CHAPTER - II

THE MASTER'S OWN WORLD
This chapter is a study of the representative works from all the three major periods of James’s productive career — the early, middle and later years, roughly from the early 1870’s to 1910. An attempt has also been made to explore the interconnections among James’s social, moral, psychological and philosophical interests, together with his experimental and technical innovations. The overriding theme of the study is to show that James’s short fiction eventually achieves a poetic density that makes him the central bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth century fiction. His craftsmanship is never secondary to human issues — in the dominion of society and psychology, consciousness and philosophy. There is also a scope to assess James’s development as an artist, and a thinker from the social realism and internationalism of his first period, through his aesthetic and moral preoccupations of the middle period, towards the poetic expressionism and pioneering ghostly fiction of the late period. In James’s studies it is sometimes customary to cite The Madonna of the Future (1873) and A Passionate Pilgrim (1871) as early prototypes of James’s evolution towards the international theme. Yet many critics would probably agree that both these immature tales are uncertain in their focus. The Madonna of the Future is one of James’s earliest real accomplishments, though it may seem still very ‘literal’ with the detail of its canvas taken over from Balzac’s story ‘Le Chef — d’ Muvre and the speech of a Florentine painter quoted from Musset!
But it puts very affectingly many of the problems of the beginning artist, and it vibrates with James's peculiarly high spiritual notes. It sprang from his own first immersion in Italian art, which had been followed by a reluctant return home. In part therefore, the story dramatizes the special case of the American as James had begun to feel the burden of it. The old Yankee painter, who has lived out his life in Florence, confesses sadly, and James's own anxiety is in his voice.

"We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle!... We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."

To which the young narrator rejoins speaking for James's hopes:

"Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nursing air, of a kindly soil of opportunity, of.... There's no law in our glorious constitution against that, Invent, create, achieve."

There was a personal pressure behind this story, here was James himself, already at the verge of thirty, and with hardly a start in fiction. As he contemplated the old painter's fatal mistake in so idealizing art, that he never brought it to earth, James could envisage an even worse fate in the opposite extreme, that of cynical talent without an ideal. His particular American heritage spoke through him as he created the Italian contriver of obscene animal figurines. To this heritage James was to owe his deepest tones, the blackest threads in his design, the rare ability to suggest the horror of spiritual death. Such horror comes out in this early story with the intensity of the narrator's revulsion from
the sculptor’s declaration:

“Cats and monkeys – monkeys and cats – all human life is there!”

James complicates this theme of Theobald’s importance through idealism by providing some Melvillian “crosslights” to a productive Italian artist who creates only crude figurines of cats and monkeys. He also depicts the figure of Mrs Coventry, an unpleasant American “Social high priestess of the arts” in Florence (13:458), who predicts accurately Theobald’s lack of any real accomplishment, and his inspiration. She is hardly any longer the appropriate image for a ‘maiden mother’ who carries on promiscuously with the Italian figurine maker.7 Only the narrator emerges intact, with the knowledge that he himself has been the instrument of Theobald’s disillusionment and eventual swift death. Indeed the narrator is an early specimen of that frequent Jamesian unnamed narrator, a quasi – busybody whose curiosity is at once helpful and suspect. The Madonna of the Future is neither a Jamesian art parable, like his later tales of the 1890’s nor an incisive exploration of the international theme. It is essentially an example of negative ‘realism’, which exposes the flaws of a romantic or idealistic viewpoint, although it uses art and expatriation as its frame, background and context.

A Passionate Pilgrim is perhaps more pointedly James’s inchoate discovery of the international subject. Clement Searle, the expatriate
American protagonist in England is a dying man throughout the story. His 'passionate' romanticizing of English life, culture and countryside are checkmated thematically by two beggars, who appear in the tale, and whom even Searle recognizes as his spiritual doppelganger. It culminates in an ironic reversal when both Searle and his antagonistic cousin die at the same time. Searle’s romanticizing is contradicted constantly by his very real dying condition, his "attenuated person" and the "spiritless droop of his head". (13:338) While such language clearly evolves Poe-like melancholy, James does not really affirm, as does Poe, its inevitable association with supreme beauty. Yet the American narrator, who remains Searle’s confidant throughout the story does respond like Searle, time and again to the picturesque beauty of English life and landscape evoking not a Poe – like but a Hawthronesque Our Old Home tenor. The two characters taken together bespeak James’s own ambivalence in the early 1870’s to America and Europe, but what remains consistent despite an authentic appreciation of English country life is a similar strain of anti-romanticism. His illness is never specified, one cannot help but wonder whether Clement Searle’s passionate pilgrimage mindset is somehow destroying him, specially when one considers that at the end, the accidental death of the hostile kinsman coincides with his own death. What he wants most, seals his demise and the spirit behind that want – the passionate pilgrimage has been killing him by inches.
One of the truly significant works of James's immaturity is Madame de Mauves\(^1\) (1874) which Christoff Weglin says points across the whole of James's career to his latest novels in part because it dramatizes the contrast between two visions of Europe — the romantic and the real, the sentimental and the objective, and partly because, "We flounder in Jamesian ambiguity"\(^11\)
at its end. In the case of both the heroine, Euphemia de Mauves, victimized by an unfaithful French aristocratic husband, and the hero Longmore, as a young ardent American timber merchant attracted to his abused compatriot, one gets for the first time in Henry James the American innocent abroad in combination with his use of a central consciousness — in this case, focussed on Longmore — to render the narrative through a third person 'register', in other words, the very ingredients found in James's classic international works, Daisy Miller, The Portrait of a Lady, and The Ambassadors. This is accomplished within the familiar structure of James's longer tales, which are divided into several sections.\(^12\)

What is distinctive about Madame de Mauves is the skilful way it enlists the reader's sympathy for them which gradually raises serious questions about the American idealism so deeply embedded in the principal characters, Euphemia and Longmore. Euphemia's marriage to Richard de Mauves is the result of her own romantic delusions about
European aristocracy: Warning signs abound too, in the “pagan life style of her sister-in-law Madam Clairin whose husband is a druggist and thus another outsider, who blows his brains out after marrying into the high born family.”

It is a significant fact that Euphemia when young was placed in a European school by her wealthy mother, to be educated and to end up through marriage coupling her American money to a French Count. In any case she is a deeply unhappy, long-suffering, pretty woman dressed in muslin and lace when Longmore meets her through a mutual friend Mrs. Draper, a bonafide early-Jamesian “ficelle” that is an indispensable auxiliary figure who imparts necessary information to the protagonist and the reader alike.

One must stress that this is Longmore’s story as much as it is Euphemia’s, for Longmore is a perfect match for her romantic nature apostrophized in her name Euphemia or “Euphemism”. Longmore is a thoroughgoing restless idealist, as his name indicates, a man with a sense of “curiosity still unappeased” who

“Never chose the right hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour’s wayfaring that the left would have been better.”(13:215-16)

As the two become close friends they share the American “Protestant” outrage at the infidelity of Richard de Mauves and a disgust at the conduct of his sister Madam Clairin whose initial advances to
Longmore are deeply repugnant to him once the situation is established. However, the center of the tale becomes Longmore's growing attraction for Madam de Mauves, an attraction fuelled in part by his knowledge of her husband's neglect and misconduct, but also by her beauty of character, of body, and of something like moral compatibility.

It is precisely at this level that James introduces a series of complications and irony of the sort that really do anticipate his later work. For one thing Longmore fails to perceive the obvious parallel between his growing erotic love for a married woman and the rakish behavior of her husband, until the Count finally proposes to his wife in front of his sisters that he will encourage an affair between her and the attentive Longmore if only the two would no longer bask in moral superiority like a "certain Wordsworth", Euphemia once tried to force him to read. James even gives an early hint of his patented operative irony when Madam Clairin reports this episode to Longmore,

"My belle-soeur sat silent for a few moments, drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, walked out of the room. It was what she would have done! And Longmore reiterates "Yes, it was just what she would have done." (13:293-94)

What is Jamesianly operative about such irony is that the two characters mean diametrically opposite things. Madam Clairin, in European fashion means yes, Euphemia reacted with appropriate discretion, Longmore in American fashion means, yes, and she walked
out of the room in the face of such an immoral proposition. But the broader irony, of course is that Longmore does coach this countrywoman, who is also his neighbor’s wife and the Count’s suggestion externalizes the decries beneath Longmore’s own squeamishness. This becomes clear when in great frustration Longmore takes a sojourn into the French countryside and experiences a kind of recognition scene. He espies, admires and idealizes a young picnicking French couple only to learn from the innkeeper that the two are not married, but that only the woman is married. Following a countryside dream in which he and Euphemia appear on opposite shores of a river with De Mauves seated in a boat between them, the disillusioned Longmore now gives into nature, embraces Carpe diem, and comes to seek his prize, characteristically opting for the “left road”, as it were after precisely choosing the right. At this point James manages a marvelous scene of re-reversal. When Longmore approaches Euphemia, dressed in white, standing in a “soft, warm wind,” she confronts her would-be lover with the statement: “Don’t disappoint me”. Longmore must listen to a “marble statue”, a beautiful woman preaching reason with the most communicative and irresistible passion. (13:312) But with the appearance, one last time, of Madame Clairin and Euphemia’s insistence that

“If you should go away in anger, this idea of mine about our parting would be but half - realized.” (13:314)
Longmore leaves and chooses, so to speak, the right road again.

