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HENRY JAMES' STYLE IN WASHINGTON SQUARE

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Washington Square (1880) marks Henry James' move away from the flat, socially representative characters of his early novels. The novel also signals a move toward more individualized characters and suggests James' interest in the responsibility individuals bear for the quality of their communities, societies, and cultures.¹ Although the result of the shift toward complex and individualized characterization is rather unsuccessful, *Washington Square* is an important novel to consider because the tension between social representation and individualization of the central character indicates the changing direction of James' artistic interests. *Washington Square* thus maps where he has been and signals where he will go. Glauco Cambon touches the transitional nature of *Washington Square* when he writes that James "is still developing his potential within genre limits of the comedy of manners, though the seeds of a deeper approach are already there."² Cambon's "deeper approach" has to do with the freedom of the individual and Catherine Sloper's rise to "ethical reality" under the pressure of her particular circumstances.³

In *Washington Square* James merges two techniques: he "pull[s] the wires" of his characters with the cleverness of the "supremely skillful contriver and arranger" that he saw, admired, and claimed to have "thoroughly mastered" from the satiric stage comedy of Victorien Sardou, Émile Augier, and the younger Alexandre Dumas and which informs his early style;⁴ and he experiments with representing consciousness, a technique which nearly defines his middle and late novels.⁵

On one hand, James' comic technique drives the satire of American businessmen as a class, represented by Austin Sloper, who operate successfully in the commercial world but who fail to understand their own families.⁶ James contrives the comedy of *Washington Square* by "pulling the wires" of Austin Sloper, a medical doctor and widower whose mercenary approach to the healing art underlines his links to the business community and explains why he lacks any sense of how to rear his daughter. And because Sloper alone cares for his daughter, James forces the stock American businessman (who never would be at home) to practice the most important of all domestic skills.⁷ At the same time, James works at an exposition of what happens when

Sloper's daughter becomes conscious of, understands, and confronts the circumstances created by her father, who dominates the scene. The consequent characterization of Catherine Sloper indicates James' interest in the effects of Sloper's conduct in relation to his daughter and in the ramifications of one individual's conduct on another.

In *Washington Square* James goes beyond the exploration of the dynamics and effects of social forces that informs the earlier novels. He supplements a call for social reform implied by the satire of businessmen like Sloper with the characterization of Catherine Sloper, which suggests the importance of individuals in the amelioration of social problems.

James goes to greater lengths to individualize Catherine Sloper than he had with any of his earlier characters, such as Hudson and Mallet of *Roderick Hudson* (1876), Newman in *The American* (1877), or the Wentworths, Felix, or the Baroness of *The Europeans* (1878). He repeats techniques used in the individualization of Catherine Sloper in such later figures as Isabel Archer, Hyacinth Robinson, and Maggie Verver. James signals his interest in Catherine Sloper (and through her in the makeup of individual human beings) through his effort to portray states of consciousness, even though that portrait lacks detail and is uneven. Nevertheless, the consequences of relations between individuals rather than between social cohorts introduce a subject he investigated through the middle novels and carried out fully in the late ones.

Even while James individualizes Catherine more than any previous novel character, he could not avoid involving her in the implicit social commentary raised by Doctor Sloper's replacement of family relations with business ones. Thus Catherine's involvement in the satire raises a problem for James: how to individualize a character without sacrificing the didactic component of the fiction, which may be carried more effectively by flatter, more representative characters as vehicles. The progress of James' career up to *Washington Square* seems to have made his confrontation with such a problem inevitable.

R. P. Blackmur and Richard Poirier note that *Washington Square* contains recurrent Jamesian themes, character types, and relations, and the consequent dynamics and ramifications of power as if building from *Roderick Hudson* toward the central situation of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and beyond to the major novels.⁸ In addition, *Washington Square* introduces new elements that will themselves recur in later novels. James' intensifying interest in the interaction of one's circumstances with the development of one's mind and personality is one of these new concerns. In fact, a combination of manners and consciousness had been on James' mind as a novel subject

for several years before the publication of *Washington Square*, but never had he carried it out in fiction.

As early as 1873 James had expressed his interest in illustrating "the growth of one's mind."⁹ In 1877 he returned to that subject in the outline for *The Portrait of a Lady*, which he drew up for William Dean Howells.¹⁰ James mentions his interest in the relation of character to circumstances in another 1877 letter concerning Howells' objections to the unhappy conclusion of *The American*. James' comments in that letter accent his interest in the artistic and philosophic question of individualism he takes up implicitly several years later in *Washington Square*:

We are each the product of circumstances and there are tall stone walls which fatally divide us. I have written my story from Newman's side of the wall, and I understand so well how Mme de Cintre couldn't really scramble over from *her* side! If I had represented her as doing so I should have made a prettier ending, certainly; but I should have felt as if I were throwing a rather vulgar sop to readers who don't really know the world and who don't measure the merit of a novel by its correspondence to the same.¹¹

The relevance of James' comments on *The American* to *Washington Square* and to later novels resides in his allusion to the individual character as if he or she were an actual figure in life rather than a stereotypical representative of a social cohort. The letter suggests that in succeeding novels James would make clearer the nature and the effects of a character's relation to circumstances so that his readers would not misunderstand the crucial relationship, as Howells misunderstands it in *The American*. James comes close to refining a method that conveys such a relation in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Madame Merle's "envelope of circumstances" speech to Isabel Archer in chapter nineteen makes this clear. But the technique did not spring fully mature from James' imagination. He worked up to it. And between the problem in *The American* and the solution in *The Portrait* lies the experiment in *Washington Square*.

