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# Citational Strategies and Literary Traditions: Placing Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*

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Henry James's first known reference to *The Portrait of a Lady* served as an act of placement that would begin to define that novel. James wrote to William Dean Howells in 1876, "My novel is to be an *Americana* – the adventures in Europe of a female Newman, who of course equally triumphs over the insolent foreigner" (James, 1999b: 74). While James would not publish *The Portrait* even as a serial until late 1880, his figuring of his main character in 1876 in relation to the symbolically named central character of *The American*, Christopher Newman, is significant. The *Americana*, a forward-charging and also symbolically named Diana-like Isabel Archer, is to represent the New Woman as Newman represented the New Man. Both "triumph" unconventionally after struggling with "foreign" manners and matters.

Yet there also would be important differences between the characters and novels. Newman, after failing to marry Madame de Cintré, and through her into a noble French family, returns to the United States humbled in achievement yet richer in wisdom than when he left for France. Isabel Archer, on the other hand, after rejecting the proposals of a charming English nobleman, Lord Warburton, and her American suitor, Casper Goodwood, and after receiving an immense inheritance, accepts the proposal of a widower, Gilbert Osmond, a Europeanized American with a vulnerable daughter who needs Isabel's protection. There is no doubt about the status of Osmond's entrapment, which he accomplishes with the help of his daughter's mother, Madame Merle, whom Isabel admires. In the novel's important chapter 42, to which I'll return later, the narrator thus reveals Isabel's thoughts about her awful life with Osmond, which had begun for her with so much promise:

Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. Of course it was not physical suffering; for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. Under all his good culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers. (James, 1963: 396)

Embedded within that narrative of awareness of her circumstances is James's reference not only to a suffocating world that Christopher Newman had escaped when he left Claire de Cintré and her ultra traditional family, the Bellegardes, but also to Hawthorne's tale of self-destruction, "Egotism, Or, the Bosom Serpent," and thus to James's own allegory of the human heart in *The Portrait*. Moreover, the reference points to James's admiration for Hawthorne's skill at conveying "the deeper psychology" (James, 1984a: 368) and in so doing orients us to James's attention to the psychological states and pressures that account for his interest in Isabel Archer and the drama of her growth in consciousness throughout the course of the novel. Hers is a development that Christopher Newman did not share. For what James writes in his New York Edition preface to *What Maisie Knew* applies also to his strategy for placing Isabel Archer within the grasps of Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle:

The active, contributive close-circling wonder, as I have called it, in which the [character'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 – which would have done comparatively little for us had n't it been monstrous. (James, 1984b: 1164)

The pressures that define Isabel Archer's situation are considerable. They account in part for the power of the novel.

They account also for the development of Isabel Archer's awareness and her sense of herself, and thus motivate the plot of the novel as they motivate her as a character. For, as James wrote in "The Art of Fiction": "When one says picture one says of character, when one says novel one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed at will. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (James, 1984a: 55). The incidents that make up Isabel's character, in combination with an extraordinary and active mind, include the loss of both her parents and a strong attraction to the exotic, which in the novel Europe, Osmond, and Madame Merle represent. In addition, her uncle, after being persuaded by his son, Ralph Touchett, leaves her a fortune after his death. This fortune then proves her undoing because it establishes her as a target for Osmond's attack. Her own egotism in combination with the money and a fear for what might happen to her should she engage the world more directly conspire in her decision to reject the

great Lord Warburton's marriage proposal. James represents the failure of her marriage to Osmond in the one reference to their child, a son, whom Madame Merle says, "died . . . six months after his birth" (1963: 334). That Isabel sees and feels the misery of her stepdaughter, Pansy Osmond, only serves to increase the weight of the tax she feels and knows. In addition, other placement strategies point the importance of *The Portrait of a Lady* as a central Jamesian and American novel.