James however is not yet finished. Longmore returns to America after both he and Euphemia successfully astound De Mauves by their mutual renunciation. Longmore reaffirms his moral idealism that he "Must assent to destiny "that" he must see everything from above."(13:318:19)

And he does just that, even priggishly criticizing Mrs Drapers and from her learns an astonishing sequel, that Madam de Mauves first frustrated, and then smitten by his wife's moral courage begged her forgiveness, changed his entire life, on his knees besought her to be readmitted to her favor. Euphemia however flatly refused him. Finally like his own former brother-in-law, they discovered he had "Blown out his brains." As for Longmore, he

"Was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered composure was to return immediately to Europe. But several years have passed and he still lingers at home. The truth is that, in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling - a feeling of wonder, of certainty, of awe."(13:331)

The second feature of the tale is the motif, James employs of the "secret". References to Euphemia's "secret" or its equivalent meaning occur nine times throughout the story. Longmore's "unappeased curiosity" is finally satisfied when he knows the source of Euphemia's sadness and tears,13 "He felt his heart beat hard he seemed now to touch her
secret”(13:275).

He feels confirmed in this later when they speak openly of her abuse.

“She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture.”(13-296)

There is here most certainly a sexual innuendo also as old as medieval poetry - but the more critical level of meaning is that this entire rhetorical motif or “secret” is a verbal artistic strategy that comes into its own with the end of the tale. Euphemia’s secret is ironically re-established with a vengeance at the conclusion, and Longmore is left in “awe”. Even the sexual parallel functions ironically, for Euphemia’s secret is not to be penetrated from the moment she asserts, “Don’t disappoint me.”

The Four Meetings,14 (1877) is a fine representative short tale both in its realist theme, and its handling of the international theme. Its structure is relatively simple, in fact the tale resembles a three-act play, two of the four meetings occurring consecutively at the same time period. This story presents James’s early technical mastery as well as a presage of certain important thematic preoccupations in his later work.

Caroline Spencer, a schoolteacher from North Verona in the depths of New England, has saved every penny to fulfil the great dream of her life, to visit Europe. The narrator of the tale, who like the majority of those in which James uses first person narration remains
unnamed, is a cosmopolitan European traveler from New York who befriends Caroline and takes an interest in her. At the first meeting they inspect a portfolio of European photographs, and he hears of her intense eagerness to go abroad. He warns her in a humorous vein that she must get abroad speedily because "Europe was getting sadly de-Byronised"(16:271) and he also teases her that she possesses the "great American disease" the appetite morbid and monstrous, for color and form, for the picturesque and the romantic at any price. Caroline is both shy and intense, yet single-mindedly interested in the narrator's travels and determined to experience for herself the adventure of Europe.

The second and third meetings take place several years later at the French port of Havre. Here he runs into Miss Spencer, who has just disembarked from the same ship as the narrator's own sister and brother-in-law. Her great enthusiasm on finally reaching Europe is immediately complicated by her Europeanized American cousin, a Parisian art student, who arrives and asks for financial help in his courtship of a supposed noble woman. Although the narrator warns Caroline that she is being fleeced, Caroline empathetic and even intrigued by the "old-world romance" gives her money to the cousin and his young "Countess" wife, who has "written me the most beautiful letter"(16-291) and departs for home "The poor girl", the narrator tells us "had been some thirteen hours in Europe." (16-294)
Never getting farther than the French seaport.

The final fourth meeting occurs five years later, back at North Verona, the scene of the initial meeting. The narrator, on a visit, discovers Caroline looking much older, haggard, "tired and wasted". In a Maupassant like twist of irony, one learns that the Countess then a widow has come over to live with Caroline and in fact treats her like a servant, a condition Miss Spencer accedes to. The narrator, even more impatient with her than at the previous meetings, tries to rekindle her interest in Europe, but Caroline says she doesn't "care for it now". (16:300) The worldly-wise narrator swiftly ascertains that the late art student's wife, if she even was his wife - is anything but a Countess, indeed her speech and manner reveal to him someone of very low class and probably of questionable profession since she seems to practice it with a rich young Mister to whom she presumably gives French lessons behind a closed door! His attempts to show Caroline that she is being cruelly exploited, are of no avail. Sensing that she finally wants to leave, he does so, leaving behind the young woman with the "great American disease". Although Caroline's long-cherished goal of going to Europe was stinted, Europe has come to her "to stay" while the cost of this trip is extracted in her constant servitude to her fraudulent guest.

In this story Caroline Spencer represents a minority group- a group which enjoins to experience for the community as a whole the thirst and the slacking of the thirst for the traditional which is the unlimited
in time, and the cosmopolitan which is the unlimited in space. The same thought was represented by Carol Kennicolt for a later generation. Spencer is able to feel the passion for Europe in only a limited way, as a longing for "the picturesque". It is a colored postcard, a museum, Europe for which her frail puritan arms reach out. It is for this rather anemic Europe where she finally spends but thirteen hours of her life that she suffers. She is willing as the narrator remarks "to be ruined for her picturesqueness sake!" It is her narrow conception of "Europe" that cruelly betrays her into her cousin's trap. She is fascinated by his fake Bohemianism, by the atmosphere of the foreign he exudes. It is for him, the counterfeit, that she sacrifices her chance to experience the reality. And this counterfeit Europe pursues her to the end of her dim-colored days taking the form of the vulgar and spurious Countess. Whom she is too weak, too mesmerized to reject, and too sensitive to accept. Thus the story is a calculated and absolute exhaustion of the theme - the Europe American opposition of forces that James had announced and used in his novels like The Ambassadors, (1903) and The Golden Bowl (1941)\(^5\)

Caroline's victimization is an early example in James, of his life-long theme of human exploitation, which always formed the moral basis for his art. The Four Meetings also epitomizes James's theme of anti romanticism. His earlier 'negative realism' is so negative because the principal purpose there, is to show the destructive consequences of
a romantic view, a realism found so frequently in Howell's and Twain in stories like Edither or The Private History of a Campaign that Failed. This is opposed to James's mastery in "positive realism", which is an attempt to render and poetize all the shades, nuances and implications of ordinary everyday reality, especially the permutations of human consciousness. Like Poe's grotesque and arabesque elements, James's positive and negative realism are most frequently woven together in a given story and not simplistically divided, but they can be distinguished however for there are tales in James's canon in which either the negative or positive expression of his realist theme predominates. In general one finds a predominance of negative realism in the earlier tales and of positive realism in the later ones.

The Four Meetings also gives us an early taste of James's innocence to experience them in the person of Caroline Spencer. One also finds his trademark of some pivotal irony on Turn of the Screw a feature again very Maupassant like, but one greatly embellished and complicated in his work much later. The Four Meetings also points up another characteristic element in James's international theme. The fact that Caroline, the American is exploited not only by a European (the countess) but also first and foremost by a Europeanized American, her art student cousin, who gives the narrator

"A solemn wave in the 'European fashion' and who extracts the stone from a plump apricot he had finally retained."(11:284,293)
The morally flawed Europeanized American persists in Henry James's work and can be seen more individualized in such figures as Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller*, Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and the Moreen family in *The Pupil*. The exploitative European like the Countess of *The Four Meetings* is actually the rarer instance in James and found most prominently in his early novel, *The American* in the passages of the Bellegardes and in the Mille Noemic. In *The American*, had the ambivalent Mrs Tristam principal Europeanized American character, been more representative of Christopher Neoman's moral hazards than the Bellegardes, the late James would likely have thought his early novel more realistic and less flawed by romance. Furthermore, for those who may wish to read *The Four Meetings* in such fashion, James provides at least some slight possibility that the unnamed narrator is perhaps specious or slightly obtuse, if not unreliable, all trademarks of much of the late fiction. James also employs direct metaphor to enrich his early tale. One example occurs when Caroline at the Havre informs him excitedly of her proposed plans of travel.