James seems to have written the short novel as a way to experiment most efficiently with characterization, subject, and form and at the same time to earn the money that would free him to write the more ambitious and polished *Portrait*. James implies in an 1878 letter to his brother William, written just three months before he recorded the "germ" of *Washington Square*,¹² that his method is to use shorter works to help him compose his longer fiction: "I have a constant impulse to try experiments of form, in which I wish to not run the risk of wasting or gratuitously using big situations. But to these I am coming now. . . . I don't regret my step by step evolution."¹³ The

way he nurtures germinal ideas for his novels in his *Notebooks* and his habit during his later years of preparing extended outlines as the foundations of his novels supply examples of James' preparational habit outside of *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. James initially conceived *The Ambassadors* as a "nouvelle."¹⁴ But after the preparatory outline ran to some 20,000 words, James carried out the design as a novel.¹⁵ Perhaps James' failure with *Washington Square* led in part to his decision not to force a condensation of *The Ambassadors*.

James struggled from the start to carry out his full idea for *Washington Square*. He had intended the book as a short story to run in the *Atlantic* through three numbers.¹⁶ But he overran by far his estimated length and was forced to sell it to the *Cornhill* in England and *Harper's* in America, where it ran six installments in each magazine.¹⁷ But even after doubling his estimated length, James was not able to achieve both the social commentary and the exposition of the central character that he had projected for *Washington Square*. His subject was simply too large and his space too short. James' commitment to the damaging condensation of the large subject may be explained at least in part by the transitional and preparational properties of *Washington Square*.

The second opening installment of a serialized James novel within four months, *The Portrait of a Lady*, began in October of 1880. Discussing both books in a letter to William James, the novelist compares *Washington Square* to its near successor and reveals what he has learned from *Washington Square* about achieving artistic and commercial success:

The only good thing in the story [*Washington Square*] is the girl. The other book increases, I think, in merit and interest as it goes on, and being told in a more spacious, expansive way than its predecessors, is inevitably more human, more sociable. It was the constant effort at *condensation* . . . that has deprived my former things of these qualitates.¹⁸

James' emphasis on "*condensation*" indicates that a clear difference between *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady* is one of style and the degree to which he elaborates his idea for the novel, rather than his fundamental artistic purpose for the characterization itself.

The preceding statement to William in which Henry James relishes his opportunity to write a novel "in a more spacious, expansive way" and expresses his desire to convey a "more human, more sociable" novel suggests a shift in James' conception for the novel precisely during the composition of *Washington Square* from a form built on manners and caricature to one based in consciousness and individualized characterization. The association of "spacious, expan-

sive" with "human . . . sociable" shows clearly that while he might have aimed toward a more "human" novel in *Washington Square*, the "constant effort at *condensation*" that his serial publishers required, in combination with the attempt to recycle previously successful satiric techniques, prevented him from conveying the full complexity of Catherine Sloper's struggle to learn to cope with her difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, that very tension between tested and successful satiric characterization and James' challenging experiment at more complex characterization makes *Washington Square* an important James novel.

James' flat, representational characterization of Austin Sloper resembles earlier figures such as Roderick Hudson, Roland Mallet, and Christopher Newman. These characters function as products of their worlds and thus signify the social forces that shaped them. When James satirizes those characters, he satirizes those forces. The attention to the emotional and psychological ramifications of Sloper's oppression of Catherine resembles James' later depiction of the relation of the central character to its oppressor. Thus even as Sloper's character looks back to earlier types, his place in the novel anticipates the way James will deploy the dominating characters of later novels.

Sloper establishes the manners of *Washington Square* by his own idiosyncratic nature in the same way that Gilbert Osmond and Ralph Touchett shape the manners of *The Portrait of a Lady*, as Christina Light and Paul Muniment establish those of *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), as Sir Luke Strett shapes the manners and circumstance of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and as Adam Verver's moral sensibility shapes the manners of *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Rowland Mallet from *Roderick Hudson*, on the other hand, functions as a product of his world and thus represents the forces that shaped him. Although Sloper represents American business as a social force, James begins to look beyond social factors and into the role of the individual will in the exercise of power. And since Sloper is aware of at least some of the consequences of his conduct and makes choices regarding his behavior, there are aspects of him that indicate traces of individualization. Mallet has no such capacity to understand or to choose.