"Under certain circumstances" (1963: 5): the opening words of *The Portrait of a Lady* signal the significance of conditions and situational relations for the novel and James's fiction overall. Situation and circumstances ground not only plot elements, but also James's very style in the novel, which he organizes both explicitly in relation to contemporary discussions of "art" and implicitly in relation to popular fiction. Furthermore, indirect discourse in *The Portrait of a Lady* functions as a way Henry James can place his reader in a kind of parallel perspective with the point of view of Isabel Archer and, at times, other characters. James's use of sustained indirect discourse, his famous point-of-view technique, distinguishes the novel – especially in the crucial chapter 42, Isabel Archer's vigil, during which both she and we readers come to understand the full severity of her situation. That situation itself is a consequence of her intelligence, innocence, youth, separation in Europe from American manners that had organized her world, great inherited wealth from her uncle, and a terribly mistaken marriage to cruel and abusive Gilbert Osmond.

Osmond's home stands as a symbol of his own suffocating life, into which he draws Isabel Archer:

this ancient, solid, weather-worn, yet imposing front, had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask of the house; it was not its face. It had heavy lids, but no eyes . . . . The windows of the ground-floor, as you saw them from the piazza, were, in their noble proportions, extremely architectural; but their function seemed to be less to offer communication with the world than to defy the world to look in. (James, 1963: 209–10)

In typical Jamesian style, the house represents its owner. And it is with the owner of this forbidding and foreboding place that Isabel is seduced (partly by herself) into marriage. It is a marriage she hoped would benefit Osmond, whom she believed needed her and whose cruelty she could never see until it was too late. At one crucial moment in the novel's famous chapter 42, however, she realizes that Osmond hates her: "She was morally certain now that this feeling of hatred, which at first had been a refuge and a refreshment, had become the occupation and comfort of Osmond's life" (1963: 399). Just as the situation and circumstances of character and plot produce for James Isabel Archer, so do the particular circumstances and situation of the novel's composition expose its importance as an American novel. Such situations locate this importance first in James's association of the novel with Turgenev and a continental novel tradition. Second, they point to James's far more covert positioning of the Americana novel with the novel of the American girl and thus to some

contemporary popular fiction, such as Maria Susanna Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854).

In the New York Edition preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, James emphasizes the foundational importance of situation and relation for Isabel Archer and thus her novel, a technique which he claims to have learned in Paris from Ivan Turgenev:

I have always fondly remembered a remark that I heard fall years ago from the lips of Ivan Turgeneff in regard to his own experience of the usual origin of the fictive picture. It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were. He saw them, in that fashion, as *disponibles*, saw them subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications they would be most likely to produce and to feel. (James, 1984b: 1072)

James's acknowledgement of Turgenev's lesson of placement in the design of the *Portrait* has been recognized for a long time, most recently by Millicent Bell (2009: xlv–xlvi). Nonetheless, James's association of the development of his notion of the Americana to Isabel Archer with Turgenev is important because it sets James's novel within a particular Franco-Russian novel tradition. In so doing, that placement obscures the relation of *The Portrait of a Lady* to other traditions, such as those it has with the American popular novel of the later nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Such placements also emphasize James's reputation as an international novelist because it reminds us of the way James drew from a range of international sources – Russian, French, English – to shape and represent himself as novelist. The strategy allows James to encourage readers to figure the novel as a transatlantic one rather than a strictly American one – even beyond its well-known and important “international theme” of the American girl in Europe, a subject that has been discussed at length.<sup>2</sup> In this way, his novel, as well as Isabel Archer, negotiate an American tradition, American manners, within a European context or placement.

Placement and the consequent meaning shaped by it is especially important for *Portrait*, because James's revisions for the 1908 New York Edition version of the novel change its shape and alter its placement in relation to the nineteenth-century novel, calling attention to James's development as a writer. The revisions alter the nature of Isabel Archer and thus of her novel. Nina Baym, like so many readers, is struck by the consequences of those revisions, which, like the novel's New York Edition preface, radically shift the novel from its context with the novel of the American Girl to one with the international novel of consciousness:

The changes of 1908, transforming the story into a drama of consciousness, overlaid and in places obliterated the coherence of the 1881 version. Omissions and additions altered

all the characters significantly. . . . But the version of 1881 is a different work. . . . Once recovered, the 1881 story with its topical focus on the “new woman” and its skillful use of fictional formulae, may prove to be just as interesting as the version of 1908. (Baym, 1976: 184–5)

James’s attention in the New York Edition preface to the links between *The Portrait* and Isabel Archer, Turgenev and the novel’s origin, certainly underscore the changes Baym finds.