"She had them on her fingers ends and told over the names as solemnly as a daughter of another father might have told over the beads off a rosary." (16:283)

This is an excellent example from the early James of a 'reflexive image' that is one whose content is not intended to lead the reader
away from the character to the broader associations the image might otherwise denote, but as William James would say, circles back and 'redirects itself' to its source, in this case the pious child like character of Miss Spencer, whose plans will not materialize. The tenor of this metaphor consorts well with a subsequent one when Caroline informed by the narrator that her cousin is about to swindle her,

"asserted at this her dignity - much as a small pink shorn lamb might have done---'I shan't be stripped' I shan't live any worse than I have lived, don't you see? And I'll come back before long to stay with him."(16:292)

This last declaration typifies the sort of anticipatory irony that permeates this tale, for it is ultimately the Ersatz Countess who comes to stay with her. And the imagery of the innocent "small pink shorn lamb" asserting its dignity even echoes a detail from the first meeting at North Verona, when Caroline’s fan is said to be ‘adorned with pink ribbon’ (momentarily suggestive of Hawthorne’s Goodman Brown’s innocent wife Faith) and her attire,16

"a scanty black silk dress (16:269) suggesting fragility and vulnerability - someone who as the narrator exclaims, eventually can be stripped of every dollar."(16:292)

MIDDLE JAMES: With the exception of The Turn of the Screw written in 1898, and several other proto-ghostly tales composed earlier in the 1890’s, James’s short fiction in the last twelve years of the nineteenth century tends to address moral and aesthetic questions, not so much to undermine his social realism as to enhance and complicate
it by exploring the relation between moral and aesthetic experience. James provides a context for such experience by probing more deeply than before into the elusive psychological motivations of character who reveal their interior consciousness through James's maturing prose idiom. Although James between 1880 and 1890 produced a number of important novels, he published only ten tales between 1880 and 1888. Some of his novels of the 1880's offered him a fuller and freer handling of social and political themes, which may well have preoccupied his mind and work. It was to be the last two years of the 1880's and then the 1890's that would bring forth a resurgence of some of James's finest short fiction. Subsequently in the period from 1900 to 1910, he was to extend the form still further and thereby become a major bridge in Anglo American fiction from the nineteenth century to twentieth century modernism. The 1880's also included the publication of his indispensable *Art of Fiction* and 1888 marked the publication of three important tales. *The Aspern Papers, The Liar, The Lesson of the Master* (discussed in the next chapter) and *Greville Fane.* (1892) Both *The Aspern Papers* and *The Liar* are unusually important specimens of unreliable narration wherein the reader may expect to distrust or even reverse a protagonist's justification of his conduct and his overriding appraisal of others and of himself.

*The Aspern Papers* was published in *The Atlantic Monthly*
from March to May 1888 and as the title piece of a volume of stories in the same year. The narrator, an American editor travels to Venice to recover the letters written by Jeffery Aspern, a romantic poet of the early nineteenth century, to his mistress ‘Juliana’. He rents rooms from Juliana, now the aged Miss Bordereau, who lives with her niece Tina, an unattractive spinster. After Miss Bordereau dies Tina says that she could give the letters only to a ‘relative’ of the family. The editor balks at the veiled proposal and when they meet the next time Tina reveals that she had burned them.

The Aspern Papers has long been the recipient of considerable critical analysis but both are usually cited for James’s handling of narrative unreliability, a truly major trademark of his originality and technique in the work of his maturity. In the case of The Aspern Papers one probably has the most pronounced instance in all James’s fiction of the unreliable first person narrator, the type of narrator whom one might associate later with Ring Larder’s, HairCut. The narrator, an unnamed American publisher, will do anything he can, to get his hands on the dead poet Jeffrey Aspern’s papers - including outright deception of the Misses Bordereau in Venice and gross manipulation of Miss Tina Bordereau’s affection. This ‘publishing scoundrel’, as he is eventually denominated, nevertheless addresses the reader throughout the course of the story and tries to fulfil his villainous pursuit of the Legendary poet Jeffrey Aspern’s papers and love letters,
written to his mistress, the ancient Juliana Bordereau. The narrator attempts to track her niece to Venice, to pose as a lodger in their home, and even to feign a romantic interest in Miss Tina, all hasten the death of the aged Juliana but result as well in thwarting the would be duper himself. Miss Tina in reaction to his rebuff of her incipient affection, both finds and burns the coveted Aspern Papers-

"It took a long time – there were so many."(12:143)

The Aspern Papers, for James appear to have a technical simplicity just because of the clear cut unreliability of its narrator, and yet behind that device there is considerable complexity and virtuosity. To cite an example, the narrator and eventually reveals her ‘true name’ to Miss Tina, a name the readers never know anymore than its predecessor, and so of course he remains, unnamed to us. Further more the moral issues surrounding what is primarily a comic tale are anything but simple. The narrator’s compulsive – nay monomaniacal- guest, for Jeffrey Aspern’s papers recalls indirectly the desecrate group of Hawthornian questers whose head has usurped their hearts for example Aylner of The Birth Mark, Rappaccini (whose Italian garden is recollected by this Jamesian narrator’s venetian gardening) and of course Elian Brand all of whom, Lisa, James’s narrator, in effect prey upon women. Indeed, one of the many satisfying elements of this long tales with Miss Tina burning of the coveted papers is that it seems almost as if the whole, Hawthorne-James gallery of prying and
praying men are finally repaid by the perennially exploited woman, yet one who does so without resorting to the narrator’s own duplication tactics. Dane Juliana by contrast is more the narrator’s adversial alter ago, perhaps symbolized by her green eye shades in cat and Mouse counter point to his green thumb- although she is obviously less culpable than he and acts primarily out of a wish to protect and provide for her nieces. There is even some possibility that Tina is in fact her illegitimate daughter by Jeffery Aspern. In any case, one may feel with justification that by the end the obtuse narrator has lost the real prize in losing Tina Bordereau, not The Aspern Papers.

Another dimension of the tale, one stressed by James himself in his later preface to it, is the evocation of the past in the figure and associations of Aspern, an American poet who flourished at the beginning of the nineteenth century in culturally impoverished America - the same issue that James addressed in his early study Hawthorne (1879) when he catalogues the cultural deprivations against which Hawthorne worked. This whole question however greatly complicates the Aspern Papers as Wayne Booth points out in the Rhetoric of Fiction much cited analysis, “James and the unreliable narrator’, a discussion focussing attention on both The Aspern Papers and The Liar. The complicated factor Booth contends is that the narrator’s evocation of the American past is never integrated rhetorically with his pernicious designs in the present. Booth not with
standing clears the narrator's response to the past. James, in his Preface is not synonymous, but foils the narrator's evocation, is specious because he does not further, but instead perverts cultural transmission through his pursuit of the letters. Again like Hawthorne's Aylmer, all that he touches or tries to touch, ultimately-dies, the papers, Aspern (through the papers) and Juliana. Only Tina, whom he rejects, comes to life and thus reverses, as it were, the passive role of Georgina in The BirthMark. But in his Preface Henry James's own interest in the attenuated extension of the past, away from the present is fostered precisely by the artist, not the deadly acquisitive collector. Hawthorne for example whose 'past' is the subject of James, as is Aspern's the narrator's wish, "comes to life again," through James's reformation of his tales by this one. The crucial difference between the Aspern narrator and James is reinforced by James's own magnificent metaphor a bonified metaphysical conceit-comparing the receding past to a baffling succession of walled English gardens viewed from a ladder, an extended figure wonderfully vivid and apt if one has ever visited or lived in England. The narrator in short belongs to that group of James's character from Urban de Bellegarde in The American, to Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady to Maud Lawder in The Wings of a Dove who take, or would take the veneer for the thing itself, the form for the substance, the walled pattern barriers for the garden themselves. It is not so surprising, perhaps that along with
another publisher he is associated early in the tale with the devil. Short of that, he shares the inauthenticity of numerous Jamesian Europeanized Americans, although he is not one himself. Ultimately, however he is again one of James’s deeply flawed characters ‘violated by an idea.’ Against the Kantian dictum, he uses people as means rather than ends, but that is because he truly is violated by his idea. The retribution he receives at the conclusion by losing both the papers and Miss Tina signifies his willful blindness of precisely the kind of human love that produced both Aspern letters and his poetry in the first place. Indeed his relationship with Tina Bordereau throughout the tale becomes an obvious parody of Aspern’s with the youthful Juliana of the past. This parody is underscored by the language of the climactic scene, in Juliana’s bedroom, when his clandestine search for the papers is expressed in such language as

“The drawers of her tables gaping and the climax of my crisis.”(12:116-117)

Yet he fails in this score, is unmasked by Juliana’s “finally unshaded extraordinary eyes” and he fails once again with Tina herself when she later offers to become a relation. (12:118,133) With great success The Aspern Papers explores with its half gothic narrative mode the life and death of creativity over a period of time.

The Liar is more complex than it first appears. At the first reading one is diverted by the ingenuity of the plot, its sly twists and
turns, the adroit complication, for example of the episode of Miss Geraldine. Then as one re-reads and reflects, the character of Colonel Capadose emerges as *The Liar*'s centre of gravity. This is not in the least so banal a thing as a story about lying as a vice but rather so imaginative a thing as a story about lying as a passion. The passion or Neurosis is interesting enough, but James does not remain satisfied with the unconditioned portrayal of it. What excites him here as everywhere is relation, reaction, the effect of one passion upon the other. The Colonel is ingenious enough for study, yet what makes the story remarkable is not the Colonel's weakness but his wife's iron will to protect and defend it. Her passion for the Colonel is so intense, that honorable though she is, she will lie, deceive and even connive in a criminal act so that he may remain unexposed.