Some ethical consequences of Sloper's behavior may be described by comparing them with the consequences of Mallet's conduct. Mallet responds to Hudson's struggle to understand himself and his place in the world by enforcing his dominant and oppressive position over the sculptor. But he neither intends nor seems to recognize that he injures his charge. Mallet's responses to Hudson's problems demonstrate his selfishness, but his conduct after he discovers Hudson's body indicates his lack of malice. On the night of Hudson's disappearance and death, Mallet is too disturbed to sleep.¹⁹ When he finds

Hudson's body, "Rowland had an immense outbreak of pity and anguish."²⁰ Only later, alone with the body, Mallet "accused himself of cruelty and injustice, he would have lain down there in Roderick's place to unsay the words that had yesterday driven him forth on his lonely ramble."²¹ Sloper's conduct is in sharp contrast because James emphasizes his awareness of the harm he causes Catherine while he causes it.

Sloper enjoys his daughter's difficulties, especially when he engineers them. After he commands Catherine to choose either him or her lover, Townsend, and to renounce the other, she breaks down and moves toward her father "with a pitiful cry" as she gestures a plea for understanding and comfort. But rather than comforting Catherine, Sloper separates himself from her just when she needs his consolation and understanding. He orders her from the room, shuts the door behind her, and enjoys the "comical side" and the "entertainment" of her situation.²²

Mallet's conduct harms Hudson, but Mallet never finds comedy or entertainment in Hudson's pain because his function in the novel is to suggest the potential harm (and indirectly the benefits) art patrons as a class may bring to artists.²³ James deploys Sloper and Catherine to suggest the harm (and the benefits) one individual with the capacity for making choices may bring to another.

Having a father who never worked in the business world and was at home much of the time, James would have been sensitive to the implications of Sloper's cruelty. Robert C. Le Clair reports that Henry James, Sr., was a "deeply affectionate man" who raised the quality of the homelife "to a level that few children ever know. Many records bear testimony to his devotion to the children whom he constantly instructed, often by the mere flow of his conversation. . . . He brought them up . . . with the deepest sense of humanitarianism, of brotherhood and sympathetic understanding of other people."²⁴ The novelist himself writes that his father enveloped his family with "a certain sense of inspiration and protection which had, I think, accompanied each of us even to middle life."²⁵ James' praise of his father supplies a direct statement of how James thinks that a father ought to conduct himself in relation to his children. In context with *Washington Square*, the praise implies the intensity of James' satire of Sloper, who never inspires, never protects, Catherine.

If one should believe Sloper that Catherine is "as about as intelligent as the bundle of shawls" (p. 175), one may raise an objection to the assertion that James experiments with the growth of a consciousness because Catherine would seem to have no consciousness to develop. But as Victoria Rosenberg and William Veeder point out, charges levied against Catherine by the narrator reflect the lim-

ited viewpoints of Sloper, Townsend, and Aunt Penniman.²⁶ They are not advanced directly by the narrator. Instead, they emphasize Catherine's differences from the others. And because Sloper, Townsend, and Penniman conduct themselves badly, it speaks well of Catherine that the others do not praise her.

Most important in terms of the way the novel looks ahead to *The Portrait* and beyond, James characterizes Catherine Sloper according to the way she responds to circumstances. That is, he characterizes her according to the way she reacts to Sloper's manners, shaped by the values of the business world, rather than to the "paraphernalia," as James calls it, of her world, the superficial details of Washington Square society.²⁷ James had used such "paraphernalia" extensively to create a context for his characters before *Washington Square*. But the development of Catherine Sloper as a pivotal James character depends on the extent to which the author shows Catherine's recognition of the boundaries of her personal envelope and her development of strategies for negotiating and surpassing those limits. With Catherine Sloper, James begins to suggest through his central characters that consciousness provides individuals with the possibility to resolve fundamental conflicts and to gain a certain degree of control over their lives.²⁸

Catherine's eventual knowledge of her relation to her circumstances provides her with a basis from which she manages Townsend and endures her father. She fashions her life by recognizing, accepting, and asserting her moral simplicity in the face of her father's bullying and Townsend's more subtle coercion. James' exposition of Catherine's relation to Sloper and to Townsend thus prepares the way for Isabel Archer's struggle with Osmond and the circumstances he creates in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In addition, as Patricia Meyer Spacks explains of adolescent fiction in general, James' dramatization of the moral dilemmas of the young adult serves as a formal device that engages the audience and "expands" the "reader's perceptions of the moral conflicts."²⁹ The dramatization of moral dilemmas also anticipates *The Portrait*.