F. R. Leavis praised James’s middle-period novels at the expense of his later ones by citing especially the achievement of *The Portrait of a Lady* (Leavis, 1973: 126–7). However, the text Leavis famously, and evidently unknowingly, used for his study and to praise James’s earlier novels, especially *The Portrait* from 1881, was the later revised New York Edition version from 1908, which, as Baym (1976) shows, exhibits many of the traits of those very novels from James’s later period. Leavis’s mistake, however, in his discussion of the “conditions” of *The Portrait* (“By conditions I mean the inner conditions – largely determined as they are by outer. I mean the essential interests and attitudes that characterize his outlook on the world and his response to life,” Leavis, 1973: 126), is an example of how important is the particular placement of *The Portrait of a Lady* when one attempts to estimate its significance in a discussion of the American novel. How one understands Isabel Archer is a function of the terms by which one understands the character and novel.

The particular efforts by Leavis to place and understand James’s novel – and thus James as novelist – are matched by the efforts of James himself to place and represent *The Portrait of a Lady*. Like Leavis in *The Great Tradition*, James performs a feat of double placing, substituting one version of the novel when writing about the other, in the preface to the New York Edition of *Portrait*. At the preface’s opening James places readers and himself into the Venice of the novel’s original composition in 1879, rather than offering readers a context for the revised version of the novel they will read following this preface. Given the extensive revision James completed for the New York Edition (Baym, 1976; Krause, 1958; Mazzella, 1975), James’s orientation of his reader to the first version as preparation for reading its revision appears to be a strategy as odd as Leavis’s use of the revision to discuss the merits of the first version. But James’s strategy, like Leavis’s mistake, serves to organize James’s entire *oeuvre* around or from *Portrait*, designating *Portrait* as the novel by which all other novels by James may be read.

After the New York Edition preface’s opening in Venice, recalling the novel’s first composition rather than the circumstances of the revision, one of James’s most impressive and important placement strategies in the preface is to locate *Portrait*’s composition in terms of particular biographical moments, especially those from the mid-1870s in Paris and, then, with Ivan Turgenev. James uses Turgenev in the New York Edition preface similarly to the way Leavis places James himself: as the artist whose work represents the seamless integration of art and life, novelistic and poetic innovation and the achievement of what Tamar Yacobi calls “generic,” “existential,”

and “perspectival” principles (1981: 116–18). But the particular way James employs Turgenev in the preface – and this point is crucial – gives him a way to pattern the relation of the mimetic to the epistemological realism in the novel, the relation of his representing life and art. The pattern thus enables James to show his readers that he preferred to be read as his readers were reading Turgenev, next to whom he places himself as artist. The placement of his work next to the Russian’s enables James to highlight the art of his novel and, at the same time, to downplay the degree to which *Portrait* imitated life. For it is in James’s negotiation of the publicity of art and the privacy of actual talk that the Turgenev references and James’s resistance to colloquial dialogue cast light on the place of *The Portrait of a Lady* as an American novel.

If Leavis’s placement of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the “Great Tradition” in terms of James’s integration of life and “art” is meaningful as a way to begin thinking about James’s place in the English novel tradition, then James’s deployment of dialogue, which as obviously as anything else marks his relation to the romance and to the novel, to “art” and to “life,” can also be used to think about and establish the place of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the history of the American novel. In other words, dialogue marks the placement of *Portrait* that Leavis values and James highlights through the Turgenev references regarding the composition of his novel. In addition, dialogue represents James’s private relation to Turgenev and provides a way to uncover *The Portrait*’s relation to popular fiction.