Finally it dawns upon one that *The Liar* suggests his greatest in this theme within theme quality. It is also one of his wittiest tales. The whole narrative is a unified piece of art. Each witty sentence, being part of James's mind seems part of a large and unverbalised field of reflection. It makes a playful but by no means a trivial judgement on human character. It is intellectual also in that his wit requires some corresponding wit in the reader.²³

The point on which the action hinges - the narrator's ability to expose in oils the true character of Capadose is quite implausible. It is interesting however to reflect on how little this admitted improbability,
or impossibility detracts from the value of the story.

The Liar though perhaps not as highly regarded as The Aspern Papers is actually more complicated technically at least in its use of unreliability. This is important because it is told in third person like Daisy Miller and Madame de Mauves. The Liar turns on a Maupassant like twist in which the putative liar of the story, Colonel Clement Capadose, is juxtaposed to a protagonist narrator (James’s register) who emerges as the deeper, more profound liar- as is even named Lyon. A highly successful and gifted painter, Lyon re meets Everina Brant, the woman who refused him long ago and is now the wife of Capadose, a man Lyon gradually discovers is a compulsive liar who “can’t give a straight answer” and possesses a “monstrous foible – as his friends put it.” Lyon gradually becomes obsessed by the thought that Everina, an unusually genuine and honest woman, can appear content in her marriage while presumably having to bear, the shame and humiliation of her husband’s “whoppers” which typically “shot up and bloomed.” Lyon’s real motive, however is the jealous “ache” he retains for Mrs. Capadose. He never sees, as will the attentive reader, that his own conduct and even his thinking are driven by jealousy and a desire for revenge or punishment for her choice of Capadose rather than him, and especially her absence of distress at that choice. He meditates thus, for example, on the couple’s, daughter, Amy,
“The child was beautiful and had the prettiest eyes of innocence he had ever seen: which didn’t prevent his wondering if she told horrid fibs. This idea much occupied and rather darkly amused him – the picture of the anxiety with which her mother would watch as she grew older for the symptoms of paternal strain.” (12:354)

What in effect James exhibits here is the way Lyon’s own evil has shot up and bloomed, for indeed the crisis of the tale revolves around the juxtaposition of the Colonel’s “genius” for lying with Lyon’s own evil genius. Lyon’s specialty is portraiture and he persuades the couple to let him paint Capadose’s portrait, in which he conveys by caricature the full, ugly monstrosity or a person’s massive dishonesty. When Everina comes with her husband to view it, she breaks down for the only time in the tale and cries “Its cruel – oh its too cruel”. (12-374)

Ostensibly absent when the couple comes to see the painting, Lyon is, significantly there, he hides and watches the entire episode. Capadose, apparently not comprehending the meaning of his own portrait yet responding emotionally to his wife’s horror and distress, slashes the picture with a knife and hacks it to pieces, causing the unseen Lyon immediately to feel success in breaking down the veneer as he interprets it, of the happy pair. Yet later at the story’s end, both Capadose and Everina feign no knowledge whatever of the painting’s destruction, alleging it to be the act of a disgruntled drunken model seen near the premises. Lyon thus assures himself that the hitherto forthright Everina has herself finally lied for her husband in a crisis,
although James provides a lovely little narrative "swerve" in the fact that Everina left the studio in tears ("come away- come away" she repeats) before her husband actually slashed the painting. Hence Lyon can never know for certain that she lies at the end, although he assuredly persuades himself, she has done so.

The central moral insight of *The Liar* is that Capadose's lies are never malicious, never self-serving, never harming humanity, whereas Lyon's conduct is deceptive and egotistical through and through. Lyon's first name, Oliver, is not introduced by James until well into the tale, and it is felt that James thereby emblematizes his "twistedness" with a kind of Dickensian pun. Moreover Lyon steps back and hides when he sees the Capadoses arrive at his studio to view the picture, an act insinuating his own wrong doing and even evoking obliquely the image of someone like say, Hawthorne's physically troubled Ruben Bowne in *Roga Malvins Burial*. The truth is, the portrait Lyon paints is his twisted thinking, self-reflexive, he has projected his own insidious deception into it. As a portrait of the Colonel the painting would be a moral lie. Therefore Colonel Capadose's slashing act is symbolically appropriate, for the picture, which Lyon would like to send to the Academy entitled *The Liar* is at the core a self-portrait. Likewise the hypocrisy Lyon attributes to Everina at the end for never acknowledging the disfigurement — is reflexive of Lyon himself throughout the narrative. There is even
considerable Jamesian indication that the Colonel’s habitual lying is correlative to artistry, to fabulation and story telling, an idea James developed again in The Birth Place (1903), where Marvis Gedges’ invention lies to the tourists about Shakespeare’s childhood not only saves his job but delights his writers. The falsifications of Capadose are at times called alchemy,

“An incalculable law” even “the muse of improvisation and the laying on of color.”(12:350-51)

As such they strongly contrast with Lyon’s own use of art for morally distorted ends. Wayne Booth’s criticism that this story, like The Aspern Papers suffers from ‘double focus’ and is still ‘partially unrealized’ and ‘only half developed’, thus seems less valid the more one studies the tale – even if one considers Jamesian ambiguity a defect. Lyon’s sinister psychic projection is simply everywhere, including even his creative activity while painting the portrait.

“Capadose had his intermissions, his houses of sterility, and then Lyon knew that the picture also dropped. The higher his companion soared, the more he circled and sang in the blue, the better he felt himself paint.” (12:362)

This is also a kind of ‘early draft’ or Jamesian quasi-supernaturalism, a feature which is seen more in his late fiction, but here it is primarily one more instance of Lyon living up to his name and projecting himself on to the canvas of his rival.

James’s handling of the third person unreliability in ‘The Liar’ at
times recollects Winterbourne and even prefigures John Marcher in *The Beast of the Jungle* but it resembles more immediately Adelachart of *The Marriages* to Mrs Churchley and equally harsh opposition to her brother Godfrey's marriage are gradually shown despite Adela's own bewilderment and rationalizing to be motivated by her pathological devotion to her mother's sacred memory and thus her barely sub conscious wish to replace her mother as her father's life-long companion, a wish she achieves with success at the ironic conclusion of the tale. Indeed that is one of the several 'marriages' radiating thematically from James story.\(^\text{25}\)

**Greville Fane**\(^\text{26}(1982)\) a superbly compressed tale, designated in its New York Edition volume as one of the hard shining sonnets, is superlatively representative of the convergent strands of James's middle period, in that respect very like *The Four Meetings* in relation to the early period. Though not concerned with specious or unreliable narration it is a magnificently witty tale that qualifies at one level with James's art parables. More deeply however it exhibits his moral preoccupation with internecine human relationships. Greville Fane is a pen name for the prolific Mrs. Stormer, a widow who writes potboiler romances and adventure dramas along the lines of *The Prisoner of Zenda, The Prince of Foxes*, or in more recent years, the Harlequein romances. James's story is narrated by a young unnamed journalist, a friend of Mrs. Stormer. The narrator functions much like his early
predecessor in *The Four Meetings* that is, as the narrative agent for another’s story. In fact both tales begin with the announced death of the woman protagonist and then evolve into a retrospection of her life or some particular aspect of it. *Greville Fane* however introduces a most important element not found in *The Four Meetings*. The journalist narrator is himself also an artist, an unsuccessful novelist who unlike Mrs Stormer tries “in my clumsy way, to be in some direct relation to life.”(16:116) This extra dimension accounts for some striking features of the tale, most notably the narrator’s crisp prose style with which James endows it from the beginning to end. One of the more decisive proofs anywhere in his entire corpus, is that the convoluted prose idiom of a few years later was fully thought out and international narrator’s razor sharp burlesque of Greville Fane’s literary productions and vogue, constitutes a satire that somehow manages miraculously to remain affectionate. “Oh bother your direct relation to life, replies Greville Fane, for she was always annoyed by the phrase- which wouldn’t in the least prevent her using it as a note of elegance. With no more prejudices than an old sausage – mill, she would give forth again with patient punctuality any poor verbal scrap that had been dropped into her.”(16:116)

As the language suggests, the gifted narrator offers a devastating critique of Mrs Stormer’s fiction that far exceeds anything James himself writing like-wise from the realists standpoint says about
comparable work of the costume – romance variety in *The Art of Fiction*. Yet it is clear enough that James would endorse the narrator’s assessment of Greville Fane’s work. She writes only from the elbows down “he tells us, she could invent stories by the yard, but couldn’t write a page of English. She went down to her grave without suspecting that she had not contributed a sentence to the language.” (16:111,113) And again,

“She turned off plots by the hundred and – so far as her flying quill could convey her- was perpetually going aboard. Her types, her illustrations, her tone was not cosmopolitan. She recognized nothing less principal than European society and her folk made love to each other from Doncaster to Bucharest.”(16:114)

In what is virtually a metaphysical conceit, this narrator even tells us that Greville Fane had an unequalled gift especially pen in hand, of squeezing big mistakes, into small opportunities. Indeed a large segment of this story seems to consist of nothing but a cascade of beautifully memorable locations by James’s narrator at the expense of Greville Fane’s mode of fiction.

