent the stories that press upon them, which in the case of *The Princess Casamassima*, is the story of 'one's own relation to the mere formidable mass'. The difficulty that James faces and that the novel dramatises is that the artist-flâneur seems wholly implicated in the very network of relations and representations that underpin the hegemonic formations. The Princess is the egotistical modern artist whose work is their own performance of their role as artist, a performance James critiques. Hyacinth Robinson represents the battle between the dominant narratives for the subjectivity of the artist. The theatrically multiple subject position that elsewhere represents such a positive position for the artist is shown in this novel to carry with it specific dangers. The vulnerability of that subject position is figured

in this novel by James's little bookbinder with his weakness and inanition, his openness to the powerful narratives of others. The 'lively inward revolution' that James names in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima* is in part the battle between the revolutionary underworld and the bourgeois world of art and leisure for Hyacinth Robinson's subjectivity. James turns his hero inside out, revealing the secret of his thoughts, by showing how his experience of city spaces registers these competing narratives. James achieves this by a complex rendering of Hyacinth's initiation into the revolutionary spaces of Paris, and by a mapping of these spaces onto 1880s London.

Hyacinth Robinson in Paris and London

Before Hyacinth's trip to Paris, at the close of book three, James has him intone the name of the city as though it were some magical talisman. Augustus Vetch imagines that Hyacinth has an 'acute sense of [the] opportunity' (375) that the trip represents but what are these opportunities? Into what mysteries will Paris initiate Hyacinth? The fourth book of the novel begins with Hyacinth's immersion in the spectacle of the Parisian streets. This spectacle attracts Hyacinth more than the opportunity to see the 'succès du jour' of the Variétés. The bourgeois theatre fails to match the theatre of the streets. The theatre of the streets, in another sense, is what Hyacinth is fascinated by when he wanders the boulevards imaginatively recreating the battle scenes of 1848, accompanied by the spectre of his grandfather, the bathetic 'revolutionary watch-maker'. Once again, the flâneur is haunted by visions of the stories of the city, but in this novel the ghosts are the revenants of revolutionary history and the figure of his grandfather offers him 'innumerable revelations and counsels' (381). Hyacinth's imaginings allow James to script an urban drama that offers the reader the uncomfortable spectacle of the continuing co-existence of scenes of strife with scenes of 'civilization'. This interlacing of visions is familiar from Balzac's *Père Goriot* (1833-4): Rastignac at Madame de Beauseant's farewell ball sees the dying Père Goriot's pallet in the jewels his daughters wear with pride. In this novel James records his recognition of the coincidence of death and beauty when he has Hyacinth recognise that 'The most brilliant city in the world was also the most blood stained' (380). In one sense this is James's acknowledgement of the idea that Walter Benjamin captures succinctly in his 'Theses on the philosophy of history': 'without exception the cultural treasures [the materialist critic] surveys have an origin that he cannot contemplate without horror. [...] There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[49] The streets of the city are the document that Hyacinth thinks he reads, but James suggests that on the contrary he is himself a text upon which are

[49] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 245-55 (p. 248).

written the competing discourses of representation. Rather than the streets of the city being the palimpsest that Hyacinth's flânerie scrapes to reveal previous inscriptions, James's careful staging of this flânerie should alert us to the palimpsest nature of his little bookbinder.

This complex process is dramatised in the following passage:

> Hyacinth's retrospections had not made him drowsy, but quite the reverse; he grew restless and excited, and a kind of pleasant terror of the place and the hour entered into his blood. But it was nearly midnight, and he got up to walk home, taking the line of the boulevard toward the Madeleine. He passed down the Rue Royale, where comparative stillness reigned; and when he reached the Place de la Concorde, to cross the bridge which faces the Corps Législatif, he found himself almost isolated. He had left the human swarm and the obstructed pavements behind, and the wide spaces of the splendid square lay quiet under the summer stars. The plash of the great fountains was audible, and he could almost hear the wind-stirred murmur of the little wood of the Tuileries on the one side, and of the vague expanse of the Champs Elysées on the other. The place itself - the Place Louis Quinze, the Place de la Révolution - had given him a sensible emotion, from the day of his arrival; he had recognised so quickly its tremendously historic character. He had seen, in a rapid vision, the guillotine in the middle, on the site of the inscrutable obelisk, and the tumbrils, with waiting victims, were stationed round the circle now made majestic by the monuments of the cities of France. The great legend of the French Revolution, sanguinary and heroic, was more real to him here than anywhere else; and, strangely, what was most present was not its turpitude and horror, but its magnificent energy, the spirit of life that had been in it, not the spirit of death. That shadow was effaced by the modern fairness of fountain and statue, the stately perspective and composition; and as he lingered, before crossing the Seine, a sudden sense overtook him, making his heart sink with a kind of desolation - a sense of everything that might hold one to the world, of the sweetness of not dying, the fascination of great cities, the charm of travel and discovery, the generosity of admiration. (393)

Two points should be noted from this passage: the actual spaces that James employs, as well as his representations of them, and his representation of Hyacinth's wanderings. The Madeleine is a potent site: Pierre Larousse's *Grande Dictionnaire Universel* of 1872 notes that there are 'flâneurs whose entire existence unfolds between the church of the Madeleine and the Théâtre du Gymnase'.[50] It is also associated with key moments of the events of 1848, and these are the streets that Flaubert describes in *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, when he places Frédéric Moreau as witness to action on the Champs Élysées, outside the Madeleine, and within the Palais-Royal. The cluster of street names in this passage invokes the revolutionary history of these city spaces, setting the scene for

[50] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 451.

Hyacinth's *rapid vision*. The streets and monuments are a radical text, a palimpsest that Hyacinth believes he can read. He stands surrounded by the symbols of bourgeois rule, and sees them over-written with visions of the violent events of revolution. He believes he recognises here the 'magnificent energy, the spirit of life' that is represented by the legend of the revolution, but this feeling only serves to emphasise his vulnerability, and his positive vision turns sour all too quickly. James offers us an alternative to Hyacinth's understanding however. We can read in this sudden vision, this interlineations of sights and sounds, of historic resonance, a clear link made by James between, on the one hand, the inseparability of the spirit of death from the 'modern fairness of fountain and statue, the stately perspective and composition', and, on the other hand, the vulnerable artist-flâneur-revolutionary figure. The reader alert to the historical topography of James's Paris can begin to discern a complex narrative tension generated by the interplay between the tropes of Paris and revolution that James locates in the character of Hyacinth Robinson, and the narratives that arise from his representation of the street scenes. In the history of the *Place* the events of 1789 become inseparable from the events of 1848. We can read an identification of violence with both the existing order and with revolutionary action. The palimpsest of the ordered civic space is mirrored in Hyacinth's own divided self, and as James has Hyacinth read the street, and despair, we must learn to read Hyacinth himself.

Previous critics have acknowledged the significance of James's representation of city spaces in the novel. Mark Seltzer has argued that James, in both his subject and his method, foregrounds the relationship between seeing and power in *The Princess Casamassima*.[51] For Seltzer it is in the 'rigorous continuity established in James's novels between seeing, knowing, and exercising power that the politics of the Jamesian text appears' (57). This continuity, Seltzer argues, gives the lie to any disavowal by James of the coerciveness of his narrative strategies. Seltzer's argument follows that of Fredric Jameson in critiquing James's realist method as not simply mimicking the logic of the hegemonic forces but contributing to their very constitution and maintenance.[52] In response to this work John Carlos Rowe has rightly identified the subtlety of James's deconstruction of nineteenth century theatricality in the novel, as well as emphasising the ways in which *The Princess Casamassima* disrupts what John Carlos Rowe calls the 'rhetoric of realism'.[53] Neither Jameson, nor Seltzer, nor Rowe sufficiently account, I think, for what is one of its most striking features: its depiction of urban experience through walking the streets of Paris and London. Fredric Jameson's misreading of James

[51] Mark Seltzer, *Henry James and the Art of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 40.

[52] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981)

[53] John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 180.

has been particularly influential and is important here. Jameson characterises James's narrative strategies as singularly concerned with point of view, the representation of the individual consciousness through complex impersonal narratives; this singular concern represents, Jameson claims, 'a case of reification in its strictest sense'.[54] That is to say, that the text maintains a carefully realised silence about the conditions of its own production. This reification is for Jameson what marks out James's 'codification of [the] already existing technique [of point-of-view], and his transformation of it into the most fundamental of narrative categories and the development around it of a whole aesthetic' as a 'genuinely historical act' (221). This 'Jamesian aesthetic' is then:

> part of the more general bourgeois containment strategy of a late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie suffering from the after effects of reification. The fiction of the individual subject - so-called bourgeois individualism - had of course, always been a key functional element in the bourgeois cultural revolution, the reprogramming of individuals to the "freedom" and equality of sheer market equivalence.

By a curious reversal, Jameson suggests 'Jamesian point of view, which comes into being as a protest and a defence against reification, ends up furnishing a powerful ideological instrument in the perpetuation of an increasingly subjectivized and psychologized world' (221-2). There are important and serious senses in which Jameson's castigation of "Jamesian point of view" as a blunt ideological tool will not do. I believe that I have shown above some of the complex yet discernible ways in which *The Princess Casamassima* is not silent about the conditions of its own production. I have argued that the central consciousness of this novel, and that of other novels by James, is a theatrically multiple consciousness, and one which is dialogical not monological. James's complex dramas identify the ways in which subjectivity is not individual and they trace the relationships between individuals and the discourses within which subjects are defined. The complex, multiple vulnerable subjectivity, which I have argued James identifies as that of the artist, is not a privileged subject position but one assailed on all sides by the very History that Fredric Jameson so eloquently and helpfully describes:

> History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History is only apprehended in its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them (102).

[54] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 219, 221.

My characterisation of both Oscar Wilde and Henry James depends upon the recognition that the pressure that impels their investigations of subjectivity is the recognition of the 'inexorable limits to individual [and] collective praxis' set by history as 'ground and untranscendable horizon'. The late nineteenth century city is the ground and untranscendable horizon for James's exploration in *The Princess Casamassima*, a ground overlain with competing narratives, narratives which each in their own way seek to reify history.

Hyacinth's identity is over-determined. James inscribes within an individual consciousness the competition between the powerful discourses that compete to script the urban subjectivity; this is 'the lively inward revolution' of the preface to the novel. The artist-flâneur-revolutionary in *The Princess Casamassima* becomes literally the site of competition, of struggle, just as the streets were. And just as the streets offer interlineations of revolutionary and bourgeois imagery, revealing their shared origins in violence, so the discourses that are enacted in Hyacinth Robinson reveal their common dangers. The roles scripted by the discourse of bourgeois individualism - the dandy, the flâneur, the gentleman of leisure, the aesthete - are revealed as openly rapacious and dominated by the market, while those scripted by the discourses of revolution - the conspirator, the anarchist, the assassin - are identified as based on the same murderous logic as that of the bourgeois subject. The phrase 'lively inward revolution' describes the narrative strategy that James employs in order to evade Flaubert's evisceration of the artist-flâneur, and the implications of that ironic process.

This representation of Paris is directly related to James's representation of London. James compares the two cities and their different histories of economic development, social organisation and revolutionary potential. Understood in this sense *The Princess Casamassima* is directly related not so much to Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) as is often noted, but to *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In his later novel Dickens contrasts London with Paris in response to the social unrest of the 1840s and 1850s, and attempts to characterise the current state of England through the prism of 1789. What Dickens does not have to reckon with is the extraordinary development of commodity culture and wider global networks of exchange and circulation. This is the decisive development of the second half of the nineteenth century and James's revisiting of Dickens's two cities meets these changes by adapting one of Dickens's key tropes. Mark Hennelly writes that Henry Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities* represents a "scapegoat" in the sense that Girard has outlined (Girard's work is discussed in more detail below) because the patterns of substitution and sacrifice in Dickens's novel make Carton's 'closing redemptive acts of substitution and sacrifice more different and more meaningful than "the vengeance of the

Revolution" ... in this sense Carton finally substitutes revelation for Revolution'.[55] James's Hyacinth Robinson is related to Dickens's Carton because his sacrifice also realises revelation rather than revolution, and the revelation of James's text is the curious agency of the theatrically multiple subject of the modern democracy. *The Princess Casamassima* adapts the existing stages that Paris and London represent in order to dramatise powerful emergent social formations and the position of the citizen-agent within them. These cities can be understood as representing complex, evolving urban forms wherein subjects are positioned.

Anne Querrien distinguishes between 'the metropolis and the capital' as related urban forms, which may exist within a single city, and which imply 'two different ethical principles and involve two different modes of human distribution'.[56] A metropolis is a world-city, 'made up of networks, it is itself caught up in an network of cities through which the flux of the world economy circulates': the transnational network is realised as the circulation of ideas and knowledge, commodities and people. A capital, on the other hand, is a centre, the centre of the nation and 'accumulates or consumes the national wealth'. These two urban forms imply contrasting social ideals. The ideal of the metropolis is a democracy where the ideal of the capital is oligarchy. These are ideals however and neither form is so simply homogeneous. The flux that frees social energies, structures, people and ideas in the metropolis, for instance, is the dynamic force which seeks out new markets and there is a danger that the freedom wrought by this force becomes only freedom within complex networks of economic exchange. Paris and London are at once capitals and metropolises.

Paris seemed the world-city in the nineteenth century. Her boulevards seemed to provide the spaces of the metropolis which Anne Querrien describes as places of 'experimentation, where new operational propositions [could] be made concerning current practices'. This sense of Paris is captured in the common nineteenth century figure of Parisian boulevards (as representative of the height of civilisation) spreading out to cover the earth. James has Hyacinth Robinson marvel at Auguste Poupin's faith in this idea:

> Poupin believed ... that the day was to come when all the nations of the earth would abolish their armies and custom-houses, and embrace on both cheeks, and cover the globe with boulevards, radiating from Paris, where the human family would sit, in groups, at little tables,

[55] Mark M. Hennelly Jr., '"Like or No Like": Figuring the Scapegoat in *A Tale of Two Cities*', *Dickens Studies Annual* 30 (2001), pp. 217-42 (p. 237).

[56] Anne Querrien, 'The Metropolis and the Capital', *Zone*, (1986), pp. 218-26 (p. 218).

> according to affinities, drinking coffee (not tea, *par exemple!*) and listening to the music of the spheres' (116).[57]

In *The Princess Casamassima* this is a comic moment with a serious intent. After 1871 and the Commune such a view of the streets can only be ironic. The Commune represents the subjugation of Paris the metropolis to Paris the capital. James's mapping of Paris onto London identifies the sense in which London retains its identity as a metropolis when that of Paris is in question.[58] *The American Scene* represents James's understanding that just as London supersedes Paris so, in its turn, London is superseded by the new metropolises of America; New York, Chicago and the other developing cities of the new republic.

The revolutionary potential of the London streets is noted by Hyacinth Robinson early in *The Princess Casamassima* and is based upon explicit comparison between Paris and London. He imagines Millicent Henning as Marianne, the symbolic figure of the French Revolution: '[He] could easily see her (if there should ever be barricades in the streets of London) with a red cap of liberty on her head and her white throat bared so that she should be able to shout the louder the Marseillaise of that hour' (161). However, Millicent is not Marianne. James insistently associates her with the streets as the sites of commodification whether through her window-shopping with Hyacinth, or in her role as a shop model. The vibrant energy that Millicent as the 'muse of cockneyism' (93) represents is the positive force of the citizen-agent in the modern metropolis, but this energy is neutralised by the circuits of commodification and desire which are a constitutive element of the metropolis. Millicent represents the figure which allows James to show that the question of resistance to this neutralisation of social power is not a question of insurrection but one of subjectivity, one that requires a 'lively inward revolution'. This can be recognised in the late scene of the novel where Hyacinth finds Millicent Henning modelling for the sinister Captain Sholto.

Millicent's 'shop-attitude' (585) is what James calls her manner when exhibiting wares to customers. Hyacinth comes upon Sholto eyeing her as a 'false purchaser', that is with no intention of buying the dress she displays for him, but, James seems to suggest,

[57] Walter Benjamin notes both variations on this idea and precise repetitions of these magically extending boulevards in his *Arcades Project*: Benjamin, ' Haussmannization, Barricade Fighting' Convolute E, *The Arcades Project*, pp.120-49.

[58] I would argue that this prospect is central to James's representation of Paris in *The Ambassadors*. The problem is that Paris is in danger of becoming like the Venice that James describes in his essay on 'The Grand Canal' (1892). His complaint is that Venice has become 'the most beautiful of tombs ... a vast mausoleum [with] a turnstile at the door'. Where Venice had been a vibrant trading capital as well as a centre of art and culture, it is now a pleasure garden. By 1903 this change in the fortunes of Paris is, I think inescapable, but in *The Princess Casamassima* James has already begun to register this movement. Hyacinth Robinson travels from Paris to Venice and it is in Venice that he is most tempted by his vision of the dense texture of history that Venetian art represents. This art though has become only a tourist attraction and commodity: Henry James, 'The Grand Canal' in *Italian Hours* ed. by John Auchard (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1992), pp. 32-50 (p. 33).

with every intention of buying Millicent. Sholto's *contemplation* of Millicent locates them both in complicity with the existing social organisation which grants power to the male gaze. It is not so much a question of whether Millicent has asked Sholto to visit her, which, if it were the case means that she and the captain have secrets from Hyacinth, but that employed as she is she has no choice but to model for him. The positive social energy that Millicent Henning represents is figured as erotic and absorbed by the very circuits of economic and social power that had seemed to free the citizen of the metropolis to create new social forms. The tension is between the emergence of these new non-commodified relations and their swift incorporation into the dynamic system of hegemony. James shows us the trio of Millicent Henning, Captain Sholto and Hyacinth Robinson late in the book in order to crystallize this problem. Hyacinth Robinson as figure for the artist is both an artist-flâneur-revolutionary and the citizen-agent of the modern democracy. Where previously the artist-flâneur-revolutionary represented and mastered the urban scene, now s/he is assailed by powerful competing discourses of representation, discourses which position the artist and the citizen within commodified relations. The inanition of Hyacinth is James's means of representing this struggle. Artist and citizen (and artist as citizen) are equally at risk from the power of these forces. James's sacrifice of Hyacinth Robinson registers the dangers of this titanic struggle, a struggle no less massive for being conducted as it is in the novel at an individual level, and deploys the logic of the scapegoat that René Girard has analysed. Girard identifies the logic of the scapegoat as a representational logic.

> Before invoking the scapegoat in connection with a text we must first ask ourselves whether we are dealing with a scapegoat of the text (the hidden structural principle) or a scapegoat in the text (the clearly visible theme). Only in the first case can the text be defined as one of persecution, entirely subjected to the representation of persecution from the perspective of the persecutor. This text is controlled by the effect of a scapegoat that it does not acknowledge. In the second case, on the contrary, the text acknowledges the scapegoat effect which does not control it. Not only is this text no longer a persecution text, but it even reveals the truth of the persecution.[59]

Michiel Heyns has read *The Golden Bowl* using Girard. He argues that 'the scapegoat *of* the text' is recognised in *The Golden Bowl* as also 'the scapegoat *in* the text'. Maggie Verver's figuring of Charlotte Stant makes her the scapegoat, the expulsion of whom provides a close for the story that Maggie self-consciously narrates. However, the narrative of the novel "refuses to validate" Maggie's rewriting'.[60] The narrative of the

[59] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (London: Athlone Press), p. 119.

[60] Heyns, Michiel, *Expulsion and the Nineteenth Century Novel: The Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 268.

novel records both Maggie's story and Charlotte's, and although Charlotte's is subordinated to Maggie's, we can recognise in the narrative of this scapegoat figure an alternative reading of the novel and its concerns.

The Princess Casamassima achieves a similar effect to *The Golden Bowl* in this limited respect: in both novels that scapegoat *in* and *of* the text coincide. The result of James's engagement with key realist narrative strategies is not a text of persecution but a text, following Girard's description, which acknowledges the scapegoat as its hidden structural principle. Hyacinth is more than simply the figure whose individual sacrifice will or will not prevent radical social change, will or will not prevent violent action. As the scapegoat *in* the text Hyacinth reveals the complicity, the shared logics of the party of action and the existing social formations that they seek to change. As the scapegoat *of* the text Hyacinth reveals the failure of existing realist narrative strategies in the face of these new urban discourses of representation. Perhaps also there is an anti-narrative, as Heyns suggests there is in *The Golden Bowl*. The anti-narrative that Hyacinth offers is that of a subject position for the individual artist that, because it is based on vulnerability rather than mastery, evades the complicity with the dominant social formations that the 'rhetoric of realism' occludes.

Conclusion: artist, revolutionary and scapegoat

My analysis of the figure of the actress suggests that the opportunity this figure offers artists is that of a subject position resistant to the efforts of the dominant social formations to incorporate them within networks of desire and commodification. The revolutionary is another such figure. The revolutionary relates the artist to the material conditions of production and to pressing *fin-de- siècle* concerns regarding the development of mass society. I have argued that both James and Wilde examine the existing conditions under which subjectivity is realised and maintained, and I have outlined their development of a theatrically multiple subjectivity which provides an alternative to the dominant bourgeois subject. The idea of revolution provides both writers with a focus for their investigation of the part that art and artists can play in contesting existing social formations and influencing emergent forms. Oscar Wilde's reformulation of *Individualism* transforms it from the atomistic model of the bourgeois subject to a collective desiring subject. This redefinition is achieved by developing the implications of Hegelian thought. I argued that Wilde understands subjectivity as a form of desiring consciousness in search of recognition in the consciousness of another, and that the sacrifice of the single self (the bourgeois subject) represents the acknowledgement of this need for recognition and locates the single self within a collective desiring subject. This collective subject is the theatrically multiple subjectivity which is the focus of this thesis. Wilde's reformulation of subjectivity provides for a

radical, optimistic role for the contemporary artist, but his experiences in the public court of the 1890s media show the many and powerful ways in which the dominant social organisation is protected against such radical thought.

Henry James relates the question of revolution to that of representation in two senses - democratic representation and discursive representation. The modern metropolis offers unparalleled opportunities for the creation of new social forms, forms which are distinctively different from the historical and existing social organisations which depend upon hierarchy and subjugation of the many to the few. However, the same forces which make the city a powerful motor of social change are forces which threaten to subjugate human relationships to abstract, non-human systems of exchange. The dispossession of modern urban artists is symptomatic of the dispossession of all citizens but stands out because artists are positioned at a particularly acute point within the hegemony: the representations that artists produce are the material from which the hegemony fashions its structures and maintains its domination. James understands that existing realist narrative strategies, far from representing the actual material conditions of existence as they claim to, are actually complicit with the conditions which they set out to critique. The question of discursive representation is related to that of democratic representation because new strategies of artistic representation of the urban must respond to the demands and circumstances of a mass democratic culture. James represents in *The Princess Casamassima* specific examples of new networks of urban power and dramatises the experience of the citizen-agent (and of the artist) as a struggle for agency within history. Where Oscar Wilde's theorising of an alternative subjectivity seems optimistic, James's novel seems to end pessimistically. The only action of the citizen-agent and artist in this situation is nihilistic, self-willed destruction. However, I argue that we should see the example of Hyacinth Robinson as scapegoat and artist as providing the spectacle of a theatrically multiple subject within a realist text and this spectacle draws attention to the limits of realism rather than the limits of that subjectivity. After this intense period of investigation in the 1880s of society in realist fictions James develops the forms of his fiction in order to bring the reader within his texts and involve them more effectively in the drama of consciousness. This shift has long been recognised as the movement from James's middle to his late period. I am suggesting that a key aspect of this change is his developing sense of the ways in which a theatrically multiple subjectivity can be realised and made available as an alternative to the dominant subjectivity. Where, in this chapter I think we can see James stumbling on the limits of realist representation and not identifying a way forward, my last chapter details his development of a form for the novel which directly attempts the ethical re-education of its reader through its complex narrative structure.