In order to individualize the character and to experiment with the transforming power of consciousness, James endows Catherine Sloper with more psychological depth than any character before Isabel Archer. He dramatizes Catherine's growth not only through her conduct as she learns how to adjust to the manners imposed upon her by her father but also in the evolution of her awareness of what it is for one to live best, regardless of whether she is able to achieve that condition. Through such a dramatization of the effect of Catherine's circumstances on her psychological condition and on her conduct, James conveys his emerging interest in what he calls in

Hawthorne (1879) “the deeper psychology” and in the efficacy of the individual as a social force.³⁰ Catherine’s conscious resistance to Sloper’s restrictions registers her desire for independence and her interest in living. The Jamesian “heiress of all the ages,” as Philip Rahv calls her, evolves directly from the experiment in characterization carried out in *Washington Square*.³¹

Catherine’s capacity to shoulder the burden that Sloper imposes upon her and to grow stronger by bearing it is an important trait of the James heroine. Instead of crushing her, “the weight of the tax” triggers a growth of consciousness and a development of Catherine’s moral sense as it will trigger similar advances in all of James’ successive heroines. Victoria Rosenberg states in her analysis that Catherine’s endurance of the burdens placed upon her by her father and Townsend results in the formation of “her full and moral consciousness.”³²

The way James describes Maisie’s relation to her circumstances in the preface to *What Maisie Knew* (1897) can be traced to his experiment with Catherine Sloper:

The active, contributive close-circling wonder, as I have called it, in which the child’s identity is guarded and preserved, and which makes her case remarkable exactly by the weight of the tax on it, provides distinction for her, provides vitality and variety, through the operation of the tax. . . .³³

In the early chapters of the condensed novel, Catherine endures quietly while she sinks lower under the gravity of her taxing circumstances. But as her experience widens and her consciousness deepens, she responds to experience by learning the art of controlling parts of that envelope in a way that helps her in life without injuring others needlessly.³⁴ This approach to characterization differs significantly from earlier ones.³⁵

Christopher Newman of *The American*, for example, understands more, though far less than he needs to know, about himself and his relation to the world at the conclusion of the novel than he does when he meets Noémie Nioche in the opening scene. Unlike Catherine’s development, there is no growth of Newman’s mind, no “vitality and variety, through the operation of the tax.” Newman remains the kind of American who assumes that he ought to have his way because he has a fortune. Mme. de Bellegarde’s title for Newman, the “Duke of California,” underscores the bold and acquisitive attitude that identifies the character with the American business tycoon and stamps him for satire. Her caricature of him as a “type” is humorous because it describes him so accurately. James’ development of Catherine Sloper’s ability to “live,” as limited as it is, resists typing, extends beyond that of Newman and of all other characters before *Washington Square*, and anticipates later characters.

James demonstrates Catherine Sloper's moral vitality when she defies the limitations imposed by her father. Far from a "bundle of shawls," she becomes an active, kind, helpful, and dependable friend to the younger members of the neighborhood once she gains control over her life. She involves herself with the community in a personal and compassionate way. In contrast, Doctor Sloper has few friends and enjoys being "disagreeable" (p. 164).³⁶ Though Catherine's own life has been a failure by some measures, the role she adopts at the end of the novel, as James sketches it quickly, approaches that of a nurturing Jamesian tutor.³⁷ She becomes for others the mentor she never had for herself. Similarly, Isabel Archer faces circumstantial limits and returns to Florence in order to counsel Pansy to face and carry the moral burden Osmond imposes on her. Milly Theale overcomes the limits placed upon her by disease by giving Kate Croy and Merton Densher the opportunity for moral freedom when she leaves the two an inheritance. James dramatizes Maggie Verver's moral and mental growth by allowing her to find the range of her knowledge and power in order to guide and improve the lives of others.

Catherine's eventual ability to analyze others shrewdly while maintaining an appearance of simplicity counters her father's earlier charges that she is nothing more than an empty-headed girl. That she uses the keen power derived from awareness, analysis, and knowledge to protect herself, not to harm others, signals her moral superiority to her father. According to Daniel Mark Fogel, Catherine "progresses from the defenseless, sentimental innocence of her girlhood through her infatuation with the unscrupulous Morris Townsend to the higher innocence she attains in the difficult integrity of her rejection of Townsend when he renews his suit after her father's death."³⁸ Through the course of that progress she works out a code of behavior by which she finds the means to live as well as possible under difficult personal circumstances.

By sending Townsend away, Catherine upholds her own system of values, which she bases on an awareness of herself and of the circumstances of her life as they are rather than on fear or competition or revenge. Catherine never scorns, derides, or ridicules Townsend as her father did. When she recognizes that Townsend aims to marry her for her money, she does not resort to melodrama in a frantic attempt to recover the relation she had believed that they shared. Catherine's ultimate maturity may be seen by comparing her conduct with Townsend as she sends him away to Sloper's bathetic displays in the Alps and in Liverpool as he attempts to turn the clock of his relation with her back to the time of her powerless and non-threatening childhood. In her final encounter with Townsend, Catherine is able to act resolutely, tolerantly, and calmly because she

has learned to accept a condition of her life. She gains a measure of control over her life when she arrives at a simple but important understanding of how her circumstances limit her and how, within those limitations, she may live best. Unlike her father, she preserves no illusions.

Rosenberg points to Catherine Sloper's moral development: her silent struggle to free herself from Sloper's domination in the Alpine scene; her ability to cope with his obsessive control after their return from Europe; and her refusal to give up her moral simplicity for the artifice Townsend encourages her to adopt.³⁹ But James suggests Catherine's capacity for responding to "the weight of the tax" before any of the moments Rosenberg highlights. That capacity is essential to a definition of James' best characters. It also indicates the degree to which James individualizes Catherine by exposing the interaction of her mind and her circumstances.