Concerning the relation of the novel not to Turgenev’s art but to the popular novel of the American Girl (a relation that James’s preface strategy conceals), Baym writes that “we can recapture the context of *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881 to some extent ourselves by so simple a historical exercise as reading the serialization in the *Atlantic Monthly* from November 1880 through December 1881, amidst many fictional and essayistic treatments of the new American girl” (Baym, 1976: 194). Such treatments of the American Girl were related, according to Baym, to “the obvious and widespread change in feminine aspirations epitomized by (though by no means confined to) the women’s movement.” Thus Baym continues:

The formula was both a conservative answer to, and a literary exploitation of, the new woman’s situation – a modern version of the essential feminine fable, the rescue story. An intelligent and attractive young girl, who is independent and wishes to remain so, is “rescued” from this false conception of an appropriate feminine life, by love and marriage. When she falls in love, the natural impulses denied by her desire for independence assert themselves. She finds independence incompatible with a woman’s way of living. But this is a happy discovery, for the traditional feminine life fulfills her, and she learns the error of her earlier aspirations. (Baym, 1976: 194)

Baym’s placement of the earlier version of *Portrait* in its contemporary literary context is important because it marks James’s awareness of and close attention to fiction being written in the United States as he wrote the novel. Sarah Wadsworth’s work on James and contemporary fiction (2001, 2008) details the degree to which James used

elements of popular women's fiction in "Daisy Miller" and, with Baym's and Leavis's work, illustrates the ways that James incorporated elements of the woman theme, as it were, from English as well as American fiction. James's use of such elements, then, in novels and tales throughout his career (e.g., "Daisy Miller," *Washington Square*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Bostonians*, *The Awkward Age*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*) functions as his way to place his own work for contemporary readers who would have been aware of the references and narrative relations of which Baym and Wadsworth remind us. At the same time, James's own placement of the novel with Turgenev, which tends to obscure its relation to contemporary popular novels, deserves comment. James's representation of dialogue serves as a telling textual sign of his management of those two relations.

Sight, seeing, vision, the gaze, scene, picture, looking and other terms related to the eyes – as important as these discussions are, especially in relation to *The Portrait of a Lady* – have been a staple of Henry James scholarship for some time (e.g., Cohn, 1978; Collins, 1976; Johnson, 2007; Liebman, 1971; Marshall, 1983). As Christina Britzolakis writes, "the critical history of James's texts has been dominated by a pre-occupation of point of view as a means to access the psychology of an individual subject" (2001: 369). At the same time, there has been relatively little work done on James and the ear and hearing or sound, especially talk, which carries much of the burden of the realistic novel. Isabel Archer may live and behave in her grandmother's house and later in the Touchetts' like a "real" American girl, but she doesn't talk like one. The lack of critical attention to sound and talk in James is something of a puzzle, even given the literal way "point of view" tends to govern much of the discussion of James's fiction and especially that of *The Portrait*. In fact, the representation of sound, especially speech, in addition to what could be shown and seen, was an important issue in theoretical discussions of fiction during the later nineteenth century. It's also a puzzle in James's particular case because his selection and omission of sound/talk plays an important role in the story of his development as a novelist as well as the story of his revision to *The Portrait*. Evidence suggests it was also important to him as an individual. James's representation of talk also helps place his fiction in later nineteenth-century debates regarding the novel in the United States. In this, James's figuring of Turgenev plays a key role.

James was aware of his tendency in dialogue to lean toward the artificial rather than to the realistic. As he wrote to Grace Norton in 1876:

The "ought to" I used as a colloquialism (some people are talking,) because of the (, as I am conscious, deserved) reproach often cast upon me of making my characters express themselves too neatly + bookishly. But it is certainly ugly, + I will in future compass realism by some other device.<sup>3</sup>

James's comment here as he places his own writing in the context of his time is telling. He opens using "a colloquialism" self-consciously, as if to prove not only that he is aware of contemporary speech, but that he can, when he wants or needs to do so, write

as people speak every day. He also acknowledges the artificiality, the “bookish” quality of the speech of his characters overall, which, in general, wouldn’t change through the rest of his career. It couldn’t. For if it did, he would lose the charge of meaning contained in exchanges such as that between Isabel Archer and Madame Merle on clothes. Says Madame Merle (her name, meaning “blackbird,” itself a literary pun):

“When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we are each of us made up of a cluster of appurtenances. What do you call one’s self? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us – and then it flows back again.” (James, 1963: 186)

But having acknowledged to Grace Norton the criticism of his bookish writing and proven his ability to write colloquially, he asserts his refusal to adopt that particular “device” for signaling the stylistic fashion of the day, realism. His refusal to employ such a device is in line with his resistance to mimetic realism, his citations of Turgenev, and the placement of *The Portrait of a Lady*. That resistance, however, did not begin for James with *The Portrait*.