> To put it otherwise, a savage is to a civilized man as a child is to an adult; and just as the gradual growth of intelligence in a child corresponds to, and in a sense recapitulates, the gradual growth of intelligence in the species, so a study of savage society at various stages of evolution enables us to follow approximately ... the road by which the ancestors of the higher races must have travelled in their progress upward through barbarism to civilization.[1]

Chapter four: The age of children

Specific cultural anxieties in the late Victorian period found their focus in the idea of childhood and in images of children. The dominant image of the child in the mid-century was that of the exploited child labourer; the sweeps of Kingsley's *The Waterbabies* (1863) and the school scene that opens Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), where the 'plain little vessels' learn their place in Thomas Gradgrind's world, provide two examples. Both Dickens and Kingsley are concerned that individual children be educated without their losing a capacity for wonder. During the 1850s and 1860s a range of parliamentary committees and commissions investigated and reported on child labour practices in industry, agriculture and urban employment such as the 'climbing boys' whose plight Kingsley recorded.[2] The resulting legislation went some way to ending traditional labour patterns involving children. Alongside legislation concerning employment, the Education Acts of 1870 and the 1880s altered the material experience of children and the majority of parents. The spectacle of the children of the poor continued to haunt Victorian society however. Towards the end of *Culture and Anarchy* Matthew Arnold discusses the impact of free trade on the East End of London. He is writing in response to a contemporary report concerning the effect of trade fluctuations on the East End: 'The East End is the most commercial, the most industrial, the most fluctuating region of the metropolis. It is always the first to suffer'; his compassionate response to this state of affairs is expressed through an image of suffering children. He relates that he was recently looking with a friend 'upon a multitude of children who were gathered before us in one of the most miserable regions of London, - children eaten up with disease, half-sized, half-fed, half-clothed, neglected by their parents, without health, without home, without hope' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, p.213). I don't think that we should mistake Arnold's sincerity here; he is clearly moved, and moved to action, by such a sight. However this

[1] James G Frazer, 'The Scope of Social Anthropology', *Psyche's Task* (1913); excerpted in *The Modern Tradition*, ed. by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 529-532 (p. 530).

[2] See Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1852-75* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 133-5; and Peter Mathais, *The First Industrial Nation: The Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, Second edition (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 182-4.

multitude is also a mass of dispossessed persons who represent a challenge to the stability of the society which rests upon social inequality. These children of course also represent the newly enfranchised working class, heirs to the agitation of the 1840s and 1850s and to the reform acts that formed the basis of political debate as Arnold is writing. The children of the masses remained a potent symbol throughout the second half of the century. Sally Ledger identifies anxieties concerning over-population and working class disorder as key components, linked to ideologies of 'race', gender, class and the discourse of degeneration, of the spectres haunting *fin-de-siècle* Imperial Britain.[3]

The individual child was no less threatening than the idea of a mass of children or the children of the masses. After Darwin both the physical sciences and the human sciences (such as anthropology) ascribed to the individual a complex and crucial relation to its species, a relation that these sciences sought to delineate. The individual child in all aspects of its growth (physical, mental, and social, as I will discuss below) was believed to recapitulate the growth not only of the species, but even of the culture as a whole. This specific scientific expression of cultural obsession depends upon the complexities and anxieties written into the very idea of childhood. As a discursive formation, 'childhood' helped constitute and was constituted by the physical and human sciences. Phillippe Ariès argues that the idea of childhood arose during an earlier period as an aspect of the creation of the modern family as an institution.[4] He notes that the interests of seventeenth century moralists and pedagogues are psychological and moral, and that the idea of childhood that comes to dominate this period enshrines the child at the centre of the family as its source and guarantee of naturalness and meaning (131, 133). Alongside this role for the child Ariès details the ways in which the discourses of education and health employ the child as a counter in the creation and maintenance of their regulatory power. In this reading, the idea of childhood is inseparable from its regulatory function, less a natural category that describes a distinct period of life than an aspect of discourses that brings within their web of relations all people. Ariès suggests that the key means through which children were brought within these discourses was the development of writings specifically targeted at children; conduct books, didactic literature and Sunday school tracts all served this purpose. Jacqueline Rose explores the status of texts concerning children and suggests that to separate writing for children from writing about children is a false distinction: 'If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside of the book, the one who does not so

[3] Sally Ledger, 'In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in Fin de Siècle Britain', *Literature and History*, 4 (1995), pp. 71-86 (p. 74).

[4] Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p. 437.

easily come within its grasp.'[5] Neither writing 'for' nor 'about' children can escape the implications of the relations between adults and children. Both Ariès and Rose note that the earliest writing for children, in the form of conduct books, offer children stories of instruction, and demonstrate, as Rose puts it, that 'there is no language for children which can be described independently of divisions in the institution of schooling, the institution out of which modern childhood has been more or less produced' (7).

The adult world of Victorian science and culture turned upon children a powerful anxious analytic gaze. This gaze upon children cannot be underestimated, and receives witty treatment in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). Faced with the train guard and the echoes of his authoritative adult voice in chapter three, Alice wishes she was back in the wood: 'All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass. At last he said, "You're travelling the wrong way," and shut up the window and went away'.[6] Dodgson captures here an image of the relations that I want to examine in this chapter. The looking glass of the title suggests narcissism, the view of the adult world, looking at children and thinking of the children they may themselves have been, or that they want to imagine themselves as. This short passage offers a compressed symbolic image of the ways in which the responsible adult looks at children. The moralist looks from afar, gazing back over an expanse of time, figured as distance, to assess the propriety of the child's position, and to either censor the child's conduct or offer the child a ticket to the adult world; the scientist examines in detail isolated physiological and psychological aspects of children, reasoning deductively, though whether this claim to deductive reasoning is conclusive is another matter; and the social world seems to dismiss the child's progress without a thought, though this nonchalance is only a pose, since anxiety regarding children's morals was a key theme of Victorian life. The telescope/ microscope figure is suggestive not only of science in general but may suggest Darwin in particular. His discussion in chapter six of *The Origin of Species* (1859), 'Difficulties on Theory', identifies the eye as analogous to a telescope but a telescope perfected through aeons of development: looking in microscopic detail at the eye offers a glimpse over the vast expanses of time. The telescope imagery in Dodgson's stories also recalls Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). When Alice first shrinks then grows in the opening pages of 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' Dodgson recalls Swift's figuring of the Lilliputians as though they are beings under a microscope. The repetition of the figure of the telescope/ microscope chimes in with Jacqueline Rose's

[5] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Language, Discourse, and Society, revised edition (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 2.

[6] Lewis Carroll, 'Through the Looking Glass', in Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, ed. by Martin Gardener (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 167-345 (p. 218).

suggestion that the genre of children's fiction is from its inception infected by the scientific gaze which seeks the secrets that children hold.

William Empson, in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, feels sure that the opening of *Alice in Wonderland* involves evolution; the bath of tears that release Alice from the underground chamber does 'double duty', he suggests, as both the sea from which life arose and amniotic fluid, 'ontogeny then repeats phylogeny, and a whole Noah's Ark gets out of the sea with her'.[7] Empson persuasively argues that Dodgson, in his version of pastoral reveals the connections between the examination of children, the idea of childhood, and the fears that beset late Victorian science and culture. The logic of this pastoral tale, suggests Empson, is that where the swain had a privileged view of the metropolitan culture, now the 'child-becomes-judge'; the figure of Alice becomes the only reasonable figure in a world that tries her understanding with mysterious assertions and rules, and that attempts to shape her understanding of herself and of the world, to educate her (254). The child-cult is pastoral because it follows the same logic of putting the complex into the simple. I argue below that we can recognise this view of the child-cult as a version of late pastoral at the *fin-de-siècle* in writings by both James and Wilde: Maisie Farange is the child-become-judge of the adults who surround her, and children in Wilde's fairy stories are often identified as pastoral figures.

The secrets that children hold

Charles Dodgson's Alice books are self-conscious instances of the adult exploration and colonisation of childhood. This colonisation depends upon the search for the revelation of the secret that children hold. Whether we are considering late nineteenth century or early twenty first century culture, children present an enigma, a problem for the adult world. What do children know? What should they know? Can they be protected? Protected from what and from whom? The singular possession of children is their own secret nature, a nature figured as a secret, as the thing that they do not even know that they have, and that the adult world seeks to know and regulate but which finally eludes the discourses of regulation. The Romantic innocence of the child, fetishised as either closer to nature, or to God, takes on at the *fin-de-siècle* the guise of latency. The question becomes not the lack of sexuality, but sexuality not yet expressed in socially acceptable forms. Freud's analysis in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) codifies the model of sexuality that he had been developing since the 1890s. Specifically he argues that 'the sexual instinct' is not absent in childhood but that there is a 'period of sexual latency' during which the

[7] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, third impression (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 255.

dominant features of adult sexuality are determined.[8] The secret that children hold becomes then the secret of adult sexuality. Psychoanalysis turns upon the child an analytic gaze that Freud claims has been sorely lacking in previous investigations of adult behaviour. In a telling metaphorical moment Freud likens the study of childhood to the study of a *primaeval* period:

> It is noticeable that writers who concern themselves with explaining the characteristics and reactions of the adult have devoted much more attention to the primaeval period which is comprised in the life of the individual's ancestors - have, that is, ascribed much more influence to heredity - than to the primaeval period, which falls within the lifetime of the individual himself - that is, to childhood (88).

Psychoanalysis then follows the conceptual frame developed by nineteenth century biology in treating the individual's development as a recapitulation of the development of the "race". The latency period of the individual becomes 'something like a *prehistoric* epoch', a period which holds the secret of adult sexuality (91). Jacques Lacan's development of Freud's thought depends upon a shift in this understanding. Lacan argues that the secret that children hold is a secret concerning language. Lacan finds in Freud's example of the infant's *Fort/ Da* game the moment when the child inserts itself into the symbolic order, the order which precedes the individual and within which the individual subject is constituted.[9] This is crucial since, as Lacan asserts elsewhere in *Écrits*, 'It is the world of words that creates the world of things - the things originally confused in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of the coming-into-being - by giving its concrete being to their essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been: χτῆμα ἐζ ἀεί (72). Malcolm Bowie helpfully summarises the importance of this aspect of Lacan's theorising; 'Lacan's self-appointed task in 'The Function and Field of Speech' and 'The Agency of the Letter' is ... to re-describe the entire Freudian enterprise, and to bring into focus its inveterately linguistic character.'[10] Lacan's work draws attention to the complex ways in which the secrets that are invested in the idea of the latent child are a combination of sexuality and language as the initiators of subjectivity. The power and fascination of the latent child emerges out of this complex of secrets. In *What Maisie Knew* (1899) it is Maisie's withholding of her words, her understanding of her situation expressed in language, which is set in opposition to adult interpellation. James suggests

[8] Sigmund Freud, 'Infantile Sexuality', the second of the 'Three Essays on Sexuality' in Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey and Angela Richards, The Penguin Freud Library (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 88-9.

[9] Jacques Lacan, 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power', in *Écrits*, ed. by Jacques Lacan (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 250-310 (first publ. in 1977 Tavistock), p. 259; For Freud's description of the *Fort/Da* game see 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *On Metapsychology : The Theory of Psychoanalysis: 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', 'The Ego and the I'' and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey and Angela Richards, The Penguin Freud Library (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), p. 284-5.

[10] Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, Fontana Modern Masters (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p.79.

that the *concealment* of her understanding is exactly that which grants Maisie her idea of an *inner self*.[11]

One particular aspect of the idea of childhood specific to the late nineteenth century was that the secret that a child's development held was the key not only to the secrets of the individual, but to the secrets of the species, and of the race. The distinction is clear. Racialist discourses asserted the superiority of specific 'racial' groups over other groups. The secret that children held was the key to the past, the guarantee of the present and the promise of the future. When we recognise this we can begin to see how the sense of the crisis in late nineteenth century culture over-determined the discursive category of childhood. Children and their secrets present a fourfold challenge. The traditionalist dominant cultural view, what we may call the Whig view of the child views their ascension to their majority as the logical and positive outcome of the progress of Western society as it demonstrates its strength and superiority over other civilizations. In this view the job of culture is to educate children to assume their rightful place within the established limits of that society, the stratifications of class, gender and race. The negative side of this view is the paranoid, obsessive vigilance with regard to what children learn, what they think, what they know, and the sense that the lessons that they learn from their culture are not positive, perhaps are even corrupting. The Romantic insistence on the innocence of the child confronts its nemesis in the actual experience of children in nineteenth century English society.

There is however another way of interpreting the contradictions and possibilities that the discourses of childhood offer. The central conceptual hinge of the idea of childhood is mutability, a continuous process of development, arrested in the Whig view at the right and 'natural' moment. There is not however a logical reason for this process to end there. What the idea of childhood offers is a promise of the future, a movement beyond precisely that ending to the narrative of childhood that is politically conservative. The politically radical view of the child emphasises exactly this idea of process, a revolution that overcomes the dominant discourses of childhood and their political consequences. The protean mutability of the child subjectivity, a subjectivity based upon secrets, provides the link between this chapter and those that precede it. As with the previous analogues for the artist that I have discussed, analysis of the child as artist, artist as child complex allows us to see the ways in which Wilde and James challenged the hegemonic social formations through locating complex resistant subject positions within those formations. In my discussions of James and Wilde's treatment of children below I will concentrate first on how we may read into Wilde's fairy stories of the *fin-de-siècle* a

[11] Henry James, *What Maisie Knew*, ed. by Penelope Lively and Stephen Pain, Everyman (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 21.

radical political commentary, and then on the ways in which Henry James deconstructs the discourses of sexuality in his figuring of childhood in his *fin-de-siècle* works. Before I turn to Wilde's stories I must detail key aspects of the contemporary idea of the child.

Science and Children

The nineteenth century view on the child was centrally concerned with a sense of children possessing the key to the future. Physical scientists saw in children a demonstration of the principle of ontogeny. The individual child displays the characteristics of all those evolutionary stages that have, in distant ages, gone before the current stage of evolution. Laura Otis notes that for Ernst Haeckel, author of *The Evolution of Man* (German 1874, trans. 1879) and the other biologists, 'developing organisms were texts in which one could read the past.'[12] The child, as developing human organism, offered biologists a lens through which they could view an immeasurable period of time. Human scientists, such as anthropologists, employed the motif of primitive peoples as children, and their societies as in the infancy of civilization, providing, as the embryo provides for the biologist, a means of viewing the far distant past, and of addressing the present, and future. Daniel Bivona has made this summary:

> that notions of the "barbaric", the "uncivilized", the "primitive", the "childlike", the alien in time and the alien in space overlap constantly in the Victorian imagination of the late nineteenth century, blurring distinctions which some in the twentieth century will later erect between phylogeny and ontogeny, cultural evolution and individual development, the history of the 'race' and the history of the individual, the customs of the primitive and the behaviour of Western children.'[13]

The areas of overlap that Bivona succinctly identifies will be examined in detail below. I want to explore two specific aspects of the relations between science and children. The first concerns evolutionary theory and the theoretical focus of the analytic gaze on the problem of identifying specific stages of evolutionary development. The trope of childhood, the extension of the model of the growth of the individual to the growth of species, races and civilizations, will be examined. Secondly the idea of children and children's stories as providing privileged access to the past of the races will be discussed with reference to Folklore research.

The first aspect that I want to discuss regarding children and evolutionary science is the complex of relations between specific tropes employed by biologists and

[12] Laura Otis, *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 235.

[13] Daniel Bivona, *Desire and Contradiction: Imperial Visions and Domestic Debates in Victorian Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 77-8.

anthropologists in their writings on physiological and sociological development. The model of development of the individual's growth, from conception to adult maturity, provided scientists with a narrative logic for their theories. However, this narrative is not without its problems, and a specific difficulty arises when each theory has to confront plateaus of development, or latent stages of development.

In *Darwin's Plots* Gillian Beer notes that, 'the multiplicity of stories implicit in evolution was *in itself* an element in its power over the cultural imagination: what mattered was not the specific stories it told, but the fact that it told many and diverse ones. Profusion and selection were part of the procedure of reception as well as being inherent to the theory'.[14] The example she offers is especially pertinent to my argument:

> Whereas the story of man's kinship with all the other species had an egalitarian impulse, the story of development tended to restore hierarchy and to place at its apex not only man in general, but contemporary European man in particular - our kind of man to the Victorians. [...] This model was achieved by reintroducing the model of the single life cycle with its pattern of growth, both physical and intellectual, from childhood through to manhood. Development extends into the idea of progress and bears with it the assumption that control is achieved by and accorded to the fully adult, that the process of cultural change is one of improvement, and that the passage from ape to man can be charted through the degrees of development of diverse races (107).

The trope of childhood and growth of the individual as a common narrative order has proved its enduring power. Its explanatory force is almost exhausted by Victorian thinkers' attempt to make it encompass the great periods of geological and evolutionary time. What both Darwin's theory of evolution does, and what those ethnologists who adopted and transformed his theory to provide a model of their own for the 'growth' of civilizations do, is to include a logical mechanism for explaining the distinct stages of development, especially those stages which appear to be unfruitful or unproductive (if not simply destructive). In Darwin's case the logic of natural selection automatically rules out the survival of unproductive, or negative stages; 'As natural selection acts solely by the preservation of profitable modifications, each new form will tend in fully-stocked country to take the place of, and finally to exterminate, its own less improved parent or other less-favoured forms with which it comes into competition. Thus extinction and natural selection will ... go hand in hand'.[15] This logic does not assume however that no

[14] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 106.

[15] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by Gillian Beer, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 141.

evidence of such stages should be available. The very lack of such evidence is one of the 'difficulties on theory' that Darwin addresses in chapter six of *The Origin of Species*.

A consequence of his theory is that 'innumerable transitional [organic] forms must have existed' (141). Darwin acknowledges however that geological evidence of these innumerable forms is not extant. How, he asks, are we then to prove that such forms did indeed follow the course that his theory posits? The first answer to this objection he gives is that the geological record is more imperfect than usually allowed. Another answer lies in the differentiation between species. Species are, Darwin asserts, 'tolerably well-defined objects, and do not at any one period present an inextricable chaos of varying and intermediate links' (145). New varieties are only 'very slowly formed, for variation is a very slow process', depending as it does on an extraordinarily extensive, complex set of interrelations between active agents and their environment, and natural selection can only act once a favourable variation has occurred; and, as new varieties are formed in lesser numbers than existing successful varieties, and many new varieties almost indistinguishable from the existing varieties will occur, Darwin concludes that it should not be surprising that recognising varieties from fossil evidence should be difficult (141-4). The examples he provides emphasise however his difficulty in discussing the idea of intermediate stages of evolution while acknowledging the aeons required for the action of evolution. The example he chooses is that of the eye, one of the 'organs of extreme perfection and complication'. He first asserts that 'it is scarcely possible to avoid comparing the eye to a telescope', then demonstrates that the complexity and mechanical perfection of the eye can only be compared to a telescope if we understand that the eye is a telescope perfected through variations occurring over 'millions and millions of years; and during each year on millions of individuals of many kinds', and that the eye stands to the telescope as the works of the creator stand to the works of man (154). The choice of example seems to me entirely apposite, though it offers perhaps more than Darwin intends. His own theory seeks to look back over time, acting simultaneously as telescope and microscope, as he examines the past and the future of humankind. It is in this sense that Charles Dodgson understood, as I suggested above, the adult examination of children. Darwin attempts to conceptualise a continuum of evolutionary development in which distinct stages of development shade into one another, distinct yet difficult to delimit precisely. Darwin recognises that the idea of stages in evolution represents certain difficulties for his theory but he remains committed to the concept. When ethnologists adopted evolutionary theory this problem became particularly acute.

Gillian Beer's description, quoted above, of the contradictory movements of thought can be recognised in the opening pages of Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture*

(1871).[16] Tylor theorised that certain of the habits and rituals of peasants and rural peoples in Europe, especially those that resembled the beliefs of non-European peoples, were what he called *survivals;* not simply similar practices, but the same practices, practices that had remained unchanged for thousands, and even tens of thousands, of years. The implications of this reasoning were clear to Tylor:

> If we choose out in this way things which have altered little in a long course of centuries, we may draw a picture where there shall be scarce a hand's breadth difference between an English plough-man and a Negro of central Africa. These pages will be so crowded with evidence of such correspondence among mankind, that there is no need to dwell upon its details here, but it may be used at once to override a problem which would complicate the argument, namely the question of race. For the present purpose it appears possible and desirable to eliminate considerations of hereditary varieties or races of man, and to treat mankind as homogeneous in nature, though places in different grades of civilization. The details of the enquiry will, I think, prove that stages of culture may be compared without taking into account how far tribes who use the same implement, follow the same custom, or believe the same myth, may differ in their bodily configuration and the colour of their skin and hair.[17]

We can see in action here the movement away from race as the differentiating characteristic between peoples towards its replacement with the suggestion of a hierarchy of cultures, what Tylor calls 'different grades of civilization'. The co-existence at the same moment in human history of these different grades allows the anthropologist and ethnographer to study the living past. Such an argument also fits neatly with the analogical use of the idea of natural selection. The superiority of modern European civilization is assured by its comparison with this living past. Tylor resorts to a figure that he acknowledges himself as being 'oft-repeated' in his assertion of this point:

> Savage moral standards are real enough, but they are far looser and weaker than ours. We may, I think, apply the often-repeated comparison of savages to children as fairly to their morals as to their intellectual condition. The better savage social life seems in but unstable equilibrium, liable to be easily upset by a touch of distress, temptation, or violence, and then it becomes the worse savage life, which we know by so many dismal and hideous examples (27).

Tylor's reliance on the assertion of the resemblance between savages and children emphasises the unspoken identity: the two become one; savages are children, children are savages, and both 'groups' require education to form them into useful, trustworthy,

[16] 'Anthropology is the whole, ethnography the study of discrete groups of mankind, a part of the whole' Elie Reclus, 'Ethnography and Ethnology', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* ed. by T. S. Baynes and William Robertson Smith, ninth edition (Edinburgh: A and C Black, 1875-89), pp. 613-26 (p. 613).

[17] E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom,* 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 6-7.

mature civilized adults. Both 'savages' and children also stand as intermediaries between a pre-historic state of man and the 'full' realization of his civilized state.