One of the first indications that Catherine possesses sufficient intellectual material to grow and improve is evident early in the novel by her Maisie-like posture as an observer. Catherine's curiosity in her world and her reactions to it demonstrate James' attention to the action of the hermeneutic circle before Isabel Archer and the famous Chapter 42. James seems to prepare for Isabel Archer's well-known vigil in *The Portrait* when Catherine, like Isabel, receives impressions passively, holds them tightly in her mind for later consideration, and then displays the interplay of memory and consciousness to knowledge and behavior.

Before the novel opens, sentimental romances and her father's way of seeing shape Catherine's understanding of herself and the world. Yet shortly after James introduces Catherine, he illustrates the operation of her mind as she begins to reach a new level of understanding. As Catherine talks with Morris Townsend at Marian Almond's party, she sifts impressions under the weight of the occasion, makes judgments, and determines her status within the social network. James sets up the initial moments of growth by showing first that she relates what she sees to her usual standard for interpreting experience, the world of fiction. She thinks that "it was the way a young man might talk in a novel; or, better still, in a play, on the stage. . . ." But sexual attraction to Townsend urges her to transgress the familiar way of understanding experience, which no longer accounts adequately for her situation:

And yet Mr. Townsend was not like an actor; he seemed so sincere, so natural. This was very interesting; but in the midst of it Marian Almond came pushing through the crowd, with a little ironical cry, when she found these young people still together, which made every one turn round, and cost Catherine a conscious blush (p. 30).

At this point the novel focuses on circumstances that are particular to Catherine Sloper and separate from the satire. The "conscious blush" that results from Catherine's sudden awareness of herself from the point of view of the others indicates self-consciousness generated by Catherine's awareness of her tiny step toward independence, her attraction to Townsend. Marian Almond's "little ironical cry . . . which made everyone turn round" indicates exactly how out of the ordinary Catherine's behavior seems to another individual and then, upon realizing her own situation from the perspective of another, to Catherine herself. Thus she surprises herself as she surprises others. The blush briefly expresses Catherine's developing social maturity because it testifies to her internalization of the manners of her society and the extent to which she has begun to shake them off.

Isabel Archer undergoes a similar shock of recognition that also indicates maturation in Chapter 42 when her way of understanding her relation to Osmond and Madame Merle no longer serves her and she is embarrassed into realizing how limited her vision is. "Isabel's cheek tingled when she asked herself if she had really married on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with her money."⁴⁰ However in *The Portrait*, without the pressure to "condense," James develops that important moment of self-consciousness far beyond his sketch of Catherine's blush in *Washington Square*. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the earlier scene prepares the way for the later one.

James focuses attention again on the relation of Catherine's awareness of her circumstances when she hears her cousin call Townsend "conceited." Catherine responds, "Don't tell him he's conceited!" Her cousin replies, "I have told him so a dozen times." The narrator follows:

At this profession of audacity Catherine looked down at her little companion in amazement. She supposed it was because Marian was going to be married that she took so much on herself; but she wondered too, whether, when she herself should become engaged, such exploits would be expected of her (p. 31).

The brief incident between Catherine and Marian Almond reveals that Catherine's desire for experience extends beyond novels and plays and her father's epistemology to an imaginative appropriation of her cousin's life. Having been cut off from actual experience by her father, she must depend on the experience of another to interpret her relation to the world. Although he does not recognize the point in *Washington Square*, Paul Armstrong contends that such a moment in the fiction "reflects James' interest in the composing powers of consciousness; it also makes explicit the ordinarily implicit role of aspects and perspectives in representation."⁴¹ While Armstrong's point, and more recent ones by Sharon Cameron on "thinking" in James,

are not new in terms of *The Portrait* and especially of the later novels, James' stake in representing states of consciousness and the compositional and transformative powers of the mind should be recognized in *Washington Square*. Catherine's effort to project herself into other circumstances in order to understand and control her own experience indicates that she possesses an imagination similar in some fundamental ways to James' greater heroines. This evidence of James' interest in describing Catherine's mind in action answers most convincingly her father's self-serving view of her as a "bundle of shawls."

When Catherine's interests extend beyond novels and her father, Sloper moves decisively to restrict his daughter's experience by limiting her interaction with Townsend. But instead of submitting to her father, Catherine asserts her independence by deceiving him. What presses Catherine toward this radical step toward independence, is "the weight upon her mind" (p. 146), a phrase that anticipates Maisie's "weight of the tax." In both novels, of course, the "weight" defines conflicts between needs of daughters and fathers.

The event that predicts Catherine's independence most clearly and associates her most directly with the later heroines occurs after she returns with her father from Europe. When Mrs. Penniman presses Catherine for the latest word on whether she has been able to carry out her plan to change her father's opinion of Townsend, Catherine replies:

"I never tried it. . . . Father was never impressed in that way. He *is* artistic—tremendously artistic; but the more celebrated places we visited, and the more he admired them, the less use it would have been to plead with him. They seemed only to make him more determined—more terrible," said poor Catherine. "I shall never bring him round, and I expect nothing now" (pp. 190–91).