A story about young Henry James, which pivots on his attention to sound over sight, is relevant. A sketch by James in a copybook where he would keep his practice stories when he was a boy was read by his brother, William, who also saw beneath the sketch the following caption line: “The thunder roared and the lightning followed!” (William James, 1920: I: 20–1). William used his brother’s mistake to ridicule Henry’s lack of knowledge of the speeds of sound and light, thus of the natural world. Embarrassed, Henry responded by concealing his writing. The incident is not only a sign of Henry James’s lack of attention to natural phenomena. It also represents his awareness of the importance of sound in conveying the drama, not the actuality, of the moment, since the roar of thunder is usually more impressive – and thus more meaningful in this context – than the flash of lightning.

Later in his career a circuit of sound during composition enabled James to dictate more easily. But here too, it was sound James produced and shaped privately rather than imitated. The sound of the Remington typewriter, provoked by James’s voice, established a kind of music by which he would then issue the dictation of his fiction in return to his typist, whose mechanical record of those very words would establish the sound that would help make possible the next sentence and so on. James’s typist used a colloquialism to name the procedure: “jawbation” (James, 1987a: xxii).

Perhaps the relative lack of critical attention to sound and talk in James has to do with the way we commonly think of James and “The Question of Our Speech” or “The Speech of American Women” – what Rob Davidson calls the “condescending” and “patronizing” (2005: 18, 19) Henry James – a discontented, intolerant and old-fashioned complainer, a crank – someone whose views really don’t merit a lot of analysis in relation to his fiction. But there has been some good work on James and sound



that can help place *The Portrait of a Lady* both within James's career and within the nineteenth-century American novel.

Leonardo Buonomo notes James's attention to a range of sounds in New York in *The American Scene*, including "the inner voice of the metropolis" and the speech of immigrants. It is the "sound of foreign idioms in the city," Buonomo contends, that led James "to ponder the question of language, both as a mark of identity and a medium of artistic expression" (2008: 268). Sound, for Buonomo, is important, if not central, in James and to James. Studies of James's interest in sound technology include Richard Menke's (2000) examination of the telegrapher in "In the Cage," who learns about the world through the clicking of her "sounder." Adrian Poole's "Henry James and the Mobile Phone" develops some implications of talk and sound, "privacy, curiosity, and sociability," and, most importantly, "intimacy" (Poole, 2008: 80). Poole's and Menke's essays on technology, talk, and intimacy may be placed next to a line from an October 1912 Henry James letter to Mrs Ford:

I am on the telephone now – 51, Rye, if you please – and am quite proud and heartened up at being able to be conversed with. Converse, converse – though I fear I may seem but to mock at you when, glancing back at your letter, I find in the left-hand corner of your paper [presumably a telegram or cable address] beautiful provision, apparently, for everything *but* conversation. (James, 2007b: 45)

James's letterhead shows that in addition to the phone at his home in Rye, he also had one installed in his Cheyne Walk flat in London, where the number was 2417, Kensington. The sound of talk seems to have been a source of intimacy for James, an aspect of his private life. In-person and telephonic vocal communication supplemented writing in the establishment and maintenance of friendship, at least, and at best served the relationship better than writing. So close to and yet distinct from James's famous command to himself to "convert, convert" (1913: 214, 215) is his imperative to Mrs Ford to "converse, converse" that we see at once the place of conversation in James's personal life and also its proximity to but difference from his idea for fiction.

Yet talk alone seems not to have been always the best way the private James could develop that intimacy. In addition, he used the very type of colloquial, un-"bookish" speech in his letters and probably on the phone that he refused to use overall in his public writing and communication. In his letters James regularly mimics colloquial and idiomatic speech: "leeter" for "letter," "probaly" for "probably," "Cunarder" for "Cunarder," "vill" for "will," and so on.<sup>4</sup> James's notebooks too show the importance of his imaginative ear and of the power of speech to produce and encourage intimacy in the way he speaks to himself as in, "*causons, causons, mon bon*" and, ironically here, "*voyons un peu, mon bon*" (1987a: 261, 133).