Writing in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the French ethnographer Elie Reclus describes those concepts which anthropology and ethnology employ to investigate social structures as analogous to physical structures:

> In the view of its supporters, evolution has not only in past ages differentiated genera and species, but is at work to-day in transforming the actual types. Here may be the place to advert to the great law, of which Von Baer and Agassiz were the most thorough and successful exponents, namely, 'that the development of the individual is an epitome of that of the species.' The human embryo, for example, passes through all the principal phases, in one or other of which whole series of inferior animals stay permanently, in such a manner that each new generation repeats in an abridged manner those that have gone before. Of the many corollaries which follow from this theory, the most important seems to be that, however much some groups of animals may differ from each other in structure and habits, they must have descended from the same parent form, if they are found to pass through similar embryonic stages. This is *heredity*. Ethnologists, again, have not been slow in borrowing this law from anatomists. The embryo going over the same organic form of the species, they argue that the child too must repeat the intellectual developments of past mankind. Parents, and not only the observers among them, had already reversed the opinion of the philosophers that savages are children by saying that children are savages. The remarkable similarity between their ideas, language, habits, and character, though generally admitted, had been regarded merely as a curious accident; but coincidences of such magnitude are not to be considered as merely accidental.[18]

Not only are primitive peoples like children, their development through distinct stages of civilization is analogous with the growth to maturity of the individual child. The corollary of this construction is that the observation of the individual child provides a view not simply of a world in miniature, but a view of the development of all civilization. And as with all the most satisfying narratives, the end of this story, the arrival of the Victorian child in adult maturity, comfortably provides a yet further scientific demonstration of the cherished belief in European civilization as the pinnacle of civilized development. The child is an intermediate stage that can be observed recapitulating all the various stages that have preceded it. This is the licensed rational scientific gaze that is turned upon not only the savage but the European child, making of these children not only avatars of the future but also symbols of the dim past.

Elie Reclus emphasises the analogous developments of societies and biological organisms, and associates ethnology directly with positivist notions of progress. He

[18] Reclus, 'Ethnography and Ethnology', p. 615.

identifies the problem of 'grades of civilization' that Tylor mentions, and incorporates it into his account: 'Ethnology takes its stand on the assumption that the laws of the intelligence have always been what they are, have always operated as they do now, that man has progressed from the simple to the complex, from the particular to the general. This assumption does not ... affirm that the progress has been always continuous and well marked' (614). Like the biologists, the ethnologists are faced with a problem of taxonomy. Reclus's narrative makes allowances for periods of no progress or even of degeneration (Reclus terms this *retrograded*). Ethnology posits 'simply that mankind, whatever be its origin, is, or has become, a mass practically homogeneous, more uniform than diverse':

> The wide differences between civilized and uncivilized man are now admitted only to be differences in degree, - actual civilization being the adult age, and savagery the infancy of mankind. 'The conditions and habits of existing savages,' says Sir John Lubbock, 'resemble in many ways those of our own ancestors at a period now long gone by; they illustrate the earlier mental stages through which the human race has passed' (614).

Reclus's conception of ethnology is centrally concerned with progress. In a later section of his article, discussing ethnology today, he writes, 'Ethnology, in its actual state, centres upon the theory of progress. It has not only to prove the existence of progress, it has to demonstrate how it operates, and to measure the amount of its work in the different periods. Progress, put in question in all the branches of human development, is nowhere more fiercely discussed than in its relations to justice and morals' (624). There is a danger and a promise in this understanding of ethnology. Reclus's dependence upon a positivistic model of ethnography runs the danger of aligning ethnography with the dominant positivistic narrative of development which, as Gillian Beer notes, enthrones Western European man as the final flowering of social evolution. However such emphasis does not necessarily allay the anxious feeling that such a triumph may be either transitory or illusory. One key result of shortening the chronological, geological, and geographical distance between civilized and uncivilized man was to emphasize the ease with which the civilized man might very quickly break down. In an 1879 lecture before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, entitled 'Degeneration: a Chapter in Darwinism', Edwin Ray Lankester argued that natural selection acted to produce one of three results, either balance, elaboration, or degeneration.[19] He begins his discussion focussing on biological examples but very quickly he shifts ground to discuss 'the notable

[19] Edwin Ray Lankester, 'Degeneration: a Chapter in Darwinism'; selections reprinted in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History C. 1880-1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 363.

examples of degeneration' offered by 'the traditional history of mankind'.[20] He frames his discussion as a warning to contemporary society and a eulogy of science:

> We are as a race more fortunate than our ruined cousins ... To us has been given the power *to know the causes of things*, and by the use of this power it is possible for us to control our destinies ... In proportion as the whole of past evolution of civilized man, of which we at present perceive the outlines, is assigned to its causes, we and our successors ... may expected to be able duly to estimate that which makes for, and that which makes against, the progress of the race. The full and earnest cultivation of Science - the Knowledge of Causes - is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race ... from relapse and degeneration' (5).

Lankester makes explicit the dangers of degeneracy for entire races and links the current state of savage races with a previous fall from a more civilized state. He provides an early example of a debate that helped shape late Victorian responses to a variety of contemporary phenomena, from scientific debates to concerns over women's suffrage.

This view of civilized man is central to the writings of Cesare Lombroso. He asserted that the physical and mental attributes of criminals suggested that savages and criminals were closely related, and that 'criminal tendencies [were] of atavistic origin'.[21] The criminal 'reproduces in civilized times characteristics not only of primitive savages but of still lower types as far back as the carnivora' (517-8). Lombroso proves this statement by evincing the similarities between the enormous jaws of criminals, savages, and carnivores; this feature occurs and is shared by these groups because each is adapted to 'tear and devour raw flesh' (518). The criminal prowls the city as the tiger does the jungle. Lombroso locates the civilized, the savage and the animal not only in the same place but within the same body. We are familiar with the relationship between such material and the writings of Stevenson, Stoker and Wilde.[22] A less familiar recognition is that this collocation of the civilized and savage occurs in the nursery also.[23] At the heart of every household, as the guarantee and identifier of the family, there stands just such a multi-faceted figure, at once animal, savage and civilized. The anxious question faced by late Victorian parents was far more than simply an exaggerated fear of how their children

[20] 'Introduction' to *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History C. 1880-1900*, ed. by Ledger and Luckhurst, p. 4.

[21] Cesare Lombroso, extracts from The Criminal Man (1876) in Otis, *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, 516-19, 517

[22] Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) each employ these tokens of decadence and degeneration. Dracula and Hyde are each repeatedly either compared to animals or described as animals.

[23] A less familiar association now perhaps but in *The Criminal* (1890) Havelock Ellis wrote that 'the child is naturally, by his organisation, nearer to the animal, to the savage, to the criminal, than to the adult. Although this has frequently been noted in a fragmentary manner, it is only of recent years that the study of childhood, subject of the gravest importance, has been seriously taken up by Perez and others' and 'the criminal is an individual who, to some extent, remains a child his life long - a child of larger growth and with greater capacity for evil. This is part of the atavism of criminals'. Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal*, p. 212, 214.

may turn out – the figure of the child and the idea of childhood, over-determined by the discourses of science and culture, carried within them the same spectres of degeneration as the criminal. In a sense there was not only a threat to children but also a threat from children. This is the radical instability of the discursive position of the latent child and source of its power. The threat from children is the target of late Victorian tracts and moral panic as writers searched for further examples of degeneracy.

The promise in Elie Reclus's characterisation of ethnology provides a quite other radical view that employs the same figures but employs different emphases, producing a politically radical narrative. Elie Reclus himself provides a useful way of recognising these distinctions. The emphasises in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article are made all the more complex when we learn that he was an extraordinarily radical political figure as well as a respected scientist. A communard in 1871, he was an international anarchist figure, a friend and collaborator with Peter Kropotkin. His view of ethnology and ethnography, and his emphasis on the figure of the child suggests an understanding of the potency of the latent child. This insight was available to Reclus because ethnology had based its very claims to knowledge upon the relationship between children, language, and folk-lore stories as survivals of earlier cultures.

Ethnology, Folk-lore and Andrew Lang

Fairytales and folklore represented a peculiar genre for the late Victorian reading public. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the public birth and first steps of a new discipline, Folk-lore research. William John Thoms (1803-85) coined the term 'Folk-lore' writing to the *Athenaeum* in August 1846. Richard Dorson describes how Thoms believed that, '"folk-lore" designate[d] a serious cultural inquiry':

> His successors explored the subject with an intellectual vigour and brilliance that excited all England in the late Victorian decades. The classicist and medievalist, anthropologist and psychologist, historian and archaeologist, literary scholar and philologist, as well as the parson, the doctor, and the school master, found stimulus and reward in the methods of folklore.[24]

Since the brothers Grimm, folklore had promised a glimpse of antiquity, but Victorian science put this idea to work in an endeavour to provide evidence for an evolutionary account of the development of civilization. In his 1856 study 'Comparative Mythology' the philologist Max Müller, working at Oxford, advanced the hypothesis of a shared origin for the Greek and Vedic pantheons. Müller argued that both incidents in the myths of each civilization, and, more importantly from a philological point of view, phrases and

[24] Richard M. Dorson, *History of British Folklore: The British Folklorists*, reprint edition (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.

concepts in each tradition were too similar not to have evolved from a shared origin. He endorsed the idea of a dispersal of an Aryan people, a people who lived together during a 'mythopoeic' age, and subsequently were scattered across the globe during pre-history. Müller's hypothesis was repeated by a number of writers, notably John Lubbock, later Lord Avebury, and contested by still more writers, most publicly and often by Andrew Lang. John Lubbock's best selling *Prehistoric Times as illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (1865) developed at length the thesis explicit in its title, a thesis that depended in equal parts upon the ideas of Müller and Edward Tylor.[25] Archaeology and folklore were employed side by side to provide evidence for Lubbock's assertions regarding the development of prehistoric man. Though pre-history seemed increasingly far off, as the chronology of geological evidence pushed back the Victorian conception of man's time on earth, paradoxically writers like Lubbock also suggested that modern man was closer to the primitive than was ordinarily allowed.

Access to the living past was achieved through the examination of the household tales or *märchen* of both European and non-European peoples. The Folklore Society, established in 1878, provided a focus for the researches of a wide range of writers and scholars, all intent on establishing such ethnological research as scientific. Prominent amongst these researchers was the Scotsman Andrew Lang.

Born in Selkirk in 1844, Lang was a prolific poet and translator, editor, journalist and scholar (Wilde damned his poetry with faint praise on a number of occasions).[26] As an editor Lang produced many selections and introductions to volumes of classical stories, fairytales and folktales. As a journalist he wrote for a range of periodicals over a forty-year period, including a column in *Longman's Magazine* entitled 'At the Sign of the Ship', which appeared each month between January 1886 and October 1905, as well as regular appearances such as those in the *Daily News* which attracted Henry James's venom in 1888.[27] However, Lang's main interest was in the study of folklore and the investigation of the evolution of civilization. As early as 1878 he published a pamphlet on 'The Folklore of France' and one of his last works was *Method in the Study of Totemism* (1911). Lang is a mostly forgotten figure now, though Green calls him 'the greatest

[25] Dorson describes Lubbock's book as a bestseller; Dorson, *History of British Folklore: The British Folklorists*, p. 197.

[26] See Roger Lancelyn Green's appendices critical biography of Lang for a substantial bibliography of Lang's writing: Roger Lancelyn Green, *Andrew Lang: A Critical Biography with a Short-Title Bibliography of the Works of Andrew Lang* (Leicester: Edmund Ward, 1946).

[27] 'Lang, in the Daily News, every morning, and I believe in a hundred other places, use his beautiful thin facility to write everything down to the lowest level of Philistine twaddle - the view of the old lady round the corner or the clever person at the dinner party', Henry James to Robert Louis Stevenson, 1888 (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 240).

bookman of his age.'[28] There are only two books concerned solely with his life and writings; Lancelyn Green's hagiographic biography (first published 1946, revised and republished 1962) and Eleanor de Selms Langstaff's *Andrew Lang* in the Twayne's English Authors series (1978); and he merits only a scornful treatment in John Gross's *The Rise and Fall of the English Man of Letters* (revised edition 1991).[29] Gross fails to do justice to Lang's scholarly interests, condemns his poetry as stilted and his criticism as too often compromised by his habit of puffing the works of friends. Langstaff provides a far more detailed and judicious treatment, discussing Lang's anthropological work in considerable detail. She offers a particularly careful discussion of the links between Lang's anthropological writings and his series of coloured fairy books for children.[30]

Lang's main activity as a writer on folklore was to combat the arguments of Max Müller, specifically Müller's philological account of the similarities between Greek and Vedic myth, and his insistence on a central symbolic contest between night and day, light and dark, as the hidden underlying structural principle of all myth. *Custom and Myth* (1884) is specifically addressed to Müller as a refutation of his theory.[31] An accompanying work of the same year is his long introduction to a new translation of *Grimm's Household Tales*.[32] Lang's introduction is entitled 'Household Tales; Their origin, diffusion, and relations to the higher myths' and forms a further instalment in his campaign against Müller and his followers, especially George Cox. Lang dismisses Müller's claim, later developed by Cox in his *Mythology of the Aryan Nations* (1870), that the similarity of the tales arises either from a shared origin, or from borrowing by one primitive group from another, or by a slow process of transmission.[33] Instead, he offers two contrary accounts regarding the origins of the household tales. The first is that they demonstrate primitive man's quest to explain his circumstances, and the phenomena that he witnesses, and the second is the primacy of the household tales in this process. Lang argues that the household tales give rise to myths and not vice-versa. He notes that 'as a rule, however, writers on these subjects believe in the former hypothesis, namely, that Household Tales are the *detritus* of the higher myths; are the old heroic coins defaced and battered by long

[28] Roger Lancelyn Green, 'Andrew Lang, 'The Greatest Bookman of his Age'', *Indiana University Bookman*, 7 (1965), pp. 10-72.

[29] John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the English Man of Letters*, revised edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991) pp. 146-53; and Eleanor de Selms Langstaff, *Andrew Lang*, Twayne's English Authors (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne's, 1978).

[30] Langstaff, *Andrew Lang*, Twayne's English Authors, p. 137-49.

[31] Quite by chance I found and examined Henry James's own copy of Lang's book *Custom and Myth* in April 2003 in Jarndyce Antiquarian booksellers, Great Russell Street, London. The text was annotated but not alas I think by James, but by a later owner of the book. The volume was priced at £250.

[32] Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, ed. and trans by Margaret Hunt, Bohn's Standard Library, 2 vols (London: H. G. Bohn, 1884).

[33] Andrew Lang, 'Household Tales; Their origin, diffusion, and relations to the higher myths', in *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, ed. and trans by Margaret Hunt, Bohn's Standard Library, 2 vols (London: H. G. Bohn, 1884), p. xi-xvii (p. xi).

service'; but the opposite is the case Lang claims, 'it is probable that the *märchen* is older than the cultivated epic'. [34] This primacy of the household tale is central to Lang's argument that the household tales provide scholars with a shortcut to the past of the European race. Lang's later longer work *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (two volumes; 1888) repeats and develops his alternative method to that of Müller's philological one. I have stressed the background to Lang's writing because it is central to an understanding of his sense of the work that it is possible to show that folk tales do. The peculiarity of folk-lore research is that it finds within the domestic setting a door way to the distant past of the race. Like the physical scientists and the ethnologists, the folk-lore researchers turn their gaze onto the child and childhood in their search for access to the past. Through their interest in the tales told to children, there is telling conceptual slippage between the tales as *survivals* and the individual child as at once a creature of the present and of past ages.

Lang's most famous books are the series of coloured fairy books that begin in 1889 with *The Blue Fairy Book*. A limited large paper edition of the book includes an introduction that provides a condensed and confused picture of Lang's reliance on the category of childhood and the child. He begins by asserting that, 'the taste of the world, which has veered so often, is constant enough to fairy tales':

> The children to whom and for whom they are told represent the young age of man. They are true to his early loves, they have his unblunted edge of belief, and his fresh appetite for marvels. The instinct of economy so works that we are still repeating to the boys and girls of each generation the stories that were old before Homer sang, and the adventures that have wandered, like the wandering Psyche, over the world.[35]

Lang is committed to two quite different aspects of the idea of childhood. These aspects, I suggest below, are potentially divergent and subversive in ways that Lang does not and cannot acknowledge. It is not only that children represent 'the young age of man' in the sense of immaturity, but also that the individual child stands metonymically for the childhood of the race. The confusion of reference between these aspects of the discursive category may be productive. What happens when the household tales and fairy tales, stories that Lang has argued provide access to the childhood of civilization, are addressed to children, the same protean characters whose freedom Lang idealises? Another way of putting the question might be to ask to whom are the fairy stories in this book offered, and what does Lang expect the reader to gain from these stories? He is clear that his introduction is superfluous to the needs of the child reader:

[34] Lang, 'Household Tales; Their origin, diffusion, and relations to the higher myths', p. xl-xli, lxx.

[35] Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, large paper edition (London: Longmans and Co., 1889).

> The study of nursery tales, of their wanderings, their antiquity, their origin, has long been a diversion for the learned ... Even a child (this preface is not meant for children) must recognise, as he turns the pages of the *Blue Fairy Book*, that the same adventures and something like the same plots meet him in stories translated from different languages.[36]

Lang offers these words for the discerning adult reader, for the reader who expects from a David Nutt book a learned exposition on folklore. But he hopes to claim for the adult reader of fairytales, and the adult compiler of collections of fairytales some of the positive qualities of a child: 'He who would enter into the Kingdom of Faery should have the heart of a little child, if he is to be happy and at home in that enchanted realm. But I trust that one may have studied fairy tales both scientifically and in a literary way, without losing the heart of childhood, as far as those best of childish things are concerned'.[37] The adult reader remains at once a child and an adult. Here, in Lang's excursion away from scholarly work, into the arena of fine editions, we catch a glimpse of the confusions that lie in his intellectual habit of resting upon the idea of childhood.

The question that now demands an answer is what kind of tales does Lang include as representative of the *märchen*? The answer is that they are the most unremarkable, most stereotypical didactic tales available. Not for the contemporary child the complex and ambiguous tales of which Lang had demonstrated himself a scholar in *Myth, Ritual and Religion*. Though Eleanor Langstaff argues that Lang's selections became more adventurous and less Eurocentric as the series of colour books wore on, in this early book the tales are almost entirely familiar; 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Little Red Riding Hood', and 'The Story of Pretty Goldilocks' are all included. Lang played safe in his choices of tales, selecting those most likely to catch the eye of the general reader. He also addressed himself to the needs of moral education under the cover of offering tales that were the same the world over. In his introduction to a later book, *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1898), we can follow Lang's characteristic pitching of his collections of tales. He addresses the child reader and tells them that 'The stories in the Fairy Books have generally been such as old women in country places tell their grandchildren':

> Nobody knows how old they are, or who told them first. The children of Ham, Shem and Japhet may have listened to them in the Ark on wet days, Hector's little boy may have heard them in Troy Town, for it is certain that Homer knew them, and that some of them were written down in Egypt about the time of Moses. [...] People in different countries tell them differently, but they are always the same

[36] Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, large paper edition (London: Longmans and Co., 1889), p. xi.

[37] Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, large paper edition (London: Longmans and Co., 1889), p. xiii.

> stories, really, whether among little Zulus, at the cape, or little Eskimo, near the North Pole.[38]

Though the whimsy of this is attractive, we shouldn't miss the attempt to disarm the more knowing reader, nor the recourse to simple untruths. Lang the folklorist knows only too well from where these stories, and from where the stories in his other collections, come. By following the usual path of asserting the universality of the stories, he hints inadvertently at the motive forces that impel his choices. Lang's stories fit carefully into the didactic tradition of Victorian writing for children, rather than into the adventure tradition that he so publicly championed as a journalist.[39] Lang's presentation of the stories in this way obscures their place in the discourse of late nineteenth century ethnology, a place that he was prominent in establishing and securing. Within this scholarly discourse the stories are employed to help establish the cultural superiority of contemporary European Imperial nations. Within the wider non-specialist discourse of writing for children, the proposition that these stories are common to all peoples is inseparable from the normative assertion of European values and expectations as shared by all the peoples of the world.

However the very terms of Lang's argument involve him in an occlusion of a troubling instability. When he suggests that as the compiler of *The Blue Fairy Book* he experienced a little of the sense of a child's wonder before stories, he acknowledges that what children do with stories and what adults may think that they will do with stories differ: 'We don't know what passes in the minds of children when they hear the fairy tales. Perhaps they side with wolf, or have a *tendresse* for the Yellow Dwarf. But if their open eyes and mouths tell the truth (they have not learnt to tell aught else) they are happy and contented with these grave prodigious histories. Pretty certainly they do not take the moral, and will be none the wiser, if much the more diverted, for the tale of Prince Hyacinth Longnose.'[40] This child listener is the innocent listener whose delight in a story is unfettered by recognition of any moral didactic purpose behind the telling. What Lang acknowledges is the freedom of the child to judge independently, a freedom that he cherishes, yet a freedom that his choice of stories, and his theorising of the position of the stories, is at odds with. What is striking about the *Blue Fairy Book* is the entirely traditional didactic manner of the stories, and the clear sense that these stories, a hodgepodge of literary tales from Perrault and *märchen* from the Grimms, are aimed at socialization. Lang's fairy stories work to educate children into the normative social expectations of late Victorian society, expectations regarding gender and class. The

[38] Andrew Lang 'Preface' to *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (London: Longmans and Co., 1898), p. iv.

[39] Lang wrote effusively in his weekly columns about the writings of Marryat, Rider Haggard and Stevenson amongst others. See Langstaff, *Andrew Lang, Twayne's English Authors*, p. 116-18.

[40] Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, large paper edition (London: Longmans and Co., 1889), p. xx.

question raised by Lang's description of childhood and reading is the relationship of folk tales to this process of socialization.[41]

Writing about his own childhood and education, in his *Adventures Among Books* (1905), Lang describes how he read widely as a child and young man and as he reached maturity came to be fascinated by folklore:

> Only a few people seem interested in that spectacle ['the topic of folk-lore, and the development of custom and myths'], so full of surprises - the development of all human institutions, from fairy tales to democracy. In beholding it we learn how we owe all things, humanly speaking, to the people and the genius. The natural people, the folk, has supplied us, in an unconscious way, with the stuff of all our poetry, law, ritual: and genius has selected from the mass, has turned customs into codes, nursery tales into romance, myth into science, ballad into epic, magic mummery into gorgeous ritual. The world has been educated, but not as man would have trained and taught it.[42]

In this last clause, 'but not as man would have trained and taught it' lies the troubled relationship of Lang's ethnological genealogy of civilizations to its evidence. The primary quality of customs, nursery tales, myth, and magic mummery is that they are protean, they depend upon and thematise transformations, the tools that they offer their communities are ways of figuring change. Yet the ethnological analogy of the progress from primitive to civilized, as the change from childhood to maturity asserts a specific passage, a series of distinct, identifiable stages. The trouble with this early model of ethnology is that it proposes a mechanism of development that it simultaneously seeks to arrest; it is teleological. It is in this sense that Lang's position is Whiggish and we can hear in Lang's words above an echo of the position that Empson describes between the artist and the worker. Lang writes that the spectacle of folktales teaches us about the relations between 'the people and the genius', but the pattern that he sketches, of 'customs into codes', 'myth into science', is a pattern that asserts the individual over the mass, the genius and the elite over the people, co-opting the artist for the hegemonic social formation (doesn't the placing together of fairytales and democracy in 'the development of all human institutions, from fairy tales to democracy', perhaps hinting at democracy as a human institution as only another fairytale, suggest at once Lang's wit and his political

[41] Rousseau mentions the difficulties that reading fables presents as a guide to moral development in *Émile*. In book II he notes that 'the morality of fables is so mixed and so unsuitable for their age that it would be more likely to incline [children] to vice than to virtue'; it is for this reason he says that 'reading is the curse of childhood'. Reading corrupts the child who is an example of uncorrupted, natural man. Rousseau's inversion of the traditional valuation of reading highlights the dependence of education on moral didacticism: Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley, Everyman's Library, 1 vol (London: J. M. Dent, 1974) p. 77, 80.