“She carried about her box of properties, tumbling out promptly the familiar tarnished old puppets. She believed in them when others couldn’t and as they were like nothing that was to be seen under the sun it was impossible to prove by comparison that they were wrong. You can’t compare birds, or fishes, you could only feel that as Greville Fane’s characters had fine plumage of the former species, human beings must be of the latter.”(16:121)

If this were the extent of James’s story, it would qualify as a
memorable burlesque, not unlike Mark Twain's parody or Fennimore Cooper's literary offenses. But in fact the tale itself somewhat like a figure skater or a fine football running back "Changes direction" on us. Most of James's short stories, even the later philosophical ones so different from this one, usually turn on a Maupassant-like twist even when they proceed to explore entirely different issues like nature of the unknown bewildering attenuated 'field' of phenomenal reality itself. In this case, however, the twist while obviously less philosophical, is hardly less engaging and interesting. It consists in the irony that behind her novels of romance, forbidden passion and high adventure one discovers, a woman whose main, indeed whose only, activity when not writing is that of doting on her two children,

"The unmoral and the maternal lived together we are told, on the most comfortable terms and she stopped curling the moustaches of her guardsman to pat the heads of her babies."(16:122)

Not only does she trace

"the loves of the duchesses beside the innocent ribs of her children, but for fans who seek her out she is inevitably disappointing to most of these pilgrims who hadn't expected to find a shy stout ruddy lady in a cap like a crumbled pyramid (16:122) moreover, she may write about the affections and the impossibility of controlling them, but she talked of the price of pension and the convenience of an English chemist."(16:122)

If this seems not so much a change in the story's direction as merely added content for the journalist narrator's wit, that is only because it does not yet tell of the real implication and consequence of
Mrs Stormer's material devotion. Her two children Ethel and Leolin, grow up to become parasites and snobs, and the narrator chronicles the way they proceed to destroy, their doing and eventually bewildered mother. In other words Mrs. Stormer like Caroline Spencer is victimized, not by an art student cousin, but by her own offspring. She spends a great sum of money educating her daughter at a very expensive school at Dresden and the result is that the pompous girl, according to Mrs Stormer herself,

"Can't read me --- I offered her taste she tells me that at Dresden - at school- I was never allowed." (16:123)

The narrator's portrayal, however of this daughter is annihilating, Ethel, the snob who is perfectly willing to milk her mother for every penny is herself singularly colorless. Only long, very long like an undecipherable letter. Eventually she produces

"The effect, large and stiff and afterwards eminent in her of a certain kind of resolution, something as public and important as if a meeting and a chairman had passed it." (16:118)

At an earlier time the narrator had never seen sweet seventeen in a form so hard, high and dry and she carried an eyeglass with a long handle, which she put up whenever she wanted not to see. Eventually Ethel receives Sir Baldwin Luard who as a joyless, jokeless young man is a perfect match for her, and so becomes Lady Luard; but she remains for the narrator a person surrounded as if with a spiked iron railing.

Greville Fane's son Leolin, is just as repugnant, although in an
entirely different way. Encouraged by his mother to become a novelist like her, Leolin proceeds to adopt every conceivable affection of an ‘avant garde’ form tormented artist, while in fact he, like his sister, is a parasite eventually being paid by his mother to provide

“All sorts of telling, technical things, happy touches about hunting and yachting and cigars and wine, about city slang and the way men talk at clubs— that she couldn’t be expected to get it very straight.” (16:125)

The dubious formation of Leolin’s character crisply summarized by the narrator at one point with his mother’s hope that he would become a novelist, Leolin,

Was eager to qualify himself and took to cigarettes at ten on the highest literary grounds. His fond mother gazed at him and like Desdemona wished heaven had made her such a man. She explained to me more than once that in her profession she had found sex a dreadful drawback. She loved the story of Madam George Sands’ early rebellion against this hindrance, and believed that if she had worn trousers she could have written as well as that lady. Leolin had for the career at least the qualification of trousers, and as he grew older he recognized its importance by laying in ever so many pairs (16:120-121)

Of course, this passage is admittedly almost as telling on Greville Fane herself as on Leolin. Already lacking the critical faculty in art, she lacks it as well in life. Nevertheless, Leolin’s exploitation of his mother is especially odious; even while he engages in pseudo-artistic posture— he felt life so. In all its misery and mystery he goes beneath the surface. He forces himself to look at things from which he’d rather run away. This to be sure, is from his deceived mother one even learns
through her that in addition to his salary he was paid by the piece, he got so much for a striking character, so much for a pretty name, so much for a plot, so much for an incident, and had so much promised him if he would invent a new crime. The narrator tries to point out that Leolin already has invented a new crime and is paid everyday for it. But Mrs Stormer fails to understand. Whenever Leolin visits the narrator he monotonously and pretentiously intones about Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert and Thackeray and earnestly enquires how far in the English novel, one really might venture to go. The narrator explains that if on such occasions he did not kick Leolin downstairs it was because he would have landed on her at the bottom.

This last statement reminds one that, with all the satiric punch at the narrator’s disposal, his view is ultimately sympathetic of Greville Fane’s humanity, and the tale corroborates this, because eventually she herself does land at the bottom. As time goes on she burns herself out, taking less and less for her work which sucked more and more dry by her two children.

“She was weary and spent, at last but confided to me that she couldn’t afford to pause.”(16:127)

Ethel Lady Luard continues to possess a smile, the dimmest thing in nature, diluted, unsweetened, in expensive lemonade, and even though she despises the execrable Leolin it did not save her after all from the mute agreement to go with him halves. The narrator calls on Mrs
Stormer at Primrose Hill, her final residence after the earlier sprightly years travelling abroad, and finds her wasted and wan, in other words reminiscent of Caroline Spencer at the end of The Four Meetings. Unlike Caroline, however, Mrs Stormer eventually begins to cry as she explains to the narrator that, on the one hand her daughter and son-in-law are ashamed and embarrassed by her in their society, while on the other, Ethel is upset with her mother for letting her 'pieces go down' in price, even though the daughter's marriage alone cost her three novels.

"I had never seen her break down, the narrator informs us, and I was proportionately moved, she sobbed like a frightened child over the extinction of her vague and the exhaustion of her vein."(16:131)

She dies soon afterward, and the two devouring children publish,

"every scrap scribbled paper that could he extracted from the table drawers then quarrel mortally about the proceeds."(16:133-34)

What is more remarkable about Greville Fane apart from the deft acute wit and dissecting prose of its proficient narrator, is the way that James at least by the conclusion of the tale, turns what looks like one of his art parables, inside out and makes it instead an acute moral tale preoccupied with the theme of human cannibalism and exploitation, in this case of the parent by the children.28 It is a most skilful performance especially when one thinks back of the opening of the short story, an apparently simple device by which James provides his lead into the narrative proper. The journalist receives a telegram from his editor
that reads,

Mrs Stormer dying. Can you give us half a column for tomorrow evening? Let her down easily, but not too easily. (16:109)

The narrator has never admired Greville Fane, but has liked her so long that his difficulty is not, in letting her down easily but in qualifying that indulgence he initially tells himself. But a female companion that evening has never heard of Greville Fane and another neighbor, pronounces the books 'too vile'. The narrator, who is obviously preoccupied with his assignment, ruminates that,

"I had never thought (her books) very good, but I should let her down more easily then." (6:109)

LATER PHASE: In a very early letter to Charles Eliot Newton, James once remarked,

"To write a series of good little tales I deem ample work for a life time."^{29}

As it is noticed, his 112 short stories are generally good indeed, but most of them, including many of his most famous and enduring, yet interestingly a surprising number of those that are admirably "foreshortened"- James's own most recurrent aim in his short fiction- and comprise the 'hard shinning sonnet' variety, such as The Four Meetings and Greville Fane which are discussed in this chapter.

The year 1900 was something of an annus mirables for his short stories. He published two tales in addition to his novel, The Sacred
Fount. Three of his short stories Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie, The Great Good Place, The Two Faces show certain elements of the Late James emerging from the earlier James in an interestingly different way although only The Great Good Place exhibits the new philosophical or stylistic expressionism of the late period.

Lily Gunton, a young American woman with great riches, as well as stubborn independence unexpectedly and carelessly quells her betrothal to a young Roman Prince from a

"Very great house, of tremendous antiquity, fairly groaning under the weight of ancient honors." (16:383)
even though he has already bent to Lily’s will and coerced his proud mother to put aside ceremonial protocol and write the first letter of invitation. An additional irony is that the impatient Miss Gunton but is henceforth obviously in bad straits with his humiliated mother, since she most unwillingly wrote that letter.