Having come a long way from the instant she displayed a "conscious blush," Catherine demonstrates in the preceding passage that she has matured enough to step outside of her immediate situation, to determine the boundaries of her envelope of circumstances, to transcend them imaginatively and to gain the upper hand in her struggle with her father over the control of her life. The ability to see oneself from the perspective of another identifies a significant moment in the growth of consciousness of the Jamesian hero because self-consciousness allows the hero to control conduct. Such a moment empowers the character to recognize what forces within its envelope of circumstances operate upon it. Once a character—or an actual individual—sees, understands, and confronts circumstances, one may act to change them. Catherine Sloper, not Isabel Archer, is the first heroine James uses to dramatize the achievement of intellectual and moral maturity. A review of analogous moments from

later novels fixes the place of *Washington Square* as a transition from the earlier novels of manners to the later novels of consciousness and from the previous novels of social commentary to the subsequent ones of individual responsibility.

In *The Portrait of a Lady* James shows Isabel Archer's ability to see herself from the perspective of the oppressive other, Gilbert Osmond. When Isabel requests permission to go to England to be with her dying cousin, Osmond ridicules her. At this moment Isabel observes that "Osmond possessed in a supreme degree the art of eliciting one's weakness."⁴² Isabel's ironic observation echoes closely Catherine's remarks on the successful "artistry" of her father. In *The Princess Casamassima*, Hyacinth Robinson realizes that his innocence and idealism have been manipulated by Muniment. In Greenwich Park Robinson speaks to Muniment regarding his own role as the point man to lead the terrorism of the anarchists: "I don't want to make a scene, or work on your feelings, but how will you like it when I'm strung up on the gallows?"⁴³ Late in *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver arrives at a similar epiphany concerning herself and her relation to others. Looking at her father, her husband, and Charlotte Stant, she realizes "the horror of finding evil seated, at all its ease, where she had only dreamed of good."⁴⁴

In all four scenes the central characters arrive at an important understanding of the circumstances that have conditioned their lives by seeing themselves and their circumstances from another perspective. When one sees and confronts circumstances, one may act to try to change them. Effective change cannot occur without such moments of self-consciousness. Once Isabel understands her relation to Osmond by seeing herself as he sees her, she can decide on what grounds and by what methods she should deal with him and cope with a central problem of living. At his moment of epiphany, Hyacinth understands the treachery of the anarchist movement generally and of Muniment specifically. Once he understands, faces, and accepts his circumstances, Hyacinth acts to change them. When Maggie Verver faces her father's role in her envelope of circumstances, she finds a way to circumvent his exercise of power and to act independently as an adult to influence her own condition. Catherine Sloper must acknowledge the scope of her father's power and its effect on her before she can improve her situation in a lasting way.

The central difference—no small one—between Catherine's epiphany and those of Isabel, Hyacinth, and Maggie rests in the degree to which James elaborates the event and thus the degree to which he emphasizes it. In the cases of Isabel Archer, Hyacinth Robinson, and Maggie Verver, James details the operation of his heroines' highly perceptive and curious minds at this crucial stage of

awareness. Pressures to “condense” *Washington Square* prevent such elaboration.

As James concluded the early part of his career, he seems to have gauged neither the complexity nor the rewards of concentrating his efforts toward an exploration of individualized characterization. In *Washington Square* James attempts to combine his early technique of social commentary (from which he gained his first literary rewards) through the satire of Sloper with his more recent interest in the exposition of his individualized central character. Nevertheless, both the exposition of character and the implicit commentary that the moral satire advances orient the reader to an emerging and recurrent theme in the novels. They both support a dramatization of the problem most people face when they try to gain maximum control of their lives without harming others. James represents this dilemma in novel after novel through his handling of the central power relation, here the relationship of Catherine to her father.⁴⁵

Since James tries to advance the theme of individual responsibility in human conduct in *Washington Square* with two narrative emphases in mind (the individualization of character and the social comedy) rather than subordinating one to the other (characterization as an element of the comedy of manners as in *The Europeans* and *The American* or manners as an element of characterization as in *The Portrait*), the two emphases compete against each other for attention and for the limited space in this magazine tale turned short novel. As a result, James seeks a strategy to overcome the limits and achieve his objectives. He economizes his use of local detail, which he calls “paraphernalia,” and the associated social comedy.⁴⁶ He also condenses his portrait of Catherine Sloper. The condensation prevents James from giving adequate treatment to either the social satire or the portraiture of consciousness. Yet the taxing problems of *Washington Square* force James to face and solve difficult compositional problems and to make key choices which, in turn, drive his maturation as an artist and enable him to achieve *The Portrait*.

By no means is *Washington Square* a work equal in skill or scope or complexity to *The Portrait of a Lady*. Neither should Catherine Sloper receive the amount of critical attention paid to Isabel Archer or even to Hyacinth Robinson. James does not endow Catherine with a mind as impressionable and intelligent as Isabel Archer’s or even Maisie Farange’s. But for all its problems of “thinness,” *Washington Square* is an important novel to consider as a decisive turning point in James’ career from the novelist of manners to the novelist of consciousness, personality, and the responsibility of individual power.