[42] Andrew Lang, *Adventures Among Books* (London: Longmans and Co., 1905), p. 36-7.

ideals?). Empson suggests that the position of the artist is always and ever isolated and that with the late version of pastoral the artist acknowledges this and walks a tightrope, striking a balance between, on the one side a position like Lang's where the privilege of the artist removes them from sympathy with the common run of humanity, and on the other a position which denies the artist the chance to be outside that society, and of course either of these sides is no choice at all as below the tightrope is an abyss.[43] Empson finds in pastoral an attempt to negotiate these difficulties, and, I will suggest below, Wilde rewrites Lang's narratives of identity to highlight their radical potential.

An alternative to Lang's characterisations of the stories as scripts that compel our participation in the roles they provide can be recognised if we read Lang's description of Robert Louis Stevenson back into his seemingly unconnected work on fairytales. Lang is one of the principal sources for the common picture of Stevenson as child-like (of course one of the other sources is Stevenson himself). Lang describes in his reminiscences how true this picture of Stevenson seemed to his memory; 'The man I knew was always a boy':

> life was a drama to him, and he delighted, like his own British admirals, to do things with a certain air. He observed himself, I used to think, as he observed others, and 'saw himself' in every part he played. There was nothing of the *cabotin* in this self-consciousness; it was the unextinguished childish passion for "playing at things" which remained with him. I have a theory that all children possess genius, and that it dies out in the generality of mortals, abiding only with people whose genius the world is forced to recognise. Mr. Stevenson illustrates, and perhaps partly suggested, this private philosophy of mine. [44]

Lang moves from comfortable reminiscence to a familiar romanticising of children, and I think that he believes he is following Stevenson's own thoughts regarding children and their genius. The key idea here is that of posing and it raises rather different ideas than those Lang wishes to acknowledge. The self-consciousness that he lauds in Stevenson is just that excessive self-concern that was censored by Victorian society in adults and children; *posing* is after all a key term in the story of Oscar Wilde. Wilde employs the idea of posing and masks to highlight the instability of the fixed, essentialist bourgeois self. Andrew Lang here needs at once to indicate the ways in which children assume this self without it being inauthentic, and to license certain individuals to retain a protean self that challenges fixed identities. These people are the geniuses, but in this reading they are only licensed fools, part madmen who may speak true but are marginal. The familiarity

[43] Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 14, 16, 19-20.

[44] Lang, *Adventures Among Books*, p. 42, 52-3.

and attractiveness of Lang's suggestion disguises a powerful ideological assertion and its implications: the move from childhood to maturity is the once and for all fixing of the individual self, the interpellation of the individual by the dominant discursive formations. The suggestion that the protean qualities of childhood remain with us always disrupts this fixity. An acknowledgement of this disruptiveness is in Stevenson's writing though Lang will not, or cannot, admit it.

The implications of Stevenson's thoughts in *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881) highlight his distance from the position Lang describes above. Stevenson wishes to show the ways in which adult story-telling is no less play acting than child's play, and to reveal the ways in which adults disguise this from themselves. The title essay is a plea for modern marriages, for a new settlement between men and women; the essay 'Child's Play' (1878) is about relations between adults and children, both the children that adults were and those that they care for now as adults. Adults, Stevenson suggests in the early pages of the essay, are in a better position than children: 'they know more than when they were children, they understand better, their desires and sympathies answer more nimbly to the provocation of the senses'.[45] It is through the idea of stories that Stevenson complicates this endorsement of adult understanding. Children occupy, suggests Stevenson, an entirely different mythological age to their parents: 'Surely they dwell in a mythological epoch, and are not the contemporaries of their parents' (163). Children make and discard stories, they transform themselves and the world through the fictions that they tell themselves, fictions that impel action, rather than the fictions adults indulge in as they sit quietly by the fire or lie prone in bed (157). Stevenson finds in the child's treatment of stories a relation between the world and the storyteller that evades the rational adult view of storytelling, the view that accepts the transformative power of storytelling only to circumscribe it, either by demanding that the story match conventions, or by denying the power of narratives to alter behaviour. This denial though is precisely the target that Stevenson has taken aim upon. He suggests that no adult really gives up this childhood fondness for narrative; 'We make ourselves day by day, out of history, and gossip, and economical speculations, and God knows what, a medium in which we walk and through which we look abroad' (155). This is the radical self-fashioning of which the child's play reminds us. The 'theories and associations' by which 'all things are transformed' in the adult sphere of the intellect are likened to 'coloured windows', a simile which both highlights the subjective nature of what we are inclined to take as objective, and also encourages the reader to think of a child's kaleidoscope where the pleasure comes from seeing the everyday world in new colours. Stevenson explicitly

[45] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Child's Play' in R L Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), pp. 153-65, (p.156).

identifies himself and the reader as this figure of the modern urban adult and highlights the role that such an understanding of narrative implies in a modern consumer culture:

> We study shop windows with other eyes than in our childhood, never to wonder, not always to admire, but to make and modify our incongruous theories about life. It is no longer the uniform of the soldier that arrests our attention; but perhaps the flowing carriage of a woman, or perhaps a countenance that has been vividly stamped with passion and carries an adventurous story written in its lines (155).

These 'other eyes' are like the gaze of children in so far as we recognise that we are busy making narratives out of the spectacle of city life. But these narratives are prey to the pull of fantasies and desires that we have become socialized to recognize. The adult is like the child viewer in their endless employment of narratives of the self, fictions of identity. Socialization however occludes the status of these narratives as fictions and naturalizes them. Stevenson emphasises the similarity of the adult to the child and implicitly suggests that the adult viewer who remains open to the child's view of the world becomes able to create and manipulate stories. The adult city-dweller alive to the countenances 'vividly stamped with passion', who reads the stories written in the lines of the faces around them, becomes like the modern city author. The child subject here stands as the intermediary between the adult and the artist. In the discussion of Oscar Wilde's short fiction that follows I emphasise Wilde's use of the child intermediary to unmask the ways in which the form of the fairytale sentimentalizes children in order to mask their actual position in systems of exchange. The short fictions in my reading match Wilde's dramatic works in their deconstruction of the bourgeois self and they do this by suggesting the ways in which that self is constructed through narratives, narratives which are open to rewriting. Wilde once described his habit of telling stories to André Gide's thus: 'They believe that all thoughts are born naked ... They don't understand that I *cannot* think otherwise than in stories. The sculptor doesn't try to translate his thought into marble; *he thinks in marble,* directly'.[46] Partly this is a characteristic claim by Wilde for his infusing of life with art, but the farther-reaching suggestion is that narratives are the means through which identities are established and contested. I demonstrate below the ways in which Wilde's intervention into the genre of fairytales is more strategic than usually allowed, and the ways in which his stories depend upon the sacrifice of the child-intermediary figure. In the discursive complexities of the figure of the child, specifically the related concepts of recapitulation and latency, Wilde recognised radical subversive narrative opportunities.

[46] *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections,* ed. by E. H Mikhail, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1979), vol. 1, p. 255.

Wilde's stories as narratives of the self

Jerusha McCormack has noted recently that to 'talk about Wilde's fiction, is to talk about everything, for Oscar Wilde was his own best work of art'.[47] Certainly Oscar Wilde was committed to the idea of self-fashioning and self-creation. As an Irishman in London, at the heart of Empire, he performed a very special role in a society comedy not simply confined to the stage of one of the West end theatres. McCormack is more helpful when she notes that, 'Wilde's shorter fictions are oral in origin and are written as performances which explore fissures in Wilde's own complex fate: as Irishman turned English; dandy become father; husband converted to illicit lover' (102). What she does not adequately discuss are the ways in which Wilde's stories are written into a specific genre highly charged with ideological forces. The stories of Wilde's first volume of tales, *The Happy Prince and other Tales* (1888), are written with the same mischievous specificity that characterises his critical essays. U. C. Knoepflmacher has suggested that 'It is no accident that the Golden age of children's books should arise, not only at that moment when literacy and socialization through literacy become most wide spread, but also in an age that struggled to establish and maintain the balance between child and adult, between maturity and immaturity, between responsibility and freedom'.[48] Knoepflmacher notes that authors like Lewis Carroll self-consciously cast themselves 'as mediators between states of childhood and maturity'. As mediators, such authors constructed self-conscious fictions that recognized that they addressed a dual audience of children and adults; the parents and the children, as well as potentially the children within the parents and vice versa. Paralleling this idea of authors as mediators is the idea of children themselves as intermediaries between the past and present states of humanity. If we connect these senses of mediation with the idea of initiation and with the idea of the radical transformative power of narratives of the self then we can begin to see the ways in which Wilde's stories rewrite the dominant form of the fairy story.

The specificity of Wilde's tales is mischievous because he takes the tokens of the form that other contemporary writers employ and turns them back upon the very discourse that depended upon them. Wilde chose Walter Crane and Jacomb Hood as illustrators for *The Happy Prince* on the strength of the illustrations that Hood had completed for Andrew Lang's translation of *Aucassin and Nicolette* (1887) (*Complete Letters*, 340). Lang's book, like Wilde's, was published by David Nutt, a publisher of fine print editions associated with other ventures in fairytale publishing (Alfred Nutt, David's son

[47] Jerusha McCormack, 'Wilde's Fiction(s)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 96-117 (p. 96).

[48] U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 37 (1983), pp. 497-530 (p. 497-8).

and the head of the family publishing business, was head of the Folk-Lore Society in 1897). To G. H. Kersley, a regular correspondent over the years, Wilde wrote in 1887, 'I am very pleased that you like my stories. They are studies in prose, put for Romance's sake into a fanciful form: meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness.' (*Complete Letters*, 352) Writing to an American correspondent, Amelie Rives Chanler, in January 1889, Wilde writes that the stories are 'slight and fanciful, and written not for children, but for childlike people from eighteen to eighty!' (*Complete Letters*, 388). Like Lang before him, Wilde hedges his bets as to his audience. The emphasis in both these statements is on the balancing of the child and the adult in the individual reader. Publishing his original stories with the usual publisher of folklore material identifies the readers that Wilde must have had in mind, a very particular mixed audience of children and educated readers well-read both in folk stories and the theorising of folk-lore. This specificity is most often lost on modern critics who read the tales without the dual attention that their form demands. The commonplace view of the tales treats them as simple confections, trivialities fit only for naive readers; still other critics read the tales with anything but an innocent eye. Robert K. Martin reads 'The Happy Prince as self-dramatization, as an 'important inner journal, an account of [Wilde's] recognition and acceptance of his homosexuality.'[49] Martin's is an extreme statement of a nonetheless widely recognised sense that the tales, especially the tales in *The House of Pomegranates* (1891) are expressly not for children.[50] It is certainly possible to mine the stories for their homoerotic meanings, as Neil Bartlett describes, but Bartlett also notes that the secret of these texts is out, was perhaps always an open secret, and asks rhetorically, 'what if "beneath" the heavily lidded eyes of the sex criminal lay not the excitement of a life that dares to challenge and evade ... but merely the overweight cynical ease with which an economically privileged man can and does lead a homosexual life in London without

[49] Robert K. Martin, 'Oscar Wilde and the Fairytale: "The Happy Prince" as Self-Dramatization', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 16 (1979), pp. 74-77 (p. 77).

[50] This suggestion that Wilde's two story collections are directed at different audiences is often aired. Michelle Ruggaber argues that 'the first [earlier] collection tells tales of love, friendship, and sacrifice that lead to happiness, redemption, and stability; the second seeks to disrupt calm and comfort with details of violence, cruelty, and betrayal and calls in to question traditional categories of right and wrong. The first contains stories short enough for children to enjoy in one setting; the second strives for complexity of plot and confusion in morals. Overall, in contrast to *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (sic), *A House of Pomegranates* consists of stories of a dark nature with complex plots, which while they can still be enjoyed by children, are meant to challenge and destabilize the expectations of adults. If the stories of *The Happy Prince* are the songs of innocence, then these are the songs of experience.' Her characterisation of the tales is too simple and her guarded allusion to the common place equation between the secrets of Wilde's erotic life and the sensuousness of the stories in *A House of Pomegranates* does not do enough to explicate the 'differences' that she finds between the two collections. There are differences but they do not turn on the question of to whom the stories are addressed. Similarities between the two collections can also be stressed. I will compare below the pastoral elements in 'The Young King' and 'The Selfish Giant', and further aspects of pastoral can also be identified. Michelle Ruggaber, 'Wilde's The Happy Prince and A House of Pomegranates: Bedtime Stories for Grown-Ups', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 46 (2003), pp. 140-53 (p. 141).

having to pay more than money for it'.[51] Bartlett is rightly suspicious of such lazy decoding and also indicates a more fruitful avenue of thought. The stories show the ways in which children do pay more than money for their initiation into the adult world. This initiation is figured as a sacrifice where what children lose is precisely their status as intermediaries and storytellers.

The prolific critic of fairy tales Jack Zipes devotes a third of one chapter to Wilde's fairytales arguing persuasively that Wilde's stories, like those of George MacDonald before him, subvert the dominant discourse of the fairytale.[52] He argues that where Hans Christian Andersen's stories depend upon the submission of the individual to the norms of society, Wilde's stories identify the sacrifice of the individual in the face of society's brutal materialist nature. Zipes accurately notes Wilde's rewritings of specific Andersen tales - 'The Fisherman and his Soul' is a transformation of 'The Little Mermaid', 'The Star-Child' a riposte to 'The Ugly Duckling' - and he rightly associates the narrative movement and the imagery of Wilde's stories with his description of the Christ-like figure in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' (114-20). He does not go far enough in discussing the integrity of Wilde's stories as consciously written into a complex contemporary discourse fraught with difficulties concerning the status of children and their relationship to the adult world.

Jerusha McCormack provides a more judicious summary of the source of the tales' power when she asserts that, whether we read the tales as 'Irish folklore, fables for children, or encoded narratives of homoerotic desire,' we can recognise that the tales, 'while posing as innocent, are dangerous ... they [draw] their inspiration from a degraded culture, driven underground - whether that of the 'little people', fairies or children, or of the emerging gay subculture of the 1880s. It is from the margins of society, from the perspective of the poor, the colonised, the disreputable and dispossessed, that these stories must be read'.[53] These stories from the margins are dangerous because they demand that readers become themselves self-conscious, that they recognise that they are addressed in a dual fashion, not simply as an innocent or initiated reader, one who has been let into the (open) secret of the narrative, but as at the same time a child and an adult. This dual address highlights the figure of the child as a vulnerable intermediary.

William Empson calls locating the complex in the simple one of the characteristics of pastoral.[54] He argues that 'the essential trick of old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relationship between rich and poor, was to make simple people express strong

[51] Bartlett, *Who Was that Man?*, p. 32-4.

[52] Jack Zipes, *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Progress of Civilization* (London: Heineman, 1983), p. 214.

[53] McCormack, 'Wilde's Fiction(s)', p. 102.

[54] Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 22

feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way)' (11). The fairytale offers just this connection, as at the same time it also offers a further concentration of generic meaning. As time passes pastoral becomes less sustainable, argues Empson, until finally 'the old tricks of pastoral take refuge in child-cult' (13). This is the danger of the form of the fairytale, and the reason that Empson characterises pastoral as *Whiggish*. Empson is concerned in the opening pages of *Some Versions of Pastoral* to elucidate the characteristics of proletarian literature. The difficulty he addresses is that most literature about workers is not for or by those who work, but it represents them within idealised, naturalising hierarchies. This is the political problem of pastoral but he also notes that, in one respect, the trouble with pastoral is that the relationship depicted between the simple and the complex is also the troubled relationship between the artist and the worker: 'the double attitude of the artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one ("I am in one way better, in another not so good")' (14). The radical possibility that the fairytale offers is the flip side of the position that Empson identifies as dangerous and reactionary: late pastoral, including what he calls the child-cult, includes an ironic awareness of the dangerous potentialities in its form at the same time as it presents the child as mediator between competing (political) worlds. This version of pastoral makes a link between the artist and the worker through the figure of the child, a link that short-circuits the usual generic associations and formations.

We can see this idea of pastoral in action in the opening of 'The Selfish Giant', where the giant himself figures as an adult-child. The giant's behaviour is that of a selfish child who won't share his toys. The giant's behaviour is the absurd logical extension of the adult world's ideas about property. The pastoral elements of the story are the reliance on images of the seasons and the trope of the garden enclosed. Amongst these conventions Wilde places both the ordinary children and the Christ child. The children are figured romantically as innocent and nearer to God, and their intervention re-educates the gigantic adult. Pastoral does suggest the return of a natural order, the order of the seasons, but does not equate this return with a particular social order. The key ideas concern change, sympathy, and sacrifice.

Another example is provided by 'The Young King'. The first two pages carefully create a familiar pastoral scene of the abandoned royal child raised by a goatherd. It is comparable with the stories that open Lang's *Blue Fairy Book*, specifically 'The Bronze Ring' and 'Prince Hyacinth and the Dear Little Princess'. The contrast that Wilde provides with this pastoral scene is crucial to the interest of the story. Before providing this contrast Wilde is careful to offer a satire on the aesthete, in the form of the young king's love of beauty, that also emphasises the young king's self-regard. The descriptions

of the young king's 'strange passion for beauty', his rapture before paintings, and tactile pleasure in sculpture (*Complete Works*, 214), allow Wilde to emphasise the way in which the young king objectifies himself, imagines himself into the fantasy of power and beauty, just as readers are asked to do in traditional fairy tales concerning kings and princes. When Wilde has the young king see 'himself in fancy standing at the high altar of the cathedral in the fair raiment of a king' (*Complete Works*, 215), this vision is at once proper to the genre of the fairy tales, and provides the narrative with a moment of hubris from which the young king will learn. The three visions of the king that follow are specifically not pastoral and provide a sharp contrast with the narrative elements Wilde has already set in motion. This is particularly clear if we compare the first of the dreams with a passage from Andrew Ure's *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835). Ure describes watching child-weavers at their looms, the same scene that the Young King witnesses, but in rather different terms:

> They seemed to be always cheerful and alert, taking pleasure in the light play of their muscles, - enjoying the mobility natural to their age. The scene of industry, so far from exciting any sad emotions to my mind, was always exhilarating. It was delightful to observe the nimbleness with which they pieced the broken ends, as the mule-carriage began to recede from the fixed roller-beam, and to see them at their leisure, after a few seconds' exercise of their tiny fingers, to amuse themselves in any attitude they chose, till they stretch and the windings-on were once more completed. The work of these lively elves seemed to resemble a sport, in which habit gave them a pleasing dexterity.[55]

The children that the young king sees are pale and sickly: 'as the shuttles dashed through the warp they lifted up the heavy battens, and when the shuttles stopped they let the battens fall and pressed the threads together. Their faces were pinched by famine, and their thin hands shook and trembled' (*Complete Works*, 215). Nicola Bown notes that Ure is exaggerating the wholesomeness of his vision in order to deny the charge that children were exploited in manufacturing.[56] Wilde's story takes this sentimentalised fairytale vision of children and exposes its logic by figuring it as a guilty dream of working-class slave-children. The exploitation of the children in the production of the young king's coronation robes makes a direct link between the sentimental vision of the child, figured as the young king himself, and the exploitation of children, and the quick response of the weaver, who accuses the young king of being a spy set on the workers by their master, indicts the gaze of the young king and the reader on this scene. The young king, dressed

[55] Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (London: Charles Knight, 1835), p. 301.

[56] Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 90.

as a goatherd, arrives at the cathedral for his coronation, is the swain of pastoral whom Empson suggests connects the rich and poor, the writer and the worker.

Throughout *The Happy Prince and other Tales* and *A House of Pomegranates* the reader is confronted with images of suffering and sacrifice. What the stories show are either children sacrificed to the adult world, or surrogates for children sacrificed. The power of the child-cult lies in its employment of the culturally powerful dominant aspects of the idea of the child - the ideas of natural innocence and of distance from the corrupt adult world. The form of Wilde's stories promises this distance only to repeatedly show the children located not only at the heart of that corrupt world but sacrificed to it. The irony that Wilde recognises and exploits is that the usual exploitation of the narrative power of the parabolic form of the fairytale, as a form of pastoral used to socialize listeners and readers and normalize expectations, does not exhaust the power of the form. Parable can be recast to offer quite different expressions of experience with quite other emphases. In a sense, I am arguing that Wilde's tales and the children in and without the tales become quite the opposite of Lang's children. The sacrifices that Wilde's tales represent expose the fantasies of children that underpin contemporary society.

From its opening pages 'The Happy Prince' is sharp in its satire. The town councillor, with his self-regard, the teacher who disapproves of children dreaming and the envious disappointed man who resents the very idea that the Prince might be happy provide a cross-section of the bourgeois of the town, those who cannot see the spectacle of life that appears before them each day. The prince on the other hand has learnt the harsh lesson of hindsight and judges his own past: 'happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness ... [now] I can see all the ugliness and misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep' (*Complete Works*, 271). At first the Swallow provides a comic foil to the prince's despair, providing purple descriptions of exotic lands, but by the end of the story the swallow's sacrifice matches the prince's. At the end of the story the prince has come to resemble those he sought to help, a beggar, and the civic pride that the burghers invested in him as a symbol has, for the councillors and the Mayor, evaporated. As Jack Zipes notes, in Wilde's story the Emperor has no clothes, but rather than the child in the story being the only one to understand this, the (child) reader of, or listener to, Wilde's story is invited to point out the emptiness of the burghers' social forms.[57] The children represented in the story are the children of the poor - the charity-school children of the opening paragraphs, the feverish boy, and the match-girl. The swallow's *flânerie* - 'the swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry ... while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white

[57] Zipes, *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion*, p. 115.

face of the starving children looking listlessly at the black streets' (*Complete Works*, 275) – provides a vision of a modern city familiar to any reader. The Prince is a lead Niobe who undergoes a triple transformation: the first is his change into a statue who only then recognises the foolish pride of his earlier life; the second is the stripping away of his gold leaf decoration, leaving him like a beggar; the third is the magical transformation of his lead heart into substance that can withstand the heat of the furnace. The first of these is, as Wilde describes in 'De Profundis', a moment of repentance that is a moment of initiation (*Complete Works*, 1037). In the case of the prince in the story, as in the case of Wilde himself, the initiation is into suffering. The most moving sections of Wilde's letter to Alfred Douglas describe his new gained understanding that 'Pain wears no mask' (*Complete Works*, 1024). 'De Profundis' names as his own deficiency the lack of understanding of sorrow and profound experience that he saw in the prosing moralists and bourgeois readers, writers, philanthropists and reformers, those who see what they call sorrow and seek to alleviate it without altering the conditions which bring it into being. What Wilde admits from prison is the understanding that he had already granted to the happy prince: the deficiency in sympathy of the bourgeois was his own. To stand in symbolic relation to one's age in this sense is to be everyman, not a genius: 'I have said of myself that I was one who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. There is not a single wretched man in this wretched place along with me who does not stand in symbolic relations to the very secret of life. For the secret of life is suffering.' (*Complete Works*, 1024) Perhaps it is hard not to hear in this Wilde's self-pity, but 'De Profundis' seems to me to be far more coherent and consistent than such a simple complaint allows.