James in his preface to the Daisy Miller volume of the New York edition, frequently speaks of Miss Gunton as one of a group with Daisy and Julia Bride, thus identifying the young, independent American woman who constitutes a single component of the fame of his fiction. It is intriguing and not inaccurate to see Lily Gunton as the intermediate stage in the short story writer’s transformation of the early, innocent Daisy Miller type, into the late morally disfigured example of Julia Bride. Gunton unlike Julia, has great wealth, far
more one realizes, than Daisy Miller. But she has none of Daisy's affecting vulnerability. Although "lovely and candid" like Daisy she possesses disparities. The juxtaposition of her beautiful sun-flashed heights and deep dark holes. Miss Gunton

"Was not great in any particular save one. She was great when she drew" (16:388)

One cannot conceive of Daisy Miller so described, nor would she ever address her would be fiance as

"My dear boy or My dear child." (16:381)

Even though she most frequently appears naive and emasculated, Lily Gunton thus marks a stage in James's revisionist view of the Daisy Miller, Bessie Alden, Isabel Archer figure into that of Julia Bride, who lacks the money, or perhaps even of Maggie Verwer, in 'The Golden Bowl' who certainly has the money and who in fact does buy her Italian Prince in James's last and most massive complex novel.31 The emerging later James, then is found here in his reconsideration of the free American Woman and implicitly in his recompilation of the international theme by focussing on the enigma or what really, constitutes and drives Lily's Americanism. The mode of the story is not particularly late Jamesian, however and it remains a comedy of manners vestigially reminiscent of 'An International Episode.'

Finally the point of view character, Lady Champer recalls the author's middle period, for he reveals her English imperviousness when she
claims at first to have analyzed Lily’s abrupt withdrawal from the engagement only to contradict herself. So she can only conclude,

"With Americans, one’s lost." (16:392)

This may he true—indeed, it reinforces the whole enigmatic theme of Lily’s Americanism— but it does not in anyway infuse the reader with confidence in Lady Champer. The two letters ‘Crossing in the mail’—Lily’s recantation and the elder princess’s reluctant overture-symbolize both the tales’ international dissonance of manner and its Maupassant like juxtaposition, a reversal not further complicated, however by additional Jamesian ‘developments’. "The Two Faces," on the other hand, while just as concise, just as Maupassant—like, nevertheless achieves an effect of greater moral complexity although without rich elaboration, for example of a nouvelle like ‘The Pupil’. The Two Faces belong first of all to Mrs Grantham, a handsomely beautiful impresario of sophisticated English Society and to the simple Lady Gwyther an innocent young woman newly married and brought from rural Germany. Lord Gwyther despite his previous understanding with Mrs Grantham takes the bold step of asking Mrs Grantham— as an appeal to her honor and generosity, to take hold of his untutored wife, dress her up, help her and then introduce her to London society. The Jamesian ‘register’ of the tale is Mr. Shirley Sulton, another suitor and confidant of Mrs Grantham, most particularly Sulton since Lord Gwyther’s surprise marriage. It is principally Sulton who conveys and
reacts to the sudden climax of the tale. Mrs Grantham’s introduction to shy Valda Gwyther at Burbeck dressed monstrously like a monkey with feathers, frills, excrescences of silk and lace massed together and conflicting and decked for the sacrifice with ribbons and flowers. Mrs Grantham’s pleased expression is like,

“that of the artist confronted with her work and interested, even to impatience in the judgement of others.”(12:410)

Everyone agrees that the poor creature is lost to society, a Roman mob at the circus awaiting the next Christian maiden brought out to the tigers.

Ironics abound in the condensed tale. Gwyther gave his wife over to Mrs Grantham’s revenge in the naive hope that she would be ‘a real friend to the young woman’, for the great labyrinth of London. Yet by disgracing Valda Mrs Grantham reveals something new for Shirley Sulton at least in her own face, and this is the real epiphany of the story and its double focussed title (which James changes in its second printing from simply ‘The Two Faces’, survey to isolate and emphasize his multiple thematic duality) Sulton’s attraction for Mrs. Grantham all along has been that he was at the mercy of her face, but he detects that something new had quickly come into her beauty, he couldn’t as yet have said what was on the whole to its advantage or loss. He eventually learns the answer when watching her contentment in Lady Gwyther’s grotesque entrance, The Face, he keeps repeating.
It was as if something had happened in consequence of which she had changed. That is she had a perfection resplendent, but what in the world had it done, this perfection to her beauty? James provides the reader then, with a double layered effect characteristic of his later method. The Two Faces on the one hand signifies that face which has hitherto captivated Sulton exhibiting the revelation of its new monstrous design and the result is to make Sulton recoil as he witnesses Mrs Grantham’s fatal beauty borne of revenge. On the other hand, Sulton perceives in young artless Valda’s facial distortion and disfigurement a humanity that, as he says, ‘goes to the heart’, a case of imaginable pathos, a dim discovery of knowledge of what has been done to her glimmering upon her innocence. This discovery imparts to the young woman’s disgrace a beauty, even while the charmingly dressed and tailored Mrs Grantham becomes in Sulton’s eyes, hideous. The multiple meaning compressed into James’s revised title gives one an impression that the compression pleased James himself in his New York edition Preface for its neat evolution - the example of the whole turn of the whole coach and pair in the contracted coach, without the spill of a single passenger or the derangement of a single parcel. Another aspect of this same economy concision and duality is the gradual realization that triumphant Mrs Grantham has ultimately lost the present suitors to the same artless woman. As Wagenknecht has put it,
“There was never a better illustration of the truth that for James, the world of high society was only a theatre to be used to test and reveal moral value.” (Wagenknecht, 129)

Through Mrs Grantham’s act James presents a critique on the corridors of social forces when in such cultivated cruelty as hers can occur. While yet allowing ultimately its victims, as in his large novels like The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl to possess somehow the final superior power. Mrs Grantham herself unwittingly expounds the very feature of the story, in which she herself emerges ugly while bedecking Lady Gwyther in ugliness, when she remarks archly at one point,

“What profundities indeed then over the simplest of matters.” (12-402)

The Great Good Place like The Pilgrim’s Progress or The Divine Comedy is a criticism of a whole culture, though developed on a miniature scale. Like these two books, it forsakes completely the methods of realism, like them it invents a world. In this tiny bit of ordered dream work James points however obliquely to the essential vacuity of modern living. The story seems to offer the most serene answer to the deepest and most desperate prayer.

The consequence of what James in this story calls the modern madness, mere maniacal extension and motion is a special form of lunacy known as being ‘under pressure’. The sense of pressure has little to do with overwork or specific worries. Rather it is identical
with the whole pattern of lives based on getting somewhere or getting something. It comes about because we are engaged in doing something unnatural. We are neglecting we are denying man's rational mind.

The Great Good Place is James's try - and a successful one at putting all these truisms in the form of a fairy tale. The novelist in the story has done what we all do, he has permitted himself to get so involved that he no longer knows who or what he is. He has too much of everything—success, friends, guests, work appointments. His life is full or rather crowded. That is to say, it is devoid of any principle of clarity.

In the story the world is 'real life'! The life of achievement, success, accumulation and motion that is the escape. It is the escape from the mind, the escape from reflection, the escape from a recognition of one's own personality. The Great Good Place is simply ordered reality, stripped truth. Whenever the mind comes into its own, that is the great good place. The place is no ethereal heaven. James is almost devoid of any religious sense but a theoretically achievable utopia. It is a hotel without noise, a club without newspapers. The Place is what civilization could be if we did not persist in taking wrong turnings, if we divested ourselves of things, if the conception of time were not based on the date—pad and the appointment book, if we could rediscover the private life, this story is
then the most densely charged with contemporary application.

The Great Good Place is an especially modern parable for the protagonist, the successful writer George Dane, is suffused with anxiety harassed by life's constant series of decapitations and wearily helplessly mixed in books from authors, books from friends, books from enemies, books from his own book seller. He turns a heavy eye on his smothering world and longs for escape. This deep psyche wish miraculously comes to pass in the form of a forgotten appointment with this young man an admirer of Dane's who by merely taking his hand precipitates a momentous transformation. Dane reawakens in a kind of secular monastery, a "great cloister", and converses with companions known only as "brother" all part of the great want met, all exquisitely without the complication of an identity. He and his converses cast in an abyss of negatives, an absence of positives. Dane feels deeply that the key, pure gold was simply the cancelled list slowly and blissfully he read into the general wealth of his comfort all the particular absences of which it was composed. One by one, he touched as it were, all the things it was such rapture to be without.