Henry James used his shorter tales, his “little tarts,” as he called them, in order to experiment with and test ideas he would refine later

for his novels, his "beef and potatoes," which now carry his reputation.⁴⁷ In many ways *Washington Square* is only a little tart that has been tasted by critics who expect it to have the texture and substance of the main course. *Washington Square* gains importance by coming out from under the shadow of *The Portrait* when it is seen and sampled as an experiment with form and theme in the process of James' development as an artist, rather than as a single work that may stand as a monument to his career like the later, larger novels. In its own modest light *Washington Square* discloses a shift in the course of James' artistic career and reveals a fountainhead of dominant themes and significant situations that recur in the middle and later novels. The situation of Catherine Sloper and her father anticipates Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Hyacinth Robinson and Christina Light and Paul Muniment in *The Princess Casamassima*, Maisie and her guardians in *What Maisie Knew*, Milly Theale and her doctor and her disease in *The Wings of the Dove*, and Maggie and Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl*. Finally, *Washington Square* marks a transition in James' moral position. His move away from typical characters and toward more individualized ones suggests a turn from the role social groups play in determining the fabric of a culture to an implicit exploration of each individual's responsibility to contribute to the condition of society by controlling the circumstances of life so that all may live better.

Notes

¹The range of critical approaches to *Washington Square* reflects James' twin emphases on manners and the operation of the mind in the transitional-preparational novel. For instance, Richard Chase (*The American Novel and Its Tradition* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1957], p. 129), F. R. Leavis (*The Great Tradition* [New York: N. Y. Univ. Press, 1973], p. 138), and James W. Tuttleton (*The Novel of Manners in America* [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972], p. 82) discuss the function of manners in *Washington Square*. F. W. Dupee (*Henry James* [New York: Dell, 1965], pp. 54–56), James W. Gargano ("Washington Square: A Study in the Growth of an Inner Self," *SSF*, 13 [1976], 355–62), David W. Gordon ("Washington Square: A Psychological Perspective," *Henry James: Washington Square*, ed. Gerald Willen [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1970], pp. 263–71), Leo Gurko ("The Dehumanizing Mind in *Washington Square*," *Henry James: Washington Square*, pp. 230–43), and Donald Hall ("Afterword," *Washington Square* [New York: New American Library, 1964], p. 190) probe the psychological dimension of the short novel. A third group of critics comes closest to a full explanation of the novel's particular complexity and critical problems because they attempt to understand both of James' emphases in *Washington Square*: Glauco Cambon ("The Negative Gesture in Henry James," *NCF*, 65 [1961], 337), Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley ("From *The Early Development of Henry James*," *Henry James: Washington Square*, pp. 278–83), Louis Kronenberger (*The Polished Surface: Essays in the Literature of Worldliness* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969], pp. 233–45), John Lucas ("Washington Square," *The*

Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James, ed. John Goode [London: Methuen, 1972], p. 40), and Richard Poirier (*The Comic Sense of Henry James* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967], pp. 145–82). Kelley also notes the preparational or “practice” function of the novel (p. 273). A notable exception to the three tiers of *Washington Square* criticism is Lauren Berlant, who sees the novel as a “case study” of the patriarchal society in pre-Civil War America (“Fancy-Work and Fancy Foot-Work: Motives for Silence in *Washington Square*,” *Criticism*, 29 [1987], 440).

²Cambon, p. 337.

³Cambon, p. 337.

⁴Henry James, *The Scenic Art*, ed. Allan Wade (1948; rpt. New York: Hill & Wang, 1957), p. 40; Henry James, *Henry James Letters*, ed. Leon Edel, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974–1984), II, 171.

⁵Sharon Cameron notes passages in early James novels in which “thinking” is explored (*Thinking in Henry James* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989], pp. 39, 41, 55, 77). Cameron does not, however, discuss *Washington Square*.

⁶James expresses his admiration and knowledge of technically polished plot and character contrivances of masterful playwrights, especially when they occur in satiric manner comedies (*The Scenic Art*, pp. 39–41; *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987], p. 216). Oscar Cargill notes the influence of the French stage on James’ fiction (*The Novels of Henry James* [New York: Macmillan, 1961], pp. 67–68).

⁷James conceives of the American man as a creature who lives in a world wholly antithetical to the family and who displays qualities wholly contrary to the “protection and inspiration” that characterizes his ideal guardian and tutor. James writes in 1898 that

the typical American figure is above all that “business man” whom the novelist and the dramatist have scarce yet seriously touched. . . . He is . . . driven above all by the extraordinary, the unique relation in which he for the most part stands to the life of his lawful, his immitigable womankind . . . who splash on the surface and ride the waves . . . while, like a diver for shipwrecked treasure, he gasps in the depths and breathes through an airtube.