The spectacle of sacrifice is the dominant image of Wilde's tales. The happy prince and the swallow sacrifice themselves for the dispossessed of the city. 'The Nightingale and the Rose' offers a rebuff to the familiar tale of lovers divided, or the infatuation of a young man with a forbidden object of love. The rank egotism and materialism of the daughter of the professor and the student provide the contrast with the devotion, resourcefulness and sacrifice of the nightingale. 'The Devoted Friend' satirises the self-serving sententious logic of the bourgeois. Where the stories are not concerned with sacrifice the spectacle they offer is that of either vanity reproved, or rampant egotism. 'The Remarkable Rocket' includes a marvellously witty caricature of an aesthete in the self-regard of the Rocket:

> A person of my position is never useful. We have certain accomplishments, and that is more than sufficient. I have no sympathy myself with industry of any kind, least of all with such industries as you seem to recommend. [...] I am merely a visitor, a distinguished visitor. The fact is that I find this place rather tedious. There is neither society here, nor solitude. In fact, it is essentially

> suburban. I shall probably go back to court, for I know that I am destined to make a sensation in the world. (*Complete Works*, 300)

Wilde at once satirises the figure that he himself was represented as during the 1880s, and the attributes of the aesthete. He also provides a stinging, witty caricature of Whistler's vanity. The fireworks of Whistler's 'Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket' (1875), and of Whistler's own notoriety, go out with a whimper rather than a bang in Wilde's tale.[58] Whether the rocket accepts his situation or not, he has a definite use which will exhaust him in its accomplishment. His vanity is the shield of the bourgeois, snobbery as a defence against a system, capitalism, which makes of individuals objects, objects that are exhausted through their participation in its processes. Snobbery masks this system with a fantasy of self-importance, a fantasy that has its attractions for the artist as well as the bourgeois. This fantasy of self-importance is comparable with the sentimental construction of children and childhood that seeks to mask the position of children in capitalist systems of exchange. The difference between the fairy tales of Andrew Lang and the tales of Oscar Wilde lies in the acceptance of the price paid in joining the adult world. Lang's tales are whiggish in Empson's sense because their moral is that the child as intermediary must sacrifice their imaginative power of sympathy with others, particularly the poor, as the price paid for becoming adult; growing up means accepting one's place in fixed social hierarchies, only children stand outside these strata and no one remains a child forever.

Child-artist-Christ

The reiteration of sacrifice as a trope identifies the child as an intermediary figure akin to the artist and to Christ. The radical political point that I have been arguing in my reading of Wilde's tales is that the stories figure children as scapegoats whose sacrifice reveals, as I argued in the previous chapter, the violent sacrificial logic concealed at the heart of civilization. In this role as scapegoats children are also intermediaries whose vulnerability, linked with the mysterious secrets of their latent nature, offers an example of a resistant subject position. Wilde's rewritings of the dominant tropes of fairytales resists their normative ideological character, producing stories that concentrate the attention of readers and listeners on sympathy and sacrifice. One specific idea that Wilde exploits is the existing association of children with Christ. Wilde's use of the association between children and Christ shifts the emphasis of his fairy stories away from the question of how children may turn out, and onto the ways in which children are vulnerable to modern society. In a previous chapter I suggested that Wilde in the dock is

[58] See 'Mr Whistler's ten o'clock' (*Complete Works*, 948-9) for Wilde's association of Whistler and fireworks, and Richard Ellmann *Oscar Wilde* p. 279.

a figure with three aspects; the artist as mediator, as scapegoat and as Christ-like. I also suggested the ways in which Wilde's sense of himself as this figure grew out of a complex negotiation of existing Romantic notions. Wilde's stories are engaged in a similar movement. The stories do emphasise the romanticised view of children as innocent, closer to nature and animals, and asocial, but also work to expose the ways in which the romanticising of childhood is a narrative that performs powerful ideological work. The child in the garden of the selfish giant is a Christ-figure but this figure emphasises that what is lost in the Christian idealisation of children is their very materiality; such idealisation swaps the real conditions of life for individual children as they live 'now' for a fantasy of innocence projected by the adult world onto children. What Wilde records in his tales is what William Empson identified as the paradox of late pastoral; the child is at once simple and complex, innocent of the corruptions of society, yet always already within that society, free to judge and to create stories but assailed on all sides by interpellations that seek to replace those stories of self-identity with positions scripted by the hegemonic forces. The culturally powerful narratives of self that figure the artist and the child as innocent, vulnerable and Christ-like are just those narratives that Wilde identifies at the close of 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' as intermediary. As discussed above, Wilde identifies the figure of the suffering Christ as an aspect of Medievalism, a mode that is necessary but not final. His over-arching argument in the essay concerns thinking through the possible developments that will lead to a supercession of Christ and Christianity (the title is after all concerned with the "soul" of man under socialism and, as the last paragraphs of the essay tell us, socialism will dispel poverty, pain and suffering and Christian spirituality which is based upon pain (*Complete Works,* 1197). Highlighting the identification of the child with Christ allows Wilde to pinpoint just those ways in which the dominant narratives of childhood make of children scapegoats in the sense that René Girard describes.

For Oscar Wilde then the figure of the child occupies a similar position within the dominant discursive formations to that of the artist. The secret of the artist is the secret of the child, the negotiation of narratives to balance and evade the powerful competing narratives of identity, or subject positions, forced on the individual by the dominant cultural forms. The gaze upon the child registered in scientific, moral, and pedagogic discourses construes the child as a powerful discursive category, one upon which substantial aspects of the hegemony rests. I have detailed above some of the specific ways in which this category is invested with discursive importance. However the very concentration of attention and discursive energy over-determines the category "child", and the result is a subject position riven by conflicting interpellations. I have argued that it is these conflicts that Wilde exploits in his critique of late Victorian society. In particular Wilde takes the latent child and explores the ways in which the child in this position

holds a radical political possibility. Wilde's tales invert the forms of late pastoral that Empson calls *Whiggish* and that I have linked with the works and thought of Andrew Lang. The result is tales that expose the ideological work accomplished by the dominant narratives of childhood.

I want now to examine Henry James's figuring of children in his novels and stories. I will argue below that James is more concerned with the socio-sexual implications of the child-cult than Wilde. This is not to say that Wilde is not alert to the intricacies of the representations of childhood sexuality. The suggestive homoerotism of 'The Young King' and 'The Star-Child show Wilde playing with ideas concerning children and sexuality. However, my emphasis below will be on the ways in which James explores through his representation of children the anxious paranoid gaze on the child in the moment of their initiation into the adult sexual world. Maisie Farange and Nanda Brookenham present reader and author with the awkwardness of an age that demands innocent children, especially female children, while simultaneously imperilling that innocence. The form that James's treatment of the idea of recapitulation takes is his cultivation of the complexities and ambiguities that inhere in the figure of the latent child.

Henry James: Children and their secrets

Prior to the 1890s James had provided one particular exemplary image of the complexity of the late Victorian view of children: Pansy Osmond's 'cultivated sweetness'.[59] We meet Pansy for the first time in a crucial chapter of the novel. Chapter twenty-two develops the plot of the novel in considerable and explicit detail. The relations between Osmond and Mme Merle are dramatised for the reader, and the question of the cynical marriage of young women is explicitly discussed. James is careful to ironise Osmond's motivations in obtaining a convent education for his daughter, as well as to begin to develop the suggestion that Osmond has been far more successful than he can yet know. James's first description of Pansy's face plays on the trope of acting and painting, two metaphors central to the novel: 'And she turned round and showed a small, fair face painted with a fixed and intensely sweet smile' (252). The choice of 'painted' in describing a girl's face that is unadorned by paint, that is make up, is pointed. And the irony achieved is deepened in rereading the dialogue between father and daughter with this in mind. Pansy has just complimented her father on his watercolour sketch and has mentioned that she too paints. He replies 'You should have brought me a specimen of your powers.' And of course she has. Her mannered politeness, so well trained she seems entirely

[59] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 341.

natural, is the specimen that she brings to him, and that pleases him. But her cultivated innocence is not unproblematic for her domineering father. The narrative description of the elder nun as simple but not crude, as well as her nationality, contribute to James's ironic figuring of Pansy's 'cultivated innocence' (she is French, noticeably well-dressed even in her nun's habit, and, when offered a choice of flowers by Pansy, chooses red roses rather than white, suggesting her understanding of the way of the world and a woman's position in it). The effect is further heightened when we hear Mme Merle soon echoing the elder nun's description of Pansy as 'made for the world'; Madame Merle says Pansy's 'very naturally meant for the world' (254, 257). The usual reading of Pansy is to see her as a pawn in the games of the adults but James includes a far more interesting possibility if we concentrate on the parallels between Pansy and Isabel.

When Isabel meets Pansy for the first time she makes a rapid induction: 'perfect simplicity was not the badge of his family. Even the little girl from the convent, who, in her prim white dress, with her small submissive face and her hands locked behind her, stood there as if she were about to partake of her first communion, even Mr Osmond's diminutive daughter had a kind of finish that was not entirely artless' (279). Isabel recognises Pansy as possibly only one more of the objects that Osmond has fashioned to suit his performance; what the reader comes to recognise before the end of the novel is that Pansy's finish allows her an inscrutability which Isabel needs. In the novel Pansy as a child is already the social actor that Mme Merle is, and this precocious grasp of the social world is figured within the novel as an advantage (which is different from a positive quality, since being able to lie well is an advantage in a brutal society, though this does not necessarily make it any the more morally acceptable).

James directs the attention of the reader and Isabel, during chapter twenty-four, towards the ways that Osmond uses Pansy; stood between his knees, fixing Isabel with a 'still, disinterested gaze', Pansy is a puppet to be manipulated by her father, and the chapter ends with his calculating use of Pansy as an appeal to Isabel's sympathy, a ploy that is repeated at the close of chapter twenty-nine (282, 303). Yet the attentive reader may understand more than Isabel does of the glimpse that she catches of Pansy's artfulness. Close by the description of Pansy's gaze, James gives a further description of Mme Merle's look as Isabel sees it. Madame Merle meets Isabel's eyes now 'with an inattentive smile in which, on this occasion, there was no infelicitous intimation that our heroine appeared to advantage' (282). This is the finish of the social actress, the polish that Isabel lacks, that Madame Merle has, and that by implication Pansy may already have achieved. The ironic revelation that is achieved by the succeeding chapters of the novel turns upon Isabel's ability to recognise sincerity in 'the perfection of self-consciousness' (341). This is the phrase that James gives to Isabel as she tries to fathom Pansy's character during their first unaccompanied meeting (unaccompanied by any

other adults). It is during this meeting that James is most clear about the complexity of Pansy's position. During Isabel's visit to Osmond's 'beautiful empty, dusky rooms', Pansy is a 'small, winged fairy in the pantomime' who 'soar[s] by the aid of a dissimulated wire'. James is careful to make clear that Isabel recognises that Pansy is performing; she recognises for instance that she has never had 'so directly presented to her nose the white flower of cultivated sweetness'. She understands that Pansy had been *directed* and *fashioned*:

> Yet how simple, how natural, how innocent she had been kept! Isabel was fond, ever, of the question of character and quality, of sounding, as who should say, the deep personal mystery, and it had pleased her, up to this time, to be in doubt as to whether this tender slip were not really all-knowing. Was the extremity of her candour but the perfection of self-consciousness? Was it put on to please her father's visitor, or was it the direct expression of an unspotted nature? (340)

The whole of Isabel's reflection is framed so as to allow the reader to understand that what James describes is Isabel's projection of the circumstances once again. When Isabel asserts that, 'Pansy was really a blank page, a pure white surface, successfully kept so', we recognise the recurrence of her earlier description of Pansy; 'She was like a sheet of blank paper - the ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text' (303). In relation to the novel's story, the Lockean metaphor James gives to Isabel registers the limits of her understanding - she cannot imagine a child who is at once innocent and knowing, and she never moves beyond the paradox of being innocent and knowing.

This moment though also provides a succinct example of my argument concerning the secrets that children hold. Isabel's view of Pansy is that of the adult world on the child, anxious to divine the secrets children hold. The 'deep personal mystery' that Pansy represents is whether she is innocent or posing, whether her sweetness is natural or *cultivated*, and if her sweetness is a performance what motivates her performance: is 'it put on to please her father's visitor, or [is] it the direct expression of an unspotted nature'? This very contrast relies upon an anxious view of children's innate, natural secrets. Isabel's questions repeat those the wider adult world asks about children, specifically children during the period of latency: do they know about sex? What do they know about sex? How can we know what they know? Did they learn what they know from us, or did they somehow know "it" already, naturally? None of the answers implied by Isabel's reflections provide solace for the adult world. If children learn about sexuality from the adult world then that world bears the burden of corrupting the innocent. If children are naturally sexually aware, then they are not innocent and not only must their behaviour be regulated, but there are the implications for adult sexuality. Isabel's questions imply that there is something unnatural in Pansy's desire to please her father's

friend, that the desire to please leads to posing as innocent and implies a secret knowledge - Pansy then becomes *all-knowing*. So this moment in an early novel depends upon precisely the questions of children's secrets, the development of their knowledge as they grow, and the relationship of what they know to what they learn from the adult world. Isabel's scrutiny of Pansy stands as a minor example of the more determined gaze that James turned to repeatedly in the 1890s. The answer to Isabel's question about Pansy's 'innocence' is provided by *What Maisie Knew*, but before turning to that novel we must consider James's most sustained satire on the dangers the adult gaze on children represents.

The situation James imagines in 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898) figures precisely the anxieties concerning relations between children and the adult world that I have identified above. The governess, scarce more than a child herself, stands as guardian between the children and the adult world, or as she casts herself, as a *screen* between the children and the horrors she imagines are contained in the story of Peter Quint.[60] She is at once their protector, someone charged with managing and guarding their moral education and well-being, and someone who tries to see more of them in order that they see less: 'The more I saw the less they would. I began to watch them in a stifled suspense, a disguised tension, that might well, had it continued too long, have turned to something like madness' (52). The anxious, obsessive gaze of the governess attempts to discover not only whether the children share her knowledge that the ghostly apparitions plague the house at Bly, but whether there is a further secret regarding the relationships that pertain between the children and the ghostly adults. The governess's attentiveness recreates within the story the situation which I have argued characterised *fin-de-siècle* discourses concerning children and childhood. Just as writers like Lang and the other folklorists made of the fairytale a source of scientific evidence, James neatly summarises the cultural crisis surrounding the secret of childhood innocence, and the part that the adult gaze on children plays in endangering them. James may have called 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898) a 'perfectly independent and irresponsible little fiction', but he also notes that the interest that he had in the idea of the story arose from the assault on the genre of 'heart-shaking ghost stories' by the explanations of science; ghost stories were being 'washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1181). Science acts to explain and reduce the power of stories over their readers and listeners.[61] With this prospect in mind we can be more alert to James's next description of

[60] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw and The Aspern Papers*, ed. by Kenneth B Murdock, Everyman (London: J. M. Dent, 1967), p. 52.

[61] Compare this earlier editorial statement from the *Pall Mall Gazette*: 'ghost stories, like all other possible phenomena, are matter for some science or other ... As treated by Mr. Tylor, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and other anthropologists, ghost stories do actually yield scientific material of a very valuable sort.' 'Psychical

the most 'sinister romance' that he 'ever jotted down' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1183). An oft-quoted phrase from the preface to the tale concerns the story's status as 'a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught ... the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1185). What is not often noted is that James is discussing the tale in direct comparison with fairy-tales: 'the merit of the tale, as it stands is ... that it has struggled with its dangers. It is an excursion into chaos while remaining like Blue-Beard and Cinderella, but an anecdote - though an anecdote amplified and highly emphasised and returning upon itself; as, for that matter, Cinderella and Blue-Beard return' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1184). James draws attention to the similarities that his tale shares with the classical fairy-tales, and then goes on to discuss the status of the story as a trap for the fastidious. The most discriminating readers of fairy-tales - and 'The Turn of the Screw' is 'a fairy-tale pure and simple' - are not children but those readers who turn on narratives their scientific tap, and wash clean of *queerness* narratives of 'sacred terror'. (*Literary Criticism II*, 1183, 1182) When he does compare his tale to named fairy-tales, those he mentions are not only famous, but those that Andrew Lang's earliest Fairy Books had brought once more to prominence. The preface to the tale is written late in James's preparations for the New York edition, but the tale itself was written far closer in time to the vogue for fairy-tale books.[62]

Fairy-tales are mentioned in the story twice and both instances are important.[63] Within pages of the start of the governess's narrative she likens the house at Bly to 'a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite':

> Such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales. Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream? No; it was a big, ugly antique but convenient house ... in which I had the fancy of our

Research', Leader comment in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21st October 1882; reprinted in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History C. 1880-1900*, eds. Ledger and Luckhurst, pp. 278-80, (p. 278); E. A. Sheppard provides a long chapter that relates James's tale to contemporary psychical researches and to The Society for Psychical Research in particular: E. A. Sheppard, *Henry James and The Turn of the Screw* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[62] See Hershel Parker's 'Deconstructing *The Art of the Novel*' for a proposed order of composition of the prefaces. Hershel Parker, 'Deconstructing *The Art of the Novel* and Liberating James's Prefaces' *The Henry James Review*, 14 (1993 Fall), pp. 284-307.

[63] Fairytales and faeries are also important in one of James's source texts for 'The Turn of the Screw', Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). In the traditional novel of growth what the male hero learns is how to choose a place for himself in the narratives that create and define the social formations of his world: Brontë's radical rewriting of the *bildungsroman* stages the competition of various narratives for the identity of the female protagonist. The regime of Brocklehust school is predicated on recreating a version of femininity whose attributes are submissiveness and mortification of self. Rochester's status as romantic hero is undercut by the exposure of romantic love as a further blind to the domination of one self by another, and St. John Rivers' version of Jane places her self once more submissively before a man who authorises his domination using Scripture. Jane is repeatedly figured as a faery creature by Rochester and in the gypsy scene he literally puts words in her mouth, telling her own "secrets". The allusions and figures that Brontë gives Rochester to describe Jane consistently make her either ethereal, or animal.

> being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship. Well, I was strangely at the helm![64]

The rosy sprite is Flora. The governess first links her sense of Bly as a fantasy world which out does even the most outlandish fairytale imagining, and then with the image of a ghost ship with herself at the helm. The play in this moment is between the inside and the outside of a narrative frame. The governess places herself and Flora figuratively within one frame, the frame of a fantastic tale, only to call this a dream or fantasy. However the dislocation that the tale creates, figured as a sense of dream here, cannot be so easily dispelled. The struggle that the governess undertakes and that the reader joins her in, is the struggle to move herself outside this frame.

The next reference to fairytales makes this clear. By chapter twelve the governess's anxiety regarding the children, and the risks they face is in full flight. She tells Mrs Grose, '"The four, depend upon it, perpetually meet. If on either of these last nights you had been with either child, you would have clearly understood. The more I've watched and waited the more I've felt that if there was nothing else to make it sure it would be made so by the systematic silence of each"' (88). This silence of children in the face of an inquisitive adult is at once an absence and a performance. What frightens the governess is that she imagines the children as preternaturally aware of her anxious observation, and that the children are capable of an extended performance of innocence as a cover for their corruption. What finally reveals the children's corruption is the absence of language. This silence is analogous to the silence of the past ages in the face of the inquisitive human scientist. The scientists, and in James's story, the governess, watch children and argue that their observations provide evidence for their conclusions. They seek to make the silence speak, yet remain caught in the same narrative trap as the governess. Despite their assertions of objectivity and method they remain within the same frame as their subjects. James makes the connection between watching children, discovering their secrets, and fairytales:

> 'Oh yes, we may sit here and look at them, and they may show off to us there to their fill; but even while they pretend to be lost in their fairy-tale they're steeped in their vision of the dead restored. He's not reading to her," I declared; "they're talking of *them* - they're talking horrors!' (88)

Here, in an extraordinary compact, enigmatic moment are all those factors that contribute to the argument of this chapter: Fairy-tales, the dead restored, children and their innocence or otherwise. James's story dramatises the dangers to children of a society that finds in children a site for all its anxieties. The story is a battle between the adults of the

[64] James, *The Turn of the Screw and The Aspern Papers*, p. 18.

past and the present for the children; '"They're not mine – they're not ours. They're his and they're hers!"' the governess tells Mrs Grose (89). The spectral adults have captured the very souls of the children and the governess can only save them by killing them. The secret of the children is the words that they share and the knowledge imputed to them by the paranoid obsessive gaze of the adult world. In 'The Turn of the Screw' and *What Maisie Knew* James is clear that the secrets that the adult world impute to children are secrets concerning sexuality, but these secrets are not secret acts but secret words, the names for the things that children should not know. [65] This moment in 'The Turn of the Screw' depends, as did my reading of Pansy Osmond, not upon what children know but whether they dissimulate their knowledge and pose as artless. This question of performance is inseparable from the question of the audience for whom children perform, and in *What Maisie Knew* James writes a novel that not only figures a child as an intermediary between the fictional adults of his story-book world, but positions both the author and his readers as the obsessive adult observers of a child. This prospect and the difficulties it represents is the key issue discussed by James in his New York edition preface to the novel.