Some critics read this story as ironic, as a kind of criticism of escapism, but the language of the tale itself with its post modern tenor constantly insinuates the opposite of such ironic interpretation. So does the structure, with each succeeding section of its fine parts, as Dane moves inexorably toward his total rejuvenation, his rebaptism,
his allotted moment to 'return' to his apartment, where ever he sleeps or has been transported, when he does reawaken he finds that the young man has taken care of all his responsibilities that day, has eliminated the asphyxiating clutter,

“I’ve been so happy”, declares Dane. “So have responds the nameless young man.” (16:263)

The Great Good Place conveys an aura of later James in a way vastly different from a comedy of manners like ‘Miss Gunton’ on a less comedic analysis of society like The Two Faces.9 The parabolic quality is part of it, the rich abstractionism, a greater part and often found in prolonged elliptical conversations between Dane and the two principal ‘Brothers’ at the place. Another aspect, a very important one, is the introduction of Jamesian alter egos. The forgotten young man who comes and ‘exchanges places’ with Dane is one, the Brothers with whom he converses are others. James even signals the alter ego condition when he has Dane emphasize the,

“Back of a person writing at his study table, and again notes the mere sight of his back.” (16:261,247)

Henry James uses the back of a person as a kind of musical key signature denoting the alter ego in such works as The Sense of the Past and A Round of Visits. Dane himself even thinks at the end that,

“Everyone was a little someone else.” (16:263)

And earlier at the place itself. It’s charming how when we speak for
ourselves we speak for each other.

James also reinforces his theme of temporary flight as refreshment – rebirth by his extensive symbolic use of rain. It’s raining when Dane experiences the great wish to escape his anger ‘I do love the rain’, he declares ‘perhaps better still, it will snow.’ At the place itself he experiences the deep bath, the soft cool splash in the stillness. And the final section, which treats the completion of his restorative process, begins ‘why it’s raining’ then returning symbolically as well as narratively to where the reader began. Indeed, the whole meaning of this remarkable story is that one’s experience of death and rebirth is a psychic matter and an affair of consciousness, and the same thematic concept is explored in James’s celebrated late tale The Jolly Corner.

Here the concept of psychic transformation is articulated. It was part of the whole impression that, by some extraordinary law, one’s vision seemed less from the facts than from one’s vision and also what he had felt the first time recurred, the friend was always new and yet at the same time it was amusing, not disturbing which suggested the possibility that he might be but an old one altered. (16:254)

Such language helps to confirm that there are really no other characters than that of George Dane in the various guises of the psychic self. Entirely unlike Miss Gunton or The Two Faces in its mode. The Great Good Place is not only a parable about modern distraction or the sort commemorated later by T.S. Eliot but also
without its being a ghost story like The Turn of the Screw or The Jolly Corner, a Jamesian foray with the quasi-supernatural, more so than even Maud-Evelyn. As such it signals the central stream within his late period. Any potential allegorical element is attenuated into the fantastic, allowing us a type of work that actually duplicates, what is said of the place itself,

"The things so perfect that its open to as many interpretations as any great work — a poem of Goethe, a dialogue of Plato, a symphony of Beethoven."(16:257)

Verily the only final explanation of what The Great Good Place may really be,

"Is the thing for instance we love it most for being."(16:238)

A Round of Visits, James's last published story, is possibly the most extraordinary of all his tales. It displays a rare convergence of all the major strands of James's late period in one compressed work other than one of the last great novels. Nicola Bradbury suggests of it briefly that

"the power of the tale depends upon a strict sense of form."40

The analysis of this story explores carefully that sense of form, which is not nearly so readily apparent as with James's earlier work, but this tale has both the comprehensiveness and conciseness of a Beethoven quarter, and there are many other issues to address simultaneously with its strict sense of form, James's refracted consciousness, penumbra —
like aura, 'unuttered utterances' and other such features characteristic of his manner are all here in richness and complexity.

The point of view of the character, Mark Monteith is examined fully as much as John Marcher or Spencer Beydon. Monteith returns from Europe, after many years and finds the entire culture of New York grotesque and phantasmagoric. The Pocahontas hotel for example exhibits one extraordinary masquerade of expensive objects, one portentous period of decoration, one violent phase of publicity after another, its heavy heat, the luxuriance, the extravagance, the quantity, the color, gave the impression of some tropical forest, where vociferous, bright eyed, and feathered creatures, of every variety of size and hue, were half smothered between undergrowth's of velvet and tapestry and ramifications of marble and bronze.

Such Fauna and Flora caused Monteith's,

"bruised spirit to draw in and fold its wings."(ct 437)

Monteith is bruised in a double sense; first he is laid up for three days with the gripe after disembarking on a Wednesday into a 'blinding New York blizzard', second his deeper illness or deep sore inward ache is itself the cause of his return, the discovery that his distant cousin and early school mate, Phil Bloodgood, to whom he entrusted his financial assets, has embezzled money from Mark and several other members of a small Europeanized American circle, and then has absconded ahead of the law. Cloistered in the ugly,
“Du-Barey hotel and face to face with Bloodgood’s picture our sufferer – would have liked to tell someone; extracting, to the last acid strain of it, the full strength of his sorrow... there was something of his heart’s heaviness he wanted so to give, out.” (CT429)

But the hotel doctor who tends to Moneith’s gripe is the first of a series of people who show no interest in his anguish. James’s protagonist wishes to blurt out;

Oh what’s the matter with me – that looking after some of my poor dividends, he has simply jockeyed me out of the whole little collection, - - - to sail ten days ago for parts unknown, - - - it’s the horror of having done it to me – with out a warning or excuse. (CT 430)

This speech is an unuttered utterance characteristic of James’s late idiom, for the hotel doctor who pronounces him well by Saturday, has a manner that precludes such an exchange, countless possibilities, making doctors perfunctory, Mark felt, swooned and seated at their doors it showed for an incalculable world. This early statement eventually and unexpectedly penetrates the very thematic core of the tale, and is although greatly disguised, a case of verbal foreshadowing.

Monteith’s first encounter after leaving his sick room on Sunday was with Mrs Folliott, a fellow victim of Bloodgood’s larceny, whom he has last seen and argued for six months earlier in London, and wants to know if he now stood up for his swindler. Mrs Folliott’s crudeness epitomizes the new crowd and deeply offends Monteith, in part because unlike himself he knows she still has considerable money left.
Although she recognizes Monteith’s right to loathe Bloodgood too. She bewails her wretched money to excess but does so with a vulgarity of analysis and an incapacity for the higher crititism, as her listener felt it to be, which made him determine resentfully, almost grimly, that she shouldn’t have the benefit of a grain of his vision of what had befallen them and how in particular it had come and should never dream thereby of how interesting he might have been. Such passages alert us to Monteith’s belief in his difference from the rapacious American double-dealing culture comes home to form the grotesque iconography of that culture presented by the Pocahontas Hotel to Mrs Folliott, and the hue and cry of the new crowd. There was nothing like a crowd, for making one feel lonely thus as Monteith moves from place to place, James strikes a profoundly modern Prufrockian note, he evokes as does Eliot’s poem itself a modern equivalent to a Dantesque pilgrim moving through the Bolgias of the underworld, an association also reinforced by innumerable uses of ‘labyrinth’. Monteith’s one hope for the kind of empathetic exchange he seeks is a welcoming note from Florence Ash, whom he has not seen for nine years but who in his Paris days had been the sympathetic recipient of all his troubles, so innocent compared with those of his present hour. At lunch however he encounters by sheer chance a ‘pretty girl’ who tells him she is the sister-in-law of Newton Wrick, a former friend and school mate, who had read of Monteith’s arrival in the papers and wonders what could
have brought that shirker. Mark back after such a lapse of years. Monteith is quite surprised, for he has all but forgotten about Wrick’s existence, since the latter had been so dull and uninteresting. But the young woman presses him to go visit Wrick who is up there in the Eighth street alone (his sister Wrick’s wife is no longer living) for he has appeared, of late, so down! Wrick too it seems has been shut in with gripe but the horrid person just seemed to have entered into poor Newton’s soul. This last comment constitutes an acute verbal echo of Monteith’s own condition, even though the ‘pretty girl’ apparently speaks of it lightly and Monteith himself sees no connection and remains uninterested. ‘Well then’, she urges, ‘feel for others, fit him in’. His much anticipated afternoon visit with Florence Ash takes an entirely unexpected turn, for the same woman who nine years past, regularly ministered to him in his trouble, and to whom he expects to pour his thoughts and feelings about Bloodgood, seizes upon his company to unburden to him ‘such immensities’ of her own recent life, most particularly her separation from her husband. Bob who is off to Washington and about to ‘patch up something’ with Mrs Folliott, one of a regular belief. As she fills him in and puts the case to him all her troubles and plans, Monteith soon realizes there would be no chance for his case, though it was so much for his case he had come! Yet he experiences a strange ‘convulsion’ the monetary strain of his substituting by the turn of a hand one prospect of interest for another.
For now he realizes he could serve supremely - oh how he was going to serve! The most sympathetic of all pairs of ears.