See *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 655. He continues this unflattering picture, which is consistent with the one he draws in *Washington Square*, in the preface to *The Reverberator* (*The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur [New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1934], pp. 192–93). Victoria Rosenberg sees Sloper’s dominating ego rather than his business ethic and loneliness as his motive for acting badly (“*Washington Square*: ‘The Only Good Thing . . . Is the Girl,’” *DR*, 63 [1983], 57). David S. Reynolds notes that the mercenary physician who was patronized by upper-class ladies was common in nineteenth-century popular fiction (*Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989], pp. 219, 330).

⁸R. P. Blackmur, “*Washington Square* and *The Europeans*,” *Studies in Henry James*, ed. Veronica A. Makowsky (New York: New Directions, 1983), p. 186; Poirier, *The Comic Sense of Henry James*, pp. 182, 183.

⁹James, *Henry James Letters*, I, 385.

¹⁰James, *Henry James Letters*, II, 97.

¹¹James, *Henry James Letters*, II, 105.

¹²James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, pp. 11–12.

¹³James, *Henry James Letters*, II, 193–94.

¹⁴James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, p. 140. Daniel Mark Fogel studies James' use of his shorter works as a way of preparing the ground for his longer novels (*Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981], pp. 30, 140, 144, 152). See also James Louis Kraft, *The Early Tales of Henry James* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1969); Robert C. McLean, "The Completed Vision: A Study of *Madame de Mauves* and *The Ambassadors*," *MLQ*, 28 (1967), 446–61; Krishna Baldev Vaid, *Technique in the Tales of Henry James* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964).

¹⁵Henry James, *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920), I, 412. (Lubbock errs in his headnote to this letter. See James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, p. 541.) Alfred Habegger ("Precocious Incest," *MR*, 26 [1985], 253–62), Blackmur ("Washington Square," pp. 186, 192), and Leon Edel (James, *Henry James Letters*, II, p. 205) glimpse James' preparational method but do not explain its importance for James criticism.

¹⁶*Henry James Letters*, II, 268.

¹⁷Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1953–1972), II, 398.

¹⁸*Henry James Letters*, II, 316.

¹⁹Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1876), p. 476.

²⁰*Roderick Hudson*, p. 479.

²¹*Roderick Hudson*, p. 480.

²²Henry James, *Washington Square* (New York: Harper Bros., 1881), p. 140. All quotations from *Washington Square* are from this edition.

²³For a more complete discussion of this point in *Roderick Hudson*, see my article, "James's Morality in *Roderick Hudson*," *HJR*, 11 (1990), 115–32.

²⁴Robert C. Le Clair, *Young Henry James: 1843–1870* (New York: A M S Press, 1971), p. 53.

²⁵*Letters of Henry James*, I, 83.

²⁶Rosenberg, pp. 56–57; William Veeder, *Henry James—the Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 191–95.

²⁷*Henry James Letters*, II, 267, 268.

²⁸Cameron makes a similar point regarding James' interest in the transformative power of consciousness in his later work (pp. 18–21).

²⁹Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 184.

³⁰James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 368.

³¹Philip Rahv, "The Heiress of All the Ages," *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), pp. 104–25.

³²Rosenberg, p. 68.

³³James, *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 149–50.

³⁴Fogel conceives this maturation process as the typical Jamesian "pattern of spiral return," which raises Catherine to a level of "moral heroism" (p. 170).

³⁵Cameron differs sharply on this point. She reads elements of the exploration of consciousness that mark the later novels in ones written before *Washington Square* (pp. 32–82).

³⁶See Chapter 32, in which characters seem to enjoy, for malicious reasons, withholding from Sloper information concerning Townsend.

³⁷There is a similarity between the kinds of services that Catherine provides for the younger members of her neighborhood and the kindness with which Lord Houghton treated James during the novelist's first months in England early in 1877. The vocabulary James uses to describe his relation to Houghton is significant because it describes a model Jamesian tutor and suggests that Houghton's lessons inform the qualities that James later gave to his best characters, including his sketch of Catherine Sloper: "Lord Houghton has been my guide, philosopher and friend—he has breakfasted me, dined me, conversatized me, absolutely caressed me. He has been really most kind and paternal . . ." (*Henry James Letters*, II, 110).

³⁸Fogel, p. 170.

³⁹Rosenberg, pp. 58–65.

⁴⁰Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1881), III, 35.

⁴¹Paul Armstrong, "The Hermeneutics of Literary Impressionism: Interpretation and Reality in James, Conrad, and Ford," *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition: The Sea: From Elemental Stirrings to Symbolic Inspiration, Language, and Life-Significance in Literary Interpretation and Theory*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Boston: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 491.

⁴²*The Portrait of a Lady*, III, 179.

⁴³Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1886), II, 35.

⁴⁴Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), II, 243.

⁴⁵James performs a similar gesture of tutorial kindness in his 1889 letter to the Deerfield Summer School (*Henry James Letters*, III, 257–58) and to his younger friend, W. Morton Fullerton (*Henry James Letters*, III, 370–71). Poirier points out the similarity of Ralph Touchett's tutorial gesture of caring for Isabel's financial security to James' tutorial gestures (p. 188).

⁴⁶*Henry James Letters*, II, 267, 268.

⁴⁷*Henry James Letters*, IV, 684.