The scenes of reminiscence in the prefaces to *What Maisie Knew* and 'The Turn of the Screw', so similar to those imagined by James in other prefaces, repeat the obsessed adult gaze on the child and the idea of childhood. It is this gaze that grants the novel its motive force. James figures himself as postulant before 'some innermost shrine', one who sniffs out the 'buried scent' in the *donnée* (*Literary Criticism II*, 1157). This lingering over and 'penetrating into' the mystery of the artistic possibilities latent in a situation mirrors the lingering over the mystery of children which is such an alarming spectacle at the *fin-de-siècle*. James is fully aware of the accusations that may be levelled at him concerning his representation of a child imperilled: 'I was punctually to have read to me the lesson that the "mixing-up" of a child with anything unpleasant confessed itself an aggravation of the unpleasantness' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1163); but as he archly notes, this response only confirms the 'observer of manners' in his low opinion of the bourgeois moralising critics whose favourite terms of abuse are *painful*, *unpleasant*, and *disgusting*. The failure of

[65] Much critical energy has been expended arguing the case whether there is a secret to 'The Turn of the Screw', or whether the 'secret' of the text is its very ambiguity. Ronald Knowles has recently argued that the spectre of Oscar Wilde and the spectacle of his trials lies behind James's pot-boiler, and a similar argument is made by Neil Matheson in his 'Talking Horrors: James, Euphemism, and the Specter of Wilde'. Both critics make valuable points concerning James's response to Wilde's disgrace (and the relationship of each writer to the other) but neither is able to set either writer in the context of the wider cultural shifts and discourses that I have been tracing. Contemporary critical insistence on the secrets of each man does not do enough to tease out the ways in which both James and Wilde exploit moments of intense discursive concentration and over-determination by figuring them as open secrets, those secrets that position individuals as subjects within the dominant discourses. Ronald Knowles, '"The Hideous Obscure": *The Turn of the Screw* and Oscar Wilde' in *The Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew*, edited by Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 164-78; Neill Matheson, 'Talking Horrors: Euphemism, and the Specter of Wilde', *American Literature*, 71 (1999), pp. 709-50.

such critics is included in the earliest pages of the novel in the figure of the good lady, the distant relation of Mrs Farange, who may come to Maisie's aid. She soon retreats however with the exclamation '"Poor little monkey!"'.[66] Critics who avert their eyes from the spectacle of the child imperilled repeat the good lady's bad faith and the failure of her moral imagination. James aligns himself with his readers as 'we fellow witnesses, we not more invited but only more expert critics', who recognise and understand Maisie's situation that much more fully than she herself does. This understanding is not innocent: James identifies his task as 'giving it all, the whole situation surrounding her, but giving it only through the occasions and connexions of her proximity and attention; only as it might pass before her and appeal to her, as it might touch her and affect her for better or worse, for perceptive gain or perceptive loss' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1160). The losses and the gains are not only on Maisie's part, as James points out. There are events and discussions that Maisie does not understand, but that author and readers do, and the 'perceptive loss and gain' is all ours, not Maisie's. The reader and author then are in one sense just the same as the adults in the story and in another sense quite separate from them: like them we think that we know everything already, that we recognise the motive forces that impel the adult behaviour James represents. Unlike Beale, Ida, Miss Overmore, Sir Claude or Mrs Wix, the adult reader is asked to put themselves in Maisie's position, to become at once a child and an adult - a child-like adult and an adult-like child. My fanciful inversion here accurately names, I think, our experience as readers of Maisie's consciousness.

Neither the novel nor the preface provides an answer to the question "what does Maisie know?" Instead the preface describes the 'close web of sophistication' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1158) that James weaves around Maisie in order to realise the 'full ironic truth' of the story that he has upon his hands. This truth would only be realised, he suggests, if Maisie 'the small expanding consciousness' was saved: she 'would have to be saved, have to become presentable as a register of impressions; and saved by the experience of certain advantages, by some enjoyed profit and some achieved confidence, rather than coarsened, blurred, sterilised, by ignorance and pain' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1157). This salvation consists in not only 'disconcerting the selfishness of [her] parents' but in withstanding the 'strain of observation' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1161). This strain arises out of the attentiveness of adults within the novel and without it to what Maisie knows; the web of sophistication James weaves catches within itself both readers and author. Recognising this deepens the ironic force of the following:

[66] 'Poor monkey' is also a proverbial expression that figures children as animals of course, and it provides the original title of Peter Coveney's study of the image of the childhood in English Literature. Peter Coveney, *Poor Monkey: A Study of the Image of the Childhood in English Literature* (London: Rockliff, 1957).

> She is not only the extraordinary 'ironic centre' I have already noted; she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension; of lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity. I lose myself, truly, in appreciation of my theme on noting what she does by her 'freshness' for appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough. They become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art; she has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions - connexions with the 'universal!' - that they could scarce have hoped for. (*Literary Criticism II*, 1162)

Maisie is an intermediary between the adults within and without the book. James slyly seems to suggest that the effect that she has for the reprehensible characters within the book, that of *lending* them, 'the poorer persons and things ... a precious element of dignity ... by the mere fact of their being involved with her', is the effect that she can have for readers and author (James does not excuse himself from our company). This alchemical effect is what saves the novel from simply repeating the obsessive gaze of adults on the latent child and where James identifies the latent child as an artist-figure who mediates between different states in order to achieve a radical ethical re-education of those around her. This re-education depends upon the recognition that the narratives of innocence and experience concerning childhood and sexuality are just that, narratives to which our assent is sought but not necessary, or, as Adrian Poole puts it, Maisie 'can see the way the world wants to fill her, as a passive receptacle, a frail vessel, with its needs and wants and desires. But perhaps - this is the real mischief at the heart of James's story - the whole idea of adult sexuality is just a fiction with which you do not *have* to conform or identify'.[67] The novel reveals these narratives as fictions through its dramatisation of Maisie's consciousness.

The first chapters of the book are precise in their introduction of Maisie's sense of herself placed in a network of relations that she can fathom only through observation and repetition, or imaginative recreation of the events in order to analyse them. Employing a familiar trope, James describes Maisie as a child-spectator before a theatrical performance:

> She was taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric - strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It was as if the whole performance had been given for her - a mite of a half-scared infant in a great dim theatre. She was in short introduced to life with a

[67] Adrian Poole, *Henry James*, Harvester New Readings, first edition (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 98-99.

> liberality in which the selfishness of others found its account, and there was nothing to avert the sacrifice but the modesty of her youth.[68]

As for the reader, the fictional world is a phantasm that makes visible (Gr. *phantazo*) specific human relations, so for Maisie her world is peopled by phantasms, apparitions that do not correspond to actual individuals with an a priori relation to her. These adults, like characters represented by a phantasmagoria, move rapidly across the field of her moral vision, shifting rapidly in size in relation to her visual and subject position. [69] In this initial position Maisie is situated as spectator, outside of the inter-subjective network. However this position is soon abandoned for a more active one. The strange ideas and adult expressions with which Beale attacks Ida in her absence, 'the things her father said about her mother' become 'complicated toys or difficult books, [taken] out of her hands and put away in the closet' (19). These adult expressions, figured as dolls, begin to take on a life of their own as Maisie's understanding grows: 'The stiff dolls on the dusky shelves began to move their arms and legs; old forms and phrases began to have a sense that frightened her' (21). This attractively witty trope can obscure the complex play of interiority that James achieves here. The doll-like figures are explicitly the participants in an internal mental phantasmagoria that gives Maisie her first sense of her 'inner self', a sense indivisible from her first 'complete vision, private but final, of the strange office she filled.' This vision is for Maisie 'literally a moral revolution and accomplished in the depths of her nature':

> She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment. She puzzled out with imperfect signs, but with a prodigious spirit, that she had been a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult, and that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so. Her parted lips locked themselves with the determination to be employed no longer. She would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, she began to be called a little idiot, she tasted a pleasure new and keen. When therefore, as she grew older, her parents in turn announced before her that she had grown shockingly dull, it was not from any real contraction of her little stream of life. She spoiled their fun, but she practically added to her own (21).

The 'strange office' that Maisie recognises as hers is her intermediary position between first her parents, but later between each adult in the novel and all the others. The 'seeds of secrecy' sown by Miss Overmore (sown not by the words that she uses but by the words that she withholds) show Maisie the way. The idea of an inner self depends upon

[68] James, *What Maisie Knew*, p. 17.

[69] In this the adults of *What Maisie Knew* resemble the creatures of the Alice books.

not talking and upon not revealing one's understanding. The result of this withholding is the understanding of the enigma that one represents to others; Maisie tastes 'a pleasure new and keen' when she understands that she must pose as stupid to avoid being used by the others. Maisie's silence is set in contrast to adult interpellations. They call her *stupid* and *dull* because they seek to script her actions and her silence presents them with an enigma that is not a blank slate.

In part, the worry that the adults have is that Maisie judges them. Maisie's silence is an *accomplishment* that irritates her mother:

> It was of a horrid little critical system, a tendency, in her silence, to judge her elders, that this lady suspected her, liking as she did, for her own part, a child to be simple and confiding. She liked also to hear the report of the whacks she administered to Mr. Farange's character, to his pretensions to peace of mind: the satisfaction of dealing them diminished when nothing came back (23).

Ida wants Maisie 'to be simple and confiding' because she wants her to have no secrets of her own, to be a vessel for her secrets and to behave as a spy (that is to report back to her the effects of the messages transmitted for her by Maisie). This role of spy is the one in which all the adults finally cast Maisie: Ida wants knowledge of Beale and Sir Claude, but for reasons which Maisie sees are different but cannot quite fathom; Mrs Wix is always on the look-out for stories in which Sir Claude figures to advantage but she is also worried for her own position; Sir Claude wants to know what she finds out about the Captain while in Kew gardens; in chapter twenty-eight, Mrs Beale wants Maisie to tell her whether Mrs Wix 'has come at all to like poor bad me!'; and in the penultimate chapter Sir Claude is also anxious to learn of Mrs Wix's thoughts (55, 84, 109, 203, 216).

The initial effect that James highlights in this process is that the shared adult view of Maisie objectifies her. She becomes a *shuttlecock*, 'a bone of contention', a *football*, and 'a boundless receptacle' (20, 14, 78, 20). Juliet Mitchell has detailed James's patterning of the novel with the structures of game play and the imagery of games; she notes the ways in which the different adults push, pull and pass Maisie amongst themselves, and points out that 'Maisie is confused about the very nature of her centrality' and the responsibility that it seems to imply.[70] Maisie is conscious that objectified as she is by the adults, she seems to create situations and relations between the others that she does not understand. At first she retreats behind a passive face, remaining a spectator at her fate:

> The sharpened sense of spectatorship was the child's main support, the long habit, from the first, of seeing herself in discussion and

[70] Juliet Mitchell, 'What Maisie Knew: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl', in *The Air of Reality*, ed. by John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 168-89 (p. 175). Mitchell makes little of the implications of her chosen title, but it is marvellously suggestive.

> finding in the fury of it - she had had a glimpse of the game of football - a sort of compensation for the doom of a peculiar passivity. It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass (78).

Her compensation is her sense of learning the rules of the game so as to become an actor in it, and so she does. When she finds herself in a potentially intolerable situation, left alone with the Captain in the park she plays the part of a *young lady*, 'She had never ... been so addressed as a young lady':

> It struck her as the way that at balls, by delightful partners, young ladies must be spoken to in the intervals of dances; and she tried to think of something that would meet it at the same high point. But this effort flurried her, and all she could produce was: "At first, you know, I thought you were Lord Eric."
>
> The Captain looked vague. "Lord Eric?"
>
> "And then Sir Claude thought you were the Count."
>
> At this he laughed out. "Why he's only five foot high and as red as a lobster!" Maisie laughed, with a certain elegance, in return - the young lady at the ball certainly would - and was on the point, as conscientiously, of pursuing the subject with an agreeable question. But before she could speak her companion challenged her. "Who in the world's Lord Eric?"
>
> "Don't you know him?" She judged her young lady would say that with light surprise (104).

This playing a part is represented to the reader as comic. There is a considerable gap between Maisie's understanding that her situation is a difficult one and the reader's understanding that her position is tremendously invidious, witnessing as she does her mother's infidelity (at worst) and duplicity (at best) towards her second husband. More importantly though we should recognise that Maisie is no longer only a spectator but a participant in the drama, and she gets her cues and lines from very particular scripts.

James figures Maisie's sense of what to do in particular situations as ironic inversions of fairytale narratives. The stories that Mrs Wix's tells Maisie stand in for the more traditional knowledge that this governess cannot provide; 'her conversation was practically an endless narrative, a great garden of romance, with sudden vistas into her own life and gushing fountains of homeliness' (29). These stories are romances in two senses: sentimental and sensational tales of romance and betrayal, derived from 'the novels she had read', and fantastic fairytale narratives that provide ways of seeing the world. That this is the way that Maisie sees the world James highlights when Ida reappears in chapter nine:

> Preoccupied, however, as Maisie was with the idea of the sentiment Sir Claude had inspired, and familiar, in addition, by Mrs. Wix's

> anecdotes, with the ravages that in general such a sentiment could produce, she was able to make allowances for her ladyship's remarkable appearance, her violent splendour, the wonderful colour of her lips and even the hard stare, the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book, that had come into her eyes in consequence of a curious thickening of their already rich circumference (54).

Ida, in all her glory is like a painted idol with make-up altering her eyes to such an extent that Maisie cannot help but notice. The effect is an ironic inversion of the process James has already represented to us. Rather than Maisie being objectified by the adults, she sees them as not quite human, perhaps even as caricatures or puppets. Here the gaze on children becomes a story-book threat; Ida's stare is 'the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book' which in the 'violent splendour' of its colouring should be terrifying. However James registers Maisie's dispassionate observation of the spectacle the adults present. Though preoccupied with fathoming the relations between Mrs Wix, Sir Claude and herself, she dispassionately observes Ida's 'remarkable ... violent ... curious ... wonderful' appearance. In part James is playing self-consciously with a simple ironic fairytale inversion, that of the natural mother as evil step-mother, or evil queen. However this is not the only instance in which Maisie's understanding of adult encounters are described as fairytale events. In chapters eighteen and nineteen Maisie travels with her father late at night to visit the rented home of his newest paramour, the American countess (121).

In a parallel scene to one earlier in Kew gardens, Maisie and Mrs Beale encounter Beale Farange where he shouldn't be. Mrs Beale decries Beale's *wickedness*, though the reader doesn't forget that she has taken Maisie to the fair as a shield for one of her covert meetings with Sir Claude (119). Maisie is whisked away from the scene by her father in a carriage and she experiences the events as though it is a story-book adventure:

> The child had been in thousands of stories - all Mrs. Wix's and her own, to say nothing of the richest romances of French Elise--but she had never been in such a story as this. By the time he had helped her out of the cab, which drove away, and she heard in the door of the house the prompt little click of his key, the Arabian Nights had quite closed round her (121).[71]

I have already indicated the significance of Mrs Wix's narratives for Maisie's sense of the many-storied world in which she moves. James's figuring of the American woman's house as Aladdin's cave is both an ironic signal to the reader of the opulent, luxurious,

[71] *The Arabian Nights* were particularly topical in the 1880s and 1890s. Two major English translations were published; John Payne's translation appeared between 1882-84, and Richard Burton's between 1885-86. Hussain Haddawy discusses the difficulties of translating the tales, and the shortcomings of Payne's and Burton's translations, in his edition. *The Arabian Nights*, translated and edited by Hussain Haddawy Everyman's Library (London: Random House, 1992).

decadent interior, and a further development of the ways in which Maisie attempts to understand the events she witnesses by comparing them to stories. This ironic use of fairy-stories is an important part of the process that James identified in his preface whereby Maisie's involvement with the events and the people (and the reader) lends them a dignity they would not otherwise possess. In a complex, but specific sense the novel shows Maisie's increasing ability to understand events as a process achieved by actively rewriting them (almost as they happen). Maisie's Arabian Nights adventure in chapters eighteen and nineteen give us a fine example of this process.

Sitting together in the rented house of the American countess father and daughter think hard about quite what they can say to one another. Maisie's 'little instinct of keeping the peace' comes back to her and she wonders 'more sharply what particular thing she could do or not do, what particular word she could speak or not speak, what particular line she could take or not take, that might for every one, even for the Countess, give a better turn to the crisis' (125). What the reader is given James explicitly tells us is what neither Beale nor Maisie can see, a scene which conveys 'the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy'. The scene that develops depends upon our recognising the full extent of the mobile, theatrical consciousness which James has so carefully constructed for Maisie, a consciousness that allows her to view the events in which she is embroiled from the points-of-view of the different protagonists, and to literally put words in their mouths, to interpolate their responses and lend them an articulacy that they do not and cannot have. James signals this complexity in chapter nineteen with an indulgent syntactical joke; as father and daughter sit together 'there was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision'. The repetition captures the shifting points of view that Maisie can achieve, and the oddness of the sentence gives a comic tinge to the situation, but this comedy is soon shown to be of the blackest for this is scene of a repudiation, the abandonment of the daughter by her father. All Maisie's energies are turned towards her diplomatic mission, but this only lets her see more clearly what her father is trying to say, and what he wants her to say. She also realises that this is a scene that her father is trying desperately to script. His tenderness towards her serves only the purpose of making him feel better; 'he had brought her there for so many caresses only because it was important such an occasion should look better for him than any other'. He has always an eye on how his actions might be construed by others, but never a sense of his moral bankruptcy. Struggling to reconcile her wish to play the part her father attempts to place her in, to speak the words that he wants to hear, and the impossible choice he is presenting to her, Maisie is without words: 'the child was momentarily bewildered between her alternatives of agreeing with him about her wanting to get rid of him and displeasing

him by pretending to stick to him. So she found for the moment no solution but to murmur very helplessly: "Oh papa - oh papa!"' James exploits this moment to its fullest by having Beale see this response as a piece of emotional blackmail: '"I know what you're up to - don't tell *me*!"' What James does next is to turn the tables on Beale entirely by having Maisie provide him with an ironic articulation of all that he cannot say:

> Then she understood as well as if he had spoken it that what he wanted, hang it, was that she should let him off with all the honours - with all the appearance of virtue and sacrifice on his side. It was exactly as if he had broken out to her: "I say, you little booby, help me to be irreproachable, to be noble, and yet to have none of the beastly bore of it. There's only impropriety enough for one of us; so *you* must take it all. *Repudiate* your dear old daddy - in the face, mind you, of his tender supplications. He can't be rough with you - it isn't in his nature: therefore you'll have successfully chucked him because he was too generous to be as firm with you, poor man, as was, after all, his duty." This was what he communicated in a series of tremendous pats on the back; that portion of her person had never been so thumped since Moddle thumped her when she choked. After a moment he gave her the further impression of having become sure enough of her to be able very gracefully to say out: "You know your mother loathes you, loathes you simply." (128)

This is savage. The free indirect speech of 'hang it', and 'let him off', are colloquial or informal and allow us to hear Beale's voice as it sounds in Maisie's head. The direct speech (which of course is not direct at all) makes explicit her understanding of what he wants to say. The direct speech mixes colloquial or informal expression with sophisticated vocabulary like *repudiate* and *impropriety* in order to highlight Maisie's articulacy, and Beale's lack. The next words he speaks contrast sharply in tone with the words that Maisie imagines for him, and the discrepancy again highlights his vacuity and cruelty. His words throughout the rest of this interview all bear ironically upon this speech that he has not made, but that his actions have made his daughter imagine (he calls the other adults 'monsters' because of the words he says they have taught her but the reader has already this example of the understanding that his behaviour has forced upon Maisie). What James has done is to make Maisie the author of her father's words: her understanding of the events is presented to the reader as a story that she writes which remains always an inverted (even a perverted) fairytale, where the adults feature as grotesque mythical or story-book creatures even as Maisie recognises them as everyday people. Maisie's comparison of the Countess and the remembered old woman on the omnibus, the 'strange woman with a horrid face' signals a dense complex of fairytale associations: the countess, a putative step-mother, a breed that she seems to know plenty about already (134), is here associated with a witch-like figure who offers Maisie an orange. Swap the orange for an apple and these associations suggest 'Snow

White', with the old woman the wicked Queen in disguise. This is no fairy-tale though, and Maisie recognises that both the women mean to be kind:

> She had felt then, for some reason, a small silly terror, though afterwards conscious that her interlocutress, unfortunately hideous, had particularly meant to be kind. This was also what the Countess meant; yet the few words she had uttered and the smile with which she had uttered them immediately cleared everything up (133).

What the Countess's words clear up is that she does not want Maisie to accompany her and Beale anywhere. The end of the chapter is identified by James as 'still at any rate the Arabian Nights' (135) and the money that the Countess give Maisie to pay the cab-man is 'far too much even for a fee in a fairy-tale' (the money also brings out the rapaciousness in the adults Maisie encounters between the Countess's home and bed: the cab-man overcharges and Susan Ash, the house maid, induces Maisie to give her a sovereign). These chapters depend upon the play of interpellation and negotiation, and the story-book allusions link Maisie's experience here with James's earliest descriptions of her interior world as phantasmagorical. The performance that Maisie imagines provides a shadowy reflection or refraction of the events which she experiences, and in giving us access to her consciousness James indicates the ways in which Maisie's subjectivity is theatrically mobile. This mobility traces the complex inter-subjective networks in which Maisie finds herself caught. Most readings of the novel acknowledge this prospect, and most seek to affirm that Maisie learns to move within these networks. However, the example of above suggests something rather different. Maisie's interpellation of her father's words is finally silent. Maisie's understanding in the novel is all on the surface, but not the surface her father can see but the surface of James's text. This is the crucial sense in which the reader has privileged access to Maisie's language, a language that is unknown to the characters around her, and this privileged access to the secret language of Maisie's consciousness involves the reader directly in what Maisie knows.

Maisie's interpellation of the adult figures, providing them with words that they cannot say, is in contrast to the silence that she maintains before these adults. The figure that James depends upon to give Maisie words that are not her own and to highlight the adults' interpellations of her knowledge is repetition. Throughout the novel Maisie repeats the words of the adults, often to query their sense and to gain time in which she might fathom their meaning. This repetition is of course exactly what children do with words, repeating them in diverse situations in order to try them out, to test their effects and to understand the mysterious links between words, the illocutionary force of speech acts and their perlocutionary effects. James's text depends upon obsessive repetitions as a way of building the patterns which govern the text's structure, associating each of the adults with each of the others, ironically spot-lighting their similarities. James stages a scene of repudiation between Maisie and each of her four 'parents' and each adult

repeats the same words: faced with Maisie, each says, "Never, never, never" (131, 150, 235). These are the words of her father in response to her asking whether she will ever see him again, of her mother when she feels she must explain herself to Maisie after the meeting in Kew gardens, and they are the words of Mrs Beale in the final chapter when Sir Claude tells her to release Maisie from her embrace. Sir Claude does not say these words but he repeats the syntax and his words are similar enough to suggest how James satirically undercuts Claude's nobility by indicating his weakness; he repeats Mrs Wix's and Mrs Beale's words concerning himself, "He can't, he can't, he can't" (239). Claude repudiates Maisie because he cannot leave Mrs Beale and his repetition, casting himself in the second person and in the words of another, indicates his prostration before the others.

Repetition also provides James with a means of ironically indicating the obsessive gaze that the adults turn on Maisie and the question of what she knows, as well as figuring Maisie's position as the centre of the novel's inter-subjective network. Early in chapter twenty-six James links Mrs Wix's insistent interest in what Maisie knows with the ways in which Maisie educates those around her:

> I am not sure that Maisie had not even a dim discernment of the queer law of her own life that made her educate to that sort of proficiency those elders with whom she was concerned. She promoted, as it were, their development; nothing could have been more marked for instance than her success in promoting Mrs. Beale's. She judged that if her whole history, for Mrs. Wix, had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge should overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything. She had not had governesses for nothing: what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn and learn? She looked at the pink sky with a placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All (187).