At this juncture in James's tale a pattern of reverse expectations has been clearly established, although for Monteith himself the case is, on the contrary one of savoring a new epiphany. After he leaves Florence Ash as he returns to the street and stands alone while a "Choked trolley car howled as he paused for it, beneath the weight of its human accretions, there follows the suffering shriek of another public vehicle and a sudden odd automatic return of her mind to the pretty girl, the flower of Mrs Folliott's crowd who had spoken to him of Newton Wrick." (CT. 442)

The violence of such street imagery issues from the rhetoric of James's fiction and hints at some connection to Newton Wrick, yet for Mark it is instead the same remarkable agent of fate that gives him the memory of Wrick's address, and he decides that the direct intervention of providence wishes him to extend sympathy rather than seek it. The final visit with Newton Wrick, wholly unplanned is the most fully elaborated of the entire tale and of course the very scenic or Jamesian 'discriminated occasion' toward which the tale has pointed from the beginning. It consists above all of a series of cascading revelations for both Monteith and the reader, and hence exhibits a set of dramatic stages of consciousness and discovery. The first of them is that Wrick is a totally different man from the common, even course person Mark remembered from college and some abortive law school years. Even
though the apartment shows the same rich confused complexion the
Pocahontas of Monteith has been ill unmistakably yet has also
undergone since their last meeting some extraordinary process of
requirements. He even presented himself now as if he had suddenly
and mysteriously been educated. This transformation not unlike
Murray Brush's in Julia Bride is also very reminiscent of Chad
Newman in The Ambassadors except that this time the mysterious
educative process and refinement has unlike Chad's or Murray's
occurred in America, not Europe, and is visibly associated with illness
and ravage. Even more remarkable is that Wrick in marked contrast to
the two women and the hotel doctor, divines at once that Monteith
himself is deeply troubled, such unexpected sensitivity from coarse to
common, Newton Wrick brings tears to Mark's eyes. 'Why, how do
you know? How can you?' Meanwhile James describes Wrick as
hovering there—considerably restless, shifting from foot to foot
changing his place, beginning and giving up motion's—body
movements indicative of the history of something that had happened to
him even so handsomely shining out.

The crowning touch occurs when 'Wrick tells Mark his coming out
is interesting'. The astonishing note absent from everyone else in the
day's round of visits and the reaction we recognize by now, Mark has
sought most of all. So grateful is the protagonist that he in turn
responds,
“there must be my dear man, something rather wonderful the matter with you since Wrick perceives Mark’s state, there must be for you to see! I shouldn’t have expected it. Then you take me for a damned fool? Laughs wonderful Newton Wrick.”(CT 447)

Monteith’s pain and need are utterly apparent, and Mark’s assumption is that Wrick’s pain is so high toned and interesting like his own. James’s handling of the scene and exchange has already begun to take on the eerie aura of an encounter with an alter ego such as found in the ghost stories. Monteith for example reacts to the altered Wrick as to “this incalculable apparition” and with the oddest intensity of apprehension, admiration, and mystification – all such language is unmistakably the lexicon and terminology of James’s ghost stories. We have while discussing The Great Good Place seen James’s use of an image of a person turned away or perceived from the back to denote the alter ego. In Newton Wrick’s case his face turned away seems to call into being his true situation and identity, whereas before the greatly ‘improved’ face in different gaze had somehow eclipsed it – an idea conceptually evocative of difference in contemporary Derridian critical theory. For Monteith everything had changed - changed extraordinary with the mere turning of that gentleman’s back, and now they were suddenly facing each other across the wide space with a new consciousness. Wrick had been trying surreptitiously with his leg to conceal a gun he meant to hide when Monteith surprised him by arriving. Symbolically of course, it is clear that this gun like Wrick
himself cannot go unexposed, and that Monteith in a sense is the emblematic cause of its revelation, even while he literally espies it. No longer with his 'veneer' of improvement Wrick implores Monteith,

"In God's name talk to me – talk to me. The pretense is over of course in deep trouble -- but turning you on was exactly what I wanted! Then most tellingly my interest was in your being interesting. For you are! And my nerves." (CT 456)

All day Monteith had hoped to be interesting. Wrick's interest is in being distracted from the suicide he contemplates, and of course the crimes themselves involve financial interest. Wrick in his ravage tells Mark that if he really wants to go to Bloodgood, 'I am such another -- only I've stayed to take it'. Mark finally understands inexpressibly the 'monstrous' sense of his friend's education. It had been in its immeasurable action, the education of business, of which the fruits were all around them.

From a broader American Philosophical framework however, the ending of A Round of Visits is James's parallel to and refinement of Emerson's profound conception voiced in his essay, experience that it is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man, in other words, the burden of self-consciousness. And in that same framework, James continues his lineage also with Hawthorne, for whom self-consciousness seems virtually always to be conscious of evils and one's inevitable participation in it whether one wills it or not.
The ghostly level of *A Round of Visits* is one of its principal features. In addition to the faces of Newton Wrick and Phil Bloodgood, which stare out, at Monteith one must keep in mind that Mark himself is, in his own way, a spectral figure and a type of alter ego to both Wrick and Bloodgood, a relationship suggested by the very geometry of the story, since Monteith is in search of Bloodgood and ends up with his surrogate in Wrick. James’s verbal artistry also supports this, Wrick for example exclaims that Bloodgood ‘sticks out of Monteith’. Monteith like Spencer Brydon in *The Jolly Corner* is an American expatriate newly returned to a monstrous New York from Europe where he has been removed and protected from American culture.

The formal integrity too of *A Round of Visits* is another illustration of just how much James by the end, had furthered the development of American short fiction as a work of art, in the course of his career. The seven divisions of the tale are halved by the transitional fourth section in which no visit occurs providing a structural balance between the first and the final three segments. The first three moreover are unified by a repetitive pattern of expectation and rebuff in the encounters with the hotel doctor, Mrs Folliott and Mrs Ash. The transitional section, with Monteith again outside in the street has him deciding to reverse his search for sympathy and follow the supposed ‘will of providence’. The last three sections in Wrick’s
apartment trace the reversal and twisting of Monteith's judgement with results, even more drastically unexpected than those accumulated in the first three sections. Such structural integrity and underpinning supports the loose and baggy monster thesis, advocated by Richard Blackmur, that James's convoluted idiom and complex elaboration are superimposed on a strict classical foundation. But it also provides the real base for James's labyrinthine which inundates the tale that is, the repeated reversal, with the doctor, Mrs Folliott, and Florence Ash; then Monteith's resignation to 'providence' to attend to poor Wrick and there upon of course the resolve reversed again by his seeming, to have found Wrick the sympathetic ear he had formerly sought. James's chain of irony is further compounded when it turns out that Monteith has done the same to Wrick as the earlier friends had done to him, ignore his weightier problem while talking of their own. Yet by the end he has come ironically in a full circle back to victimization only it is as his own agent rather than as recipient.

The imagery of the tale is both extravagant and haunting in close relation to the theme of the story, and it combines with the complex syntax to provide the same distinct idiom carefully scrutinized by Nicols Bradbury and so many others in the late novels. The principal imagery revolves around the excessive 'heat' and tropical jungle of the hotel with its lurid 'luxuriance' juxtaposed against the 'blinding New York blizzard', and great white savage return storm. Outside the
intensity of the cold it is a jump from the tropics to the pole. Such imagery evokes the medium of the Dantesque underworld that runs throughout the tale, but it also reflects Monteith’s inner turmoil as well as the cold reception he finds. It suggests especially the collision of extremes that signifies the turmoil and violence of the culture he returns to and deplores, but from which he ultimately cannot claim to stay aloof and innocent.

The intention of this lengthy examination of ‘A Round of Visits’, James’s last published story, is to illustrate the direction, texture and importance of James’s enrichment in bringing American short fiction to a maturity and poetic complexity. Like most tales he later came to write, it relies on the visiting mind, as its locus of reality, and thus fulfills earlier promise in The Art of Fiction of the writer’s experience as a huge — spider’s web suspended in the ‘chamber of consciousness’ and conveying ‘the very atmosphere in the mind.’ It deals, moreover, with large cultural questions regarding America and Europe with the profound issue of moral complexity, and with the misuse and exploitation of individuals by one another in unanticipated ways, including the idea, never far from James’s fiction, that words can be weapons, this may remind us of Graham Greene’s great admiration for the late James’s ‘Judas-complex’, his deep preoccupation with betrayal and pity for the betayers, an idea also shared by J.A.Ward.43 The tale shows further more, James’s increased sense of the extricable
relationship between character and fate a relationship on the thematic level that parallels that of “impression and experience” at the level of artistic execution. It shows the way in which the spectral, ghostly medium came to establish itself even in fiction not explicitly ghostly, conveying in a destructive Dickinson reality of poetic extravagance buttressed by verbal puns and extended figurative conceits. It illustrates James’s mastery of flexibility in the untrustworthy point of view of character, especially a ‘register’ in the third person narrator. And it illustrates unforgettably James’s tremendous contribution to the genre of his distinctive operative irony.
NOTES


2. Ibid. P. 13.


10. Henry James, *The Reverberator, Madame de Mauves*, A
Passionate Pilgrim and other Tales, (New York, Scribner, 1936) Quotations are from this book.


pp.30-45.


22. Ibid. pp. 470-475.


31. Henry James, Notebooks, pp. 189-190.


35. Henry R. Rupp, *James, The Two Faces* *Explicator* XVI, No.5 (Feb 1956) item 30.