Perhaps, says James, Maisie knows that she transforms those around her. James's repetitions here dwell on the logical conclusions of the adults' insistence on Maisie's knowledge. She is 'condemned to know more and more' and it is her two governesses who have taught her *Everything*. 'More and more ... Most ... Everything ... All', this progression occurs in the context of Mrs Wix's question to Maisie '"Haven't you really and truly any moral sense?"' (186). Confronted with this question Maisie practices with Mrs Wix for the first time the 'intellectual inaptitude' the silence and appearance of stupidity 'to which she had owed so much success with papa and mamma'. Maisie's musings represent her attempt to fathom the relationship between morals and knowledge, innocence and experience which Mrs Wix seems to suggest exists. This is the secret that Maisie is trying to unlock. The scene emphasises the contrast between Maisie's

consciousness, her interiority, and her exteriority, as well as identifying explicitly for the reader that Mrs Wix belongs to the same group as all the other adults, that of the obsessive watchers. The secret that Mrs Wix is trying to fathom is Maisie's moral knowledge and this is a comic scene because it shows her assigning this knowledge to Maisie in the face of Maisie's silence and her incomprehension (to which only the reader is privy). Mrs Wix spends the scene watching Maisie, apparently trying to catch a glimpse of her 'moral sense', and declares finally, comically, that '"it does seem to peep out!"' This moral sense depends upon judgement but not judgement in the sense of interrogation and investigation, the sense that James gives to Maisie in the quote above, but as condemnation; Mrs Wix tells Maisie that it is not enough to understand, she must learn to condemn also. That this is interpellation on Mrs Wix's part is highlighted again by repetition. She says that Maisie had seemed to know without judging, 'What I did lose patience at this morning was at how it was that without your seeming to condemn - for you didn't, you remember! - yet you did seem to *know*. Thank God, in his mercy, at last, *if* you do!"' (189). Maisie queries her meaning by repeating her words as a question; '"If I do know - ?"' Maisie has barely spoken throughout this exchange and this emphasises Mrs Wix's attempt to put words in her mouth. The lie of Mrs Wix's moral sense is revealed to Maisie by the end of the chapter. She tells Maisie that she adores Sir Claude and Maisie 'took it well in; so well that in a moment more she would have answered profoundly: "So do I." But before that moment passed something took place that brought other words to her lips; nothing more, very possibly, than the closer consciousness in her hand of the significance of Mrs. Wix's. Their hands remained linked in unutterable sign of their union, and what Maisie at last said was simply and serenely: "Oh I know!" (192). Maisie's words of course remain ambiguous: does she mean that she recognises that, like all the other woman of the novel, Sir Claude's charm and handsome face have worked their magic on Mrs Wix (that is certainly the suggestion of Maisie's inference in chapter twenty-four that Mrs Wix sees Sir Claude as *princely*)? Or is she expressing agreement with Mrs Wix? The close of the novel turns on these questions.

The close of the novel finally brings together all the questions that I have been discussing in this chapter. Where Oscar Wilde's child figures are closer to Rousseau's natural child and so as close to animals as to adults, James's recognition of the idea that children recapitulate the development of the species is entwined with his investigation the latent child. *What Maisie Knew* is often treated as though it is a bildungsroman of peculiar proportions, a novel which charts the growth into knowledge of its protagonist, yet of course the end of the novel directly emphasises that neither the adults of the novel

or the adult readers have plumbed the depths of Maisie's understanding.[72] The penultimate chapters of the novel do seem to suggest that Maisie's progress fits the familiar narrative pattern of the bildungsroman; these chapters teasingly suggest that Maisie has learnt the lessons of sexuality that the novel has to teach her. Standing on the balcony of their hotel room she listens to a drawled chanson from the placé below: 'Maisie knew what "amour" meant too, and wondered if Mrs Wix did' (189). Maisie knows what happens between adults and her walk with Sir Claude and their moment of indecision in the station makes Claude and the reader wonder at her idea of what kind of relationship might be realised between a step-father and a step-daughter who set off to Paris together clutching yellow-backed French novels (227-8). The impossibility of such a relationship is expressed earlier when it is argued that 'the essence of the question was that a girl wasn't a boy: if Maisie had been a mere rough trousered thing, destined at the best probably to grow up a scamp, Sir Claude would have been welcome. As the case stood he had simply tumbled out of it' (200). As a girl Maisie's latency is expressly figured as a question of sexual knowledge, knowledge that is threatening to adults, particularly Sir Claude who is white-faced and frightened by Maisie's suggestion that they get the train to Paris. The confrontation in the hotel room of chapter thirty-one is the final representation in the novel of the 'strain of observation' that Maisie feels. This final scene is almost a trial of Maisie, a *viva* or, as in the *Alice* books, an appearance before a judge whose qualifications are in doubt. At one moment she feels a push from Mrs Beale 'that vented resentment and that placed her again in the centre of the room, the cynosure of every eye and not knowing which way to turn' (235); at another she imagines Sir Claude as 'like visitors at an "exam"' (233). This intense examination of Maisie by the adults however is matched by her scrutiny of them. Maisie sees Mrs Beale flush 'which was never quite becoming to her' (230); a moment later her flush to 'Maisie's vision ... deepened' (231). Maisie is watching Mrs Beale but she is unwilling to meet Maisie's eye: 'she had received neither a greeting nor a glance' from her step-mother, 'even now she never looked at the child, who stood there equally associated and disconnected ... [Mrs Beale was] looking more than ever over Maisie's head' (232). We recognise again here Maisie's sense of being at once in and out of the action. James uses this sense to emphasise what Maisie sees, which are the faces and the passions writ across them of the adults around her. Along with the extraordinary preponderance of verbs which name ways of seeing in this scene, there are the repeated descriptions of the faces of the adults: Mrs Beale *flushes* and *blushes* before 'turning pale with a splendid wrath' (236), Sir Claude

[72] Of course the novel could be associated with the preponderance of peculiar bildungsroman that appear various languages in the early decades of the twentieth century. Franco Moretti provides a too brief discussion of these texts as an appendix to his *The Way of the World*: Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. by Albert Sbragia, new edition (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 229-44.

looks 'positively sick' (233), and 'Mrs Wix looked dark', scowling or frowning. Maisie's sense of dissociation is captured in her confused sense of perspective; 'Maisie turned to Sir Claude, who struck her as having been removed to a distance of about a mile' (232). This dissociation though remains the signal James gives the reader that Maisie is watching, thinking and judging: 'They stood confronted, the step-parents, still under Maisie's observation. That observation had never sunk so deep as at this particular moment' (239). If the scene is read as a test for Maisie then what she is tested upon is her knowledge of the rules of the adult game of passion, and this is a test that she fails. Whatever the hints of the previous chapters, whether it be that Maisie has sexual feelings for Claude, or that she recognises sexual impropriety adequately to condemn it as Mrs Wix asks her to do, Maisie does not know what to do next. As earlier, in the scene with her father, the reader is presented with a scene which conveys 'the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy' (125). As before Maisie recognises what each of the adults wants and the conflicts between their wishes and her wishes. The question of her knowledge James seems to suggest is not whether she understands desire but her understandable and entirely forgivable failure to know enough to reconcile their wishes with hers. Their selfishness takes no account of her wishes, but she tries to realise everyone's desires and it is recognising that she cannot that leads to her tears:

> As if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense. She looked at her examiner; she looked at the visitors; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. They had nothing - no, distinctly nothing - to do with her moral sense. The only thing was the old flat shameful schoolroom plea. "I don't know - I don't know." (233)

There is a syntactical ambiguity in the phrase 'they had nothing' of the fourth sentence here; *they* seems to refer to her tears but it can refer also to her examiner and her visitors grouped together. These adults have nothing to do with her moral sense James tells us, and her tears are not for her failure to know who is right and wrong but because she knows that she doesn't know how to write a happy ending for this tale.

The likening of this scene to a test identifies the close of the novel as a final rite of passage for Maisie and the questions raised by the penultimate chapters concerning what she knows can be thought of as questions regarding her readiness to enter the adult world. This passage represents the end of the latency period and the assumption of adult roles and responsibilities. Yet James's whole business in the novel has been to lay bare the ways in which Maisie's initiation into the world has been an ongoing process beginning from her earliest recognition that she must pose as stupid in order to frustrate the adults who want to both know what she knows and tell her what she is allowed to know. The

choice represented in the final scene is between the moral sense that Mrs Wix represents, which is the everyday prosing moralist voice of the world, and the acceptance and recognition of duplicity and selfishness as the grounds of adult behaviour (as represented by Mrs Beale). This is no choice at all of course: Mrs Wix's morality is shown as equal to Mrs Beale's performance because both are entirely self-interested. The novel ends with a different kind of passage, the journey across the channel, and the last sentences confront Mrs Wix and the readers with the tableau of Maisie at the ferry-rail, presenting a final opportunity for scrutiny: 'Mrs Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at *What Maisie Knew*' (240; my italics). Mrs Wix and the readers, the authors and all the other characters are united in their querying awe, their *wonder* in two senses. James's closing textual pun highlights that his novel is concerned not with what Maisie knows but with our worrying at her knowledge. The spectacle of the latent child is shown to compel adult interpellation, driven by anxiety and desire.

Conclusion

The complex cultural significations discussed in this chapter depend upon two prospects. The first is the question of the secrets that children may hold, and the second is the idea of the child as intermediary. This chapter has examined aspects of the discursive category of childhood and detailed how these two ideas are involved in the ideological work that the category 'childhood' performed. The child was figured by both the physical and human sciences as possessed of a secret and standing as a middle term between the past and the future. In biology the concepts of ontogeny and phylogeny identify the ways in which each individual child recapitulates the development of the species. This idea of recapitulation was adopted by anthropologists and ethnologists in their theorising of the development of civilizations (not least because, as a narrative of development, it seemed to fit with ideas of evolution that were also being adopted from the other branches of science). Each of these concepts depends upon a movement from the simple to the complex. Scientists during the second half of the nineteenth century took the child as their object of study and sought to locate the complex in the apparently simple. These discursive processes located in the figure of the child extraordinary power as well as considerable anxiety. The study of children and childhood refracts *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about race, gender and class, focussing on the period of latency a gaze which sought at once to discover the secrets of children and to deny that children had any secrets at all. A textual metaphor can help clarify my meaning: this adult gaze on children implies first that they are palimpsests in which the past can be read, and second that they are blank slates upon which must be written the rational and moral rules of modern civilization.

The contribution of the study of folk-lore to these complex cultural processes is an important one. We can see this if we examine the relationship between folk-lore and

fairytales at the *fin-de-siècle*. Folk-lore and fairytales are not quite the same thing, though often the same stories are indicated by both titles. Folk-lore researchers like E. B. Tylor argued that these stories represented survivals from the distant past and thus provided a link with this past. Fairytales on the other hand were pressed into service to entertain and educate the adults of the future. The popular fairytales of Andrew Lang's Fairy Book series emphasise narratives of growth which chart the child's path to adulthood. The result of these narratives is the end of childhood and the putting aside of childish things such as the narratives of self-making and transformation that fairytales provide alongside the linear development of maturation.

My readings of Oscar Wilde's tales and Henry James's novels reveal their shared recognition of the instability and power of the idea of childhood. Both men's narratives take up the intermediary status of children and the over-determination of the idea of childhood. Wilde's fairytales are disruptive of the settled narrative form of the fairytale. His tales represent children sacrificed to the adult world, not in the sense of being reborn as an adult, but literally destroyed. This sacrifice reveals the ways in which the discursive economy of the *fin-de-siècle* relies upon 'childhood' as a category in the creation of bourgeois subjects. The radical potential of the narratives of self offered by the fairytale form are, in Andrew Lang's stories, determinedly dissipated, but Wilde's tales highlight transformation as the radical defining power of the narratives. This emphasis is achieved through Wilde's careful staging of the child figure as a vulnerable intermediary. This subject position resembles that which I have been arguing both James and Wilde identify as the one occupied by the artist in the dominant discursive formations. The link between Wilde's tales and William Empson's characterisation of late pastoral is that the artist is an intermediary figure occupying the same vulnerable space as the child. Wilde achieves through his inversion of late pastoral a deconstruction of these discursive formations. The radical aspect of Wilde's tales is that they offer a utopian possibility similar to that he describes in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism': in this formulation the secret his children hold is the secret of the future.

Henry James's stories that represent children are, contrary to the view usually taken of them, concerned with children in public, as beings in a complex social world. James takes the idea of the latent child as intermediary, and shows the inter-subjective networks in which children (and everyone else) are enmeshed. This is 'the dense web of sophistication' in which his children and his readers find themselves. James recognises that the secrets imputed to children are not secret acts but secret knowledge of words, of language. In 'The Turn of the Screw' the adult gaze on children with its obsessive questions regarding the innocence or otherwise of children is revealed as a process which literally endangers children. In *What Maisie Knew* Maisie's silence in the face of adult questions and interpellations allows James to represent the literal and metaphorical ways

in which the adult world burdens children with complex threatening signification. Maisie's subjectivity depends upon her learning to pose as having a secret. The remedy for her difficulties that early in the novel she arrives at is 'the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment' (21). This process mirrors exactly the process by which interiority arises out of the interpellations of individuals by discursive formations and suggests at the same time a sense in which subjectivity is not entirely or simply created by these formations. Maisie's inner self is defensive and is a strategic process by which she seeks to evade interpellation by the adults. For James the latency period provides the moment of greatest tension, the point of most intense scrutiny of the child. The narrative form that James constructs for his novel foregrounds the position of readers and author in this economy of signification in specific, precise and often uncomfortable ways. Our gaze on Maisie is identified as not simply analogous to that of the adults in the novel on her, but as potentially the same as their threatening, self-interested gaze and this recognition (that of our position within the circulation of signification) is the aim, I suggest, of James's novel.

Conclusion

In his essay 'The Author as Producer' (1934) Walter Benjamin argues that dialectical criticism must examine works within their 'living social contexts'; such criticism, he asserts, asks not '"What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?" but what is the position of the work within those relations of production?[1] This demand on the attention of the critic is matched by a parallel demand upon the writer 'to *think*, to reflect on his position in the process of production' (779). For Benjamin, responding to this imperative registers the solidarity of the specialist with the proletariat, rather than with the bourgeois class in which they were educated and for whom they write. The question of alliance and allegiance in early Modernism is a complex and crucial one, but it is only one aspect of the investigation of subjectivity by Modernist writers. In this conclusion I will argue that the theory of figures for the artist that I have detailed reveals the investigations of Henry James and Oscar Wilde into the agency of the marginalized citizen-agent in *fin-de-siècle* commodity culture.

I began my discussion by drawing attention to the centrality that Oscar Wilde gives in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' to the figure of the artist as a potential centre for collective re-imagining of subject positions. The redefinition of the 'soul of man' that Wilde argues for transforms the atomistic bourgeois subject into an indeterminate, protean self-fashioning subject who, like the poet of Whitman's 'Song of Myself' includes within the self multitudes.[2] The sacrifice of a stable, fixed individual identity characterises this indeterminate subject and registers the realisation of Wilde's paradoxical 'great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally' (296/ *Complete Works*, 1178); this individualism is not atomistic, but, because it is theatrically multiple, is a collective subjectivity.

Where Oscar Wilde finds this theatrically multiple subjectivity in his development of Oxford Hegelianism and in his theorisation of the example of Christ, Henry James identifies it in the consciousness created by modern urban networks, a consciousness characterised by mutability. In his 'Preface to *The American*' James identifies the spectacle of the city as a challenge and a pleasure to the individual artist. Immersing oneself in the 'human scene', as Scott, Balzac and even Zola do, artists sacrifice their ease to gain their freedom: 'Who can imagine free selection – which is the beautiful, terrible whole of art – without free difficulty? This is the very franchise of the city and high ambition of the

[1] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer" Producer' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, vol. 2, 1927-34 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 768-82 (p. 770).

[2] Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself', *Collected Poems*, p. 123, line 1326.

citizen' (*Literary Criticism I*, 1061). Here the 'full artistic consciousness' of the artist does not represent the world by 'plotting and planning and calculating' but by 'feeling and seeing [and] conceiving' (*Literary Criticism I*, 1062). This responsiveness is dangerous because it is overwhelming; 'free selection' is terrible because it demands that writers acknowledge that their work represents the 'very franchise of the city and the high ambition of the citizen'. Adrian Poole calls this 'a kind of strenuous citizenship' and notes that for James the city, as a site for consciousness, 'concentrates history, power, politics, sexuality, art and, most important of all, it concentrates language.[3] The 'franchise of the city' is the voice of the real which, James writes, 'represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, in one way or another' (*Literary Criticism I*, 1063), and if we remember that the great cry of outcast London and the Parisian scenes of *The Princess Casamassima* is captured in the two senses of the French *voix* (both 'voice' and 'vote'), then this strenuous citizenship is the high ambition of the citizen in the sense that the artist in the city cannot possibly not know that the consciousness of the modern urban dweller is a battle ground for the allegiances of individuals, a site for the action of glamour and the process of seduction by which individuals are incorporated into the existing social order, regulated and atomised. The sacrifice of the artists' individuality in James's writing is, as in Wilde's, the recognition of a theatrically multiple subjectivity as a positive collective subjectivity which fuses the individual with the group, the writer with the mass of people, never in an easy or simple or comfortable sense, but always in a profoundly political sense. The negotiation of alliance and allegiance is central to James's scrutiny in *The American Scene* (1907) of the new democratic subject that is emerging in urban America.

Returning to America in 1904-5, at the age of sixty-one, after an absence of twenty-one years, James confronted the most developed examples of modern urban centres available any where in the world. Jeremy Tambling writes that these new cities present new, 'alternative possibilities of representing the city' and that the 'question of what new structures of feeling are created in city spaces becomes more intense'.[4] *The American Scene* records James's complex investigation into the forms of modern American society and into the kinds of citizens that these forms can and do create. *Form* in *The American Scene* is a term that James relies upon and it refers to all the various aspects or networks of relations and obligations which constitute social experience. The lack of *forms* results in a vulnerability to the shifting phantasmagoria of the commodity whereby value is attributed to each commodity or set of commodified relations in terms of dollars: these social forms, James claims, provide an alternative, non-commodified set of values which,

[3] Adrian Poole, *Henry James*, p. 9, 7.

[4] Jeremy Tambling, *Lost in the American City: Dickens, James, Kafka* (London: Palgrave, 2000), p. xv.

as they persist over time, provide 'continuity, responsibility, transmission'.[5] The challenge that faces Americans, James argues, is that Europe has these alternative values due to a feudal past; the forms of European society which provide continuity are the result of inequality and violence, and are self-limiting. The cost of these alternative sets of values has, in the past, been immense and in the present these values are in retreat. The *drama* that James foresees is the development of the social forms of Americans and, true to his fictional method practiced over many years, he provides the reader of *The American Scene* with 'the very *donnée* of the piece':

> the great adventure of a society reaching out into the apparent void for the amenities, the consummations, after having earnestly gathered in so many of the preparations and necessities ... what would lurk beneath this - or indeed what wouldn't, what mightn't - to thicken the plot from stage to stage and intensify the action? (13)

The 'preparations and necessities' are the social structures with tangible material benefits that provide health, wealth and leisure enough for more that a minority to enjoy. Time and again in *The American Scene* James returns to his sense that the majority of Americans, especially the city-dwellers, find themselves in dramatically improved material circumstances to those that they knew and their parents knew in Europe. Casting himself as the 'restless analyst' James makes his travelogue into a comic, ironic, dramatic passionate Pilgrim's Progress wherein he analyses the dominant and emergent social forms of the 'great commercial democracy' which is 'beginning to live into history' (72, 123, 119):

> to be at all critically, or ... analytically minded ... is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out: to give out, that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter. That perverse person is obliged to take it for a working theory that the essence of almost any settled aspect of anything may be extracted by the chemistry of criticism, and may give us its right name, its formula, for convenient use. From the moment the critic finds himself sighing, to save trouble in a difficult case, that the cluster of appearances have no sense, from that moment he begins, and quite consciously, to go to pieces; it being the prime business and the high honour of the painter of life always to make a sense - and to make it most in proportion as the immediate aspects are loose and confused. The last thing decently permitted him is to recognise incoherence - to recognize it, that is, as baffling; though of course he may present and portray it, in all richness, for incoherence. That, I think, was what I was mainly occupied with in New York (202).

[5] Henry James, *The American Scene*, ed. and intro. by John F. Sears (Harmondsworth, Middlesex; Penguin 1994), p. 12.

Greatly condensed, this passage summarises the intellectual work that James attempts in *The American Scene*. The 'mystic meaning' to be deciphered are those 'features of the human scene, [those] properties of the social air, that the newspapers, reports, surveys and blue-books 'seem to confess themselves powerless to "handle,"'(4). The 'perverted person' is James himself, and the American intellectual in general, confronted by a culture that in its multiplicity, its heterogeneity and simple vastness challenges the critic to discern the order from the (apparent) chaos. Finally, the 'chemistry of criticism' is James's ironic figuring of critical analyses which, though it may have provided answers in the past, finds itself at a loss to explain the spectacle of modern America. The description of the critic as a participant 'so detached and so interested' recalls the double consciousness of Lambert Strether who has 'detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference'.[6] Three particular episodes are important in understanding how James proceeds in his investigation of modern urban America: his early description of the Waldorf-Astoria, his characterisation of Central Park and his visit to the Bowery theatre.

The Waldorf-Astoria presents James with a 'synonym for civilization ... one is verily tempted to ask if the hotel-spirit may not be the American spirit most seeking and most finding itself' (79). The hotel as the highest expression of American civilization provides the 'visionary tourist' (82) with 'the intensest examples of American character; indeed [with] the very interesting supreme examples of a type which has even on the American ground, doubtless not said its last word' (81). This type is the American bourgeoisie at leisure and the hotel is filled to bursting with examples of it: 'It parades through the halls and saloons ... dances to the music ... revelled and roamed ... bought and sold', all against a background of 'encompassing wealth and splendour ... in which art and history, in masquerading dress, muffled almost to suffocation as in the gold brocade of their pretended majesties and their conciliatory graces, stood smirking on its passages' (79-80).[7] Against this stage drop of images from a European past James recognises that the only principle of discrimination is the financial one and that for all the promiscuity this exhibition of wealth suggests, it manages also to represent an 'inordinate untempered monotony'. This monotony is the success of fashion in the sense that the

[6] Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, p. 2.

[7] Later, James calls the rising bourgeoisie of New York the 'new aristocracies' and describes the ways in which they ape the aristocratic manners of the ruling classes of England and Europe. His identification of this process matches that of Marx in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'; 'Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language': Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 96.

variety of costume represents not culture but purchasing power and wealth. The 'master-spirits of management' have, the 'American genius for organization' has, arranged this variety. These 'master-spirits' are the impersonal, inhuman forces of capital which James likens to a band master:

> I see the whole thing overswept as by the colossal extended arms, waving the magical baton, of some high-stationed orchestral leader, the absolute presiding power, conscious of every note of every instrument ... What may one say of such a spirit if not that he understands, so to speak, the forces he sways, understands his boundless American material and plays with it like a master indeed? One sees it thus, in its crude plasticity, almost in the likeness of an army of puppets whose strings the wealth of his technical imagination teaches him innumerable ways of pulling, and yet whose innocent, whose always ingenuous agitation of their members he has found means to make them think of themselves as delightfully free and easy. Such was my impression of the perfection of the concert that, for fear of its being spoiled by some false note, I never went into the place again (82).

This 'hotel spirit' is exactly the commodified subjectivity that James fears will overwhelm America. The 'absolute presiding power' is a personification of the phantasmagoria of capital which, as it makes puppets of people, conceals itself behind the illusion of freedom (in this case, the wealthy hotel-dwellers believe themselves free because they are wealthy). The respectable and wealthy inhabitants of the Waldorf-Astoria are characters in a theatrical scene, subjects whose selves are formed by this invisible spirit. The hotel spirit confronts James with the powerful and successful forces of social organisation which depend upon the logic of the commodity. However, he is quick to register the alternatives that New York offers to this vision.

Confronted by this terrible scene, James takes refuge in the streets (the same streets from which only pages earlier he had sought escape). The trope of personification is repeated here, but with a difference; 'the voice of the air' is the voice of the streets which reads the observant stroller's mind and reminds him of his duty and the promise of the city: 'You care for the terrible town, yea even for the horrible as I have heard you call it, or at least think it, when you have supposed that no one would know; and you see now how, if you fly such fancies as it was conceivably meant to be charming, you are tangled by that weakness in some underhand imagination of its possibly, one of these days, as a riper fruit of time, becoming so' (83). The promise of the streets is that there is an alternative to the 'civilization' of the Waldorf-Astoria, and the duty of the writer is to recognise and record it. Central Park represents an alternative non-commercial space to the commercial spaces of the hotel and the built interiors of the city such as arcades and the streets. In the park, as in the hotel, the dominant metaphor is theatrical. James writes that upon Central Park a 'singular and beautiful but almost crushing mission' has been laid (131); this is to put into social relation the heterogeneous mass of people who stroll

through her. The Park is personified as a performer whose office is the establishment of relations between people freed from the 'discipline of the streets' (132). The crowds in the park, amongst whom is the 'brooding analyst' (134), become like 'fellow spectators of the theatre' and the park is the 'little overworked *cabotine* ... the darling of the public' (133) whose performance provides an alternative to the drama of the hotel. With a twist of the theatrical metaphor James suggests that the spectators of the park are at once participants and audience upon 'the great empty stage' of the park (136). The park as stage provides a space which is freer than the commercialised spaces from the sway of the baton waving impersonal force of capital which calls each to account for their time and actions. The space of the park provides even the most reactionary analyst a glimpse of a positive future: 'the children of the public schools who occupy ... the forefront of the stage ... the sight of [which] the brooding analyst, with the social question never, after all, too much in abeyance, could clap, in private, the most reactionary hands' (134). This reactionary 'restored absentee' (136) is of course James himself. Throughout *The American Scene* James's careful casting of himself as a participant observer in the drama of the scenes he records captures the ambivalence of his relation to the scenes. In Central Park, confronted with the children of the new republic, he suggests a European analogy; 'what were the Venetians but the children of a Republic and of trade?' (138). The children (both literal and figurative) in Central Park are the new democratic subjects of urban America whose material prosperity stands in contrast to that of the 'children' of European cities and this prosperity is shared by the many not the few. The formation of these subjects is an ongoing process and at theatres in 'The Bowery and Thereabouts' James identifies his sense that this democratic experiment is already a partial success, especially when compared to European experiences.

At the theatre in the Bowery James is reminded of his earlier visit to the Ghetto and of his view of a scene 'that hummed with the human presence beyond any I had ever faced'; this scene is the 'New York phantasmagoria' (100-1). In the Windsor theatre James writes, 'I seemed to see the so domestic drama reach out to the so exotic audience and the so exotic audience reach out to the so domestic drama' (148). In 'opposition over the chasm of the footlights' are the 'ineradicable Anglo-Saxon policy ... of keeping, where "representation" is concerned so far away from the truth and the facts of life' and the heterogeneous New York audience still showing their European origins in their physiognomies. On the one side, the existing dominant nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon culture of America, a culture anatomised by James's friend and correspondent Henry Adams in his *The Education of Henry Adams* (1913), and on the other, the heterogeneous mass of people, the new citizens, each with their own culture but with as yet no shared culture. These new citizens face the same risks as the inhabitants of the Waldorf-Astoria: the inhuman forces of capital which depend upon the phantasmagoria of the commodity

to mask the economic stratification of society, creating a society in which citizens swap their rights for the illusion of freedom. On James's mental stage Anglo-Saxon history and culture is ineradicably bound up with this process. The 'traps and tricks' of the play in the theatre become the traps and tricks by which the existing commodity culture incorporates individuals into positions within existing unequal social relations. The clear problem is that these traps and tricks may not be up to the job of hoodwinking the audience and they may 'react over the head of our offered mechanistic bribes'. This moment that James describes here parallels those in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*; the writer and critic is faced with the alarming power for violence and disruption of the great mass of people. In Arnold's thought this vision resulted in a retreat from his commitment to the transformative power of culture in favour of force exercised by the state and its representatives. In *The American Scene* the theatre offers James a vision of 'the inevitable rough union in discord of the two groups of instincts, the fusion of two camps by a queer, clumsy, wasteful social chemistry. Such at all events are the round about processes of peaceful history, the very history that succeeds, for our edification, in not consisting of battles and blood and tears.' (149). The social experiment that is America is glimpsed in this new theatre and the part that the artist and the aesthetic plays in this 'queer, clumsy, wasteful social chemistry' is that of a catalyst. The subject positions identified in this thesis and the processes of identity formation which I have outlined are James's contribution to this 'social chemistry'.

The subject positions that I have outlined in the preceding pages are characterised by specific distinct but overlapping concepts and the examples that I have identified do not exhaust the list of possible figures for the artist in modernism. I have detailed the ways in which the discursive subject positions of the actress, the critic, the revolutionary and the child are oppositional because they represent positions that frustrate and evade the forceful processes that seek to incorporate individuals. This evasion is achieved because these positions exploit ambiguities within the existing discursive formations. Each of these positions is distinct and recognisable as a subject position within existing structures and each is characterised by the same qualities of vulnerability and mutability, qualities traditional identified as weaknesses, which I have here suggested are paradoxical strengths.[8] The actress represents the epitome of the hegemony's success in reifying women, but she also represents an alternative to that process of identity formation. The very vulnerability of the actress before the hegemonic discourses, a

[8] Ross Posnock has also examined James's formulation of the entry of the subject into the symbolic order. Posnock makes clear that though James recognises that identity is bound up with alienation, that 'to become a subject is to subject oneself to external structures ... In situating the self in this way James does not cancel the subject, but rather clarifies its freedom, always limited and precarious, to renovate the forms it depends on': Ross Posnock, 'Henry James, Veblen and Adorno: The Crisis of the Modern Self', *Journal of American Studies* 21 (1987), 1, pp. 31-54 (p. 37).

vulnerability that the artist shares, paradoxically is the quality that offers the greatest opportunity for constructing alternative positions. The critic is inextricably bound by the systems of exchange and the logic of the marketplace and this represents the vulnerability of the critic. This same vulnerability though depends upon the intermediate position of the critic and the intermediate position is a site which I have argued James and Wilde renovate as they re-conceptualise the action of culture and the work that art achieves. The revolutionary represents the vulnerability of the individual to the political discourses of reaction and revolution. This vulnerability is realised by James and Wilde in their works through the figure of the scapegoat, an individual figure whose relation to the group is explicitly dangerous and revelatory. The theatrically multiple subjectivity with which James and Wilde imbue specific revolutionaries in their works identifies an oppositional subject position to those scripted by either reactionary or revolutionary discourses. The figure of the child is vulnerable to both the rapacity of the adult world and to the extraordinary burden of signification which in modernity is placed upon it. Once again this vulnerability includes the idea of mutability and, as I have described, the intermediate subject position that the child inhabits can be recast as an oppositional position.

These four figures do not exhaust the possible figures that could be examined. One of the characteristics of Modernism (and early Modernism especially) is an intense attention to the figure of the artist. *Ulysses* (1922) provides us with Leopold Bloom, Joyce's artist as Jewish Everyman, the citizen-subject of the modern world, evading the snares and nets of the world by virtue of his theatrically multiple subjectivity. *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914) represents Joyce's most intense scrutiny of the figure of the artist in the modern world, and provides a clear link between Joyce's modernist writing and the writings of Oscar Wilde and Henry James. As Stephen Dedalus and Lynch stroll through Dublin towards the end of Joyce's novel I think we can catch a sly acknowledgement of Wilde's influence. In Merrion Square, home of the Wilde family, Joyce has Stephen and Lynch discuss the necessary forms of art. The progression from lyrical form to dramatic form that Joyce gives to Stephen parallels the Hegelian development of Oscar Wilde's thought that I outlined in chapter three. Stephen tells Lynch the necessary forms of art are: 'the lyrical form, the form wherein the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relationship to others'.[9] The dramatic form is the culmination of the development of artistic forms and is reached when 'the vitality

[9] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. by Seamus Deane Penguin Modern Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 2000), p.232.

which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such a vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life' (233). This vitality is first, the impersonal *personality* of the artist which in the dramatic form is not anchored to the consciousness of the artist (as in the lyrical and epical forms) but which suffuses 'the narration itself', and second, it is the force which transforms the consciousness of the artist and the consciousness of the spectator. This argument reiterates Wilde's characterisation of the action of drama and of the artistic temperament. For Wilde and Joyce, the action of the drama is the transformation of the spectators' consciousness in the experience of the artwork, an experience which alters the existing dominant productive relations. Joyce has Stephen argue for the same inversion of art and life as Oscar Wilde argues for in 'The Critic as Artist'. Wilde writes that 'Art ... both purifies and initiates ... It is through Art, and Art only, that we can realise our perfection ... Art is mind expressing itself under the conditions of matter, and thus, even in the lowliest of her manifestations, she speaks to both sense and soul alike' (*Complete Works*, 1135-6). For Wilde this action of art depends upon the critical spirit:

> with the development of the critical spirit we shall be able to realise, not merely our own lives, but the collective life of the race, and so to make ourselves absolutely modern, in the true meaning of the word modernity. For he to whom the present is the only thing that is present, knows nothing of the age in which he lives. To realise the nineteenth century, one must realise every century that has preceded it and that has contributed to its making. To know anything about oneself one must know all about others. There must be no mood with which one cannot sympathise, no dead mode of life that one cannot make alive. Is this impossible? I think not. By revealing to us the absolute mechanism of all action, and so freeing us from the self-imposed and trammelling burden of moral responsibility, the scientific principle of Heredity has become, as it were, the warrant for the contemplative life (*Complete Works*, 1137).

The 'contemplative life' here is not the life of the mind and the life of the artist but a way of being made available to everyone by the action of art. Art, for Wilde and Joyce, provides the experience of self and other through which the true modern subject will be created and this subject will be collective: the individualism of the artist realises the 'collective life of the race'. Colin MacCabe argues that the form of Joyce's novels is radical because they demand that the reader 'is aware of the constant production of meaning in which he or she is implicated. To be conscious of our active involvement in meaning is to recognise the differences and contradictions which make the individual a crowd'.[10] The radical decentring of the spectator as subject that MacCabe identifies in Modernist

[10] Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, Language, Discourse and Society series (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.75.

writing emphasises the discursive processes in which and through which subjects are constituted. The theatrically multiple subjectivity described by Oscar Wilde and realised by Joyce in the form of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* represents a radical challenge to the dominant discursive formations. This challenge emerges from the instability which Etienne Balibar argues is constitutive of the modern subject and state. Balibar writes that one hidden or occluded history of the modern subject is that the individual "I" has only ever been half a person. The Citizen-Subject is the true subject of modernity: 'the Citizen properly speaking is *neither* the individual *nor* the collective, just as he is *neither* an exclusively public being nor a private being'.[11] These distinctions are not ignored but 'suspended ... irreducible to fixed institutional boundaries which would pose the citizen on one side and a *noncitizen* on the other'. The citizen-subject is at once one and many, not the sovereign subject of the Enlightenment and the basis of the Individualist logico-rationalist capitalist state, but a decentred subject, 'the actor of a founding revolution, a *tabula rasa* whence a state emerges, [and] the actor of a *permanent* revolution' (54). This genealogy of the subject of modernity makes clear that the theatrically multiple subjectivity that I have discussed in this work is an occluded, oppositional form which contests the dominance of the individualist Bourgeois subject.

The radical disruptive form that Colin MacCabe identifies as Joyce's aim in his writings resembles the form of the late novels of Henry James. MacCabe writes: 'Truth as struggle. No longer is it a question of truth as correspondence but of the *forging* of positions of judgement ... [forgery] capturing elements of both "force" and "counterfeit"' (39). The sense of 'force' registers the question of agency that such a definition raises and 'counterfeit' identifies the sense in which 'writing is continuous production rather than natural representation'. The late novels of Henry James and those of James Joyce involve their readers in a struggle for truth that dominates the form and the content of their works. In *The Ambassadors* Strether's adventure consists in his forging positions of judgement from which to understand the world around him. The burden of his 'double consciousness' is both his keen consciousness that the same events and actions can be seen and judged from a variety of positions (and the concomitant worry about which judgement is the 'right' one), and it is the burden that James's choice of form makes upon his writing. The processes of re-vision and judgement that the novel dramatises as Strether's consciousness is James's representation of the active struggle for truth which is the subjectivity of the decentred modern subject within the play of discourse. The complex demands that the novel makes on its reader, like those that Joyce's texts make on their reader, arise from the way in which the reader becomes both subject and object

[11] Etienne Balibar, 'Citizen-Subject' in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 33-57 (p. 51).

of James's text. This is the radical form of James's novel: it makes the reader into a participant in the drama of Strether's consciousness, and Strether a participant in the drama of the reader's consciousness.

The similarities between Joyce and James are particularly clear if we recognise that both *The Ambassadors* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* belong to the Modernist reinvestigation of the *Künstlerroman*. In a recent essay that updates his *The Way of the World* (1987) Franco Moretti argues that the *Bildungsroman*, as the dominant symbolic form of the novel in the nineteenth century 'had performed three great symbolic tasks':

> It had contained the unpredictability of social change, representing it through the fiction of youth: a turbulent segment of life no doubt, but with a clear beginning, and an unmistakeable end. At a micro-narrative level, furthermore, the structure of the novelistic episode had established the flexible, anti-tragic modality of modern experience. Finally, the novel's many-sided, unheroic hero had embodied a new kind of subjectivity: everyday, worldly, pliant - 'normal'. A smaller, more peaceful history; within it, a fuller experience; and a weaker but more versatile Ego: a perfect compound for the Great Socialization of the European middle classes.[12]

This short-hand description summarises his brilliant investigation of many specific examples of nineteenth century *Bildungsromane*. Three key concepts are central to the accomplishment of this work by the *Bildungsroman*: growth, experience and the stability of the ego (236). However, argues Moretti in his discussion of what he calls the 'late *Bildungsroman*', at the *fin-de-siècle* these three concepts are under attack: the *Bildungsroman* depends upon the final assumption by Youth of maturity, on the meaningfulness of experience and the stability of the individual Ego as the site of consciousness. Each of these three dependencies is destabilised: Youth refuses to grow up, experience is meaningless and the unity of the Ego is disrupted by the desires and irrationalities which constitute the Unconscious. The texts by Mann, Musil, Conrad, Kafka, Joyce and Rilke that Moretti identifies are each characterised by these instabilities of form. These *Bildungsromane*, Moretti writes, attempt to ameliorate the traumas which the lack of agency and the instability of the subject have wrought in the form and the content of the texts (239-40).

Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* represents a particularly important example for Moretti and it is his discussion of Joyce's novel that I want to amend. I am in broad agreement with his conceptualisation of the relationship between the formal patterns of literature and historical reality (xiii), but in his discussion of Joyce's text he misses, I think, that Joyce's *Künstlerroman* negotiates between individual and mass, age

[12] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* new edition (London: Verso, 2000), p. 230.

and maturity, artist and world. Moretti calls Joyce's novel a 'structural failure' (243) and writes that Joyce was '*forced* into modernism' by the failure of the existing forms. In this reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* fails because epiphany depends upon just those three central tenets of the *Bildungsroman* which have been shattered by the trauma of modernity. However, we could emphasise that this peculiar *Künstlerroman* ironises its own dependence on youth, growth and the ego through Joyce's careful staging of Stephen's epiphanies. Ironising Stephen as a figure for the artist highlights the limits of the form of the novel that Joyce has chosen as well as the limits of the subject position available to the artist within the existing social formations. These limits had already received sustained attention in James's contribution to the category of the late *Bildungsroman, The Ambassadors.* James's novel is contemporary with those that Moretti discusses and shares a variety of their features but he omits it from consideration.

I mentioned earlier that James specifically draws his reader's attention to the incongruity of his unheroic hero Lambert Strether as the hero of a *Bildungsroman.* Strether who knows himself old feels himself young again as he enjoys the sights of the Luxembourg Gardens.[13] Paris becomes in the novel a site not only for the redefinition of individual identities but also for an investigation of citizen agency within the social and material conditions of *fin-de-siècle* capitalism. The citizen-subject of the modern republic in 1903 is not a young French man, but the young American Chad Newsome, and Chad in Paris concentrates this figure of the subject. The novel tropes Chad early as a possible artist and if James had written a *Künstlerroman* to match those which Moretti examines then Chad would be the hero of the novel. Making Strether the central consciousness registers James's determination to review the traditional form he has chosen in order to examine the agency of the modern citizen-subject. Paris in *The Ambassadors* is the site for this investigation because it concentrates all the negative and positive forces in one dense web of representations; it is the centre of European civilisation where the most refined social forms are realised, but these forms are only possible because of the revolutions which have written on the face of the city the human cost of this civilisation. These inextricable interrelations are present to Lambert Strether even in what could be the most private of moments. Visiting Madame de Vionnet late in the novel Strether recognises that her private rooms reflect just this public history: 'Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in connexion with such matters as these - odd starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of

[13] Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, p. 66.

revolution, the smell of the public temper - or perhaps simply the smell of blood' (401). Though the confusion of sound and smell emphasises that this is a fancy of Strether's, an imaginative leap into the past, the attentive reader recognises that this other ghostly Paris is often present to Strether as a reminder both of personal and public history. Earlier in the novel James has Strether reflect on how the sights (and sites) of Paris stir his historic sense in an acute way. Strether, retreating into the public space of the Tuileries in the second book of *The Ambassadors*, and prompted by the vision of a 'white-gaitered red-legged soldier', recalls his earlier visits to Paris as a young man: 'The palace was gone, Strether remembered the palace; and when he gazed into the irremediable void of its site the historic sense in him might have been freely at play - the play under which in Paris indeed it so often winces like a touched nerve' (55). The sharp pain that Strether feels in the ghostly shadow of the Palace raises the spectre of both a younger Strether, who saw the palace, and the palace itself destroyed by the retreating communards in 1871. Henry James, like Walter Benjamin, sees the ruins of the bourgeoisie in the very monuments to their dominance, but James also sees that the bourgeoisie of the new republic represent emerging social formations and that within these emergent formations there is space for oppositional subject positions. In Paris James can represent in Strether's consciousness the claims made by the spectacular commodity economy on the modern subject, the vulnerable, multiple subjectivity of the citizen-agent and strategies through which the subject can retain agency in this economy. Put more concretely, if Chad in Paris represents the modern artist as media technician who develops complex skills of representation in order to better advertise commodities, then Strether represents the artist whose theatrically multiple subjectivity resists reification through highly developed strategies of seeing and judging; the 'precious moral of everything', after all James tells us in his preface, 'is just my demonstration of this process of vision' (*Literary Criticism II*, 1305).

There is a contemporary critical fashion in relating Oscar Wilde and Henry James to one another. As pre-eminent representatives of *fin-de-siècle* culture theirs is a position of (dubious) privilege. The writings of both men have been the subject of intense critical activity which has most recently focussed on the complex of gender and sexuality. The works of Sedgwick, Moon, Stevens and others have been valuable in helping us think our own time through the prism and to address pressing political issues in the present.[14]

[14] The works of Eve Sedgwick and others have followed this model of political criticism. See her *Between Men* (1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and *Tendencies* (1994). Michael Moon's work turns too emphatically towards the present, see his *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol* (1998). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York, Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1990), *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994); Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and*

Stevens provides a paradigmatic extended summary of this work and its tendency to trawl the oeuvre identifying yet more examples of 'Jamesian camp' and 'Wildean qualities in Jamesian camp'.[15] Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (2003) finds in 'The Turn of the Screw' mainly tenuous connections between the spectacle of Wilde's disgrace and the situation of the governess.[16] Such readings are important and unavoidable since as Gillian Beer puts it: 'Literary history, like all history, starts now ... the encounter with the otherness of earlier literature can allow us to recognize and challenge our own assumptions, and those of the society in which we live', but such reading, she reminds us, must be alert to 'the *difference* of the past in our present' which makes us 'aware of the trajectory of our arrival and of the insouciance of the past - their neglectfulness of our prized positions and assumptions. To do this, we need to learn the terms of past preoccupations. We may then experience the pressure within words, now slack, of anxieties and desires'.[17] Such "arguing with the past" takes the 'immensely detailed interconnecting systems' which the literature of the past represents and engages in dialogue with it, re-producing them in a process of 'instantiation'. This rereading, as re-creation, remains alert to its incompleteness as well as to its privileged process of vision across time and space. This is the kind of reading of the *fin-de-siècle* that I have attempted. In linking James with Wilde I have argued that at the *fin-de-siècle* Victorian writers recognised that dramatic shifts in the dominant cultural formations of nineteenth century European bourgeois culture were occurring. Labour agitation, the developing commodity culture, what Richard Salmon has, in connection with Henry James, called 'the culture of publicity', and the whole complex of dynamic social and economic changes related to the advanced establishment and perpetuation of a world economy produced a complex social reality within which writers worked.[18] Following Franco Moretti's argument that 'symbolic forms are fundamentally problem-solving devices: that they are the means through which the cultural tensions and produces produced by social conflict and historical change are disentangled', I have explored the web of relations between subjectivity, art and culture.[19] I have detailed the ways in which I think we can see both James and Wilde actively examining and recasting available literary forms in order to disentangle cultural tensions and to identify emergent oppositional subject positions within the dominant social formations. What is at stake in this work is

Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

[15] Hugh Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), p. 168.

[16] Eric Haralson, *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.91.

[17] Gillian Beer, 'Introduction' to *Arguing with the Past: Essays in Narrative from Woolf to Sidney* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.1-11 (p. 1).

[18] Richard Salmon, *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

[19] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 243.

the thinking of the possible forms of the emerging highly organised specialised society, which we now know as late capitalist. I have argued that Henry James and Oscar Wilde offer examples of attempts to disentangle the idea of culture and the culture producer from their employment in the creation and maintenance of the dominant capitalist formations and to create a narrative of culture that uses the ideas of mediation, self-consciousness and transformation in order to think about emergent social formations and the possible subjects of those formations. In a sense I have argued that while writers as different as Matthew Arnold and George Gissing are pessimistic and feel threatened by the changes that they see around them, James and Wilde (no less threatened, in James's case, no less pessimistic) deconstruct the present in order to realise the future; or to adopt Wildean terms, they aim to make 'the life of each citizen a sacrament and not a speculation' (Ross ed., *Complete Works*, 274).

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