James's attention to the accuracy of dialectic pronunciation for the Christopher Newman character in his stage version of *The American* is recorded in a surviving play script in his own hand (James, 1990: illustrations following p. 220). But while there is plenty of evidence to indicate James's good ear and accurate aural memory and his

ability to represent that talent in writing not meant for publication, he almost never seems to have cared to use that talent in his fiction, although, of course, other writers were using dialect to represent "real talk." The human voice that creates talk and the ear that hears it was important not only as a source of intimacy for James, who seems to have been a superb listener, but also of humiliation and alienation. According to Shelley Salamensky:

Henry James's first conversations with Oscar Wilde, the premier talker of his time, were less than successful. Reports from a Boston party lionized Wilde's "amusing" talk while lampooning James's as "boring" . . . Their ensuing one-on-one encounter, according to Richard Ellmann, was worse: James remarked, "I am very nostalgic for London." Wilde could not resist putting him down. "Really?" he said. . . . "You care for places? The world is my home." . . . By the end of the interview James was raging. (Salamensky, 1999: 275)

Just as speech carried the danger for humiliation and the destruction of intimacy, so did its representation with literal accuracy seem to have signaled an artistic or aesthetic danger for James.

Aside, for example, from the Roman maid's call of "Madame Milla" to Daisy in "Daisy Miller" (James, 1999a: 266), his implicit commentary on Millicent Henning's class-based use of "Plice" for "Place" and "shime" for "shame" in *The Princess Casamassima* (1987b: 180), and Mrs. Muldoon's "plased" for "pleased" and "crape" for "creep" in "The Jolly Corner" (1996: 702), during most of his career James infrequently ventured into the realm of precise aural realism in his fiction, even though he demonstrated his knowledge of it and his excellent ability to represent it elsewhere (Sydney J. Krause's conclusion about the increase in the number of contractions in the revised *Portrait* aside).<sup>5</sup> Henry James's reason for not representing everyday speech in *The Portrait of a Lady* and, overall, in his fiction likely involves the contemporary controversy over dialect and James's association of such language with the personal and private, while he associated fiction and art with matters public. Thus James's choice not to use dialect in his fiction probably had more to do with nineteenth-century controversies over the nature of realism and art, and James's preferences about his positioning of his work in relation to those controversies, than James's ability to use his own ear and convert what he heard to fiction. If one of James's strategies for placing *The Portrait of a Lady* within the range of contemporary fiction about the American Girl, the sound of her speech, was not a part of that placing, what she said and to whom was.

The rendering of sound and speech as dialect and conversation was as hotly debated around the time James wrote *The Portrait* as was the rendering of scene and, in the same registers, art and accuracy. To achieve one was not to achieve the other. Mark Twain opens *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with a response to the debate. The "author" claims dialectic accuracy in the "Explanatory." Huck, the novel's main narrator, questions immediately the veracity of "Mr. Mark Twain," who "mainly . . . told the truth"

(Twain, 1959: 10, 11). For many of the *Atlantic Monthly's* important and influential reviewers, accuracy was not always valued beyond all else as the distinguishing feature of realism. Instead, critics and some fiction writers tended to downplay the literal representation of life when that representation dominated the abstraction of art. Horace Scudder wrote of William Waldorf Astor that it was as if “the author’s historical knowledge were always getting the better of his art as a novelist” (quoted in McMahon, 1973: 28). Writing of George Eliot’s *Romola*, James himself commented that a “twentieth part of the erudition would have sufficed, would have given us the feeling and colour of the time, if there had been more of the breath of the Florentine streets” (1984a: 1006). This is not to diminish the importance of accurate observation and listening, but to distinguish its aesthetic from its historical importance. As Helen McMahon reminds us, “it is George Parsons Lathrop who gives the most decisive statement that art is something more than literal or scientific recording. . . . Such transcription he would not even call ‘realism.’ To him it is, instead, mere ‘literalism.’” (McMahon, 1973: 30).

Too-perfect dialect, like too-perfect pictorial “literalism,” was regarded by some of those writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, where James published the serial version of *Portrait* (November 1880–December 1881), as a potential barrier to a reader’s apprehension of character and situation as art. Charles Miner Thompson wrote in 1895 that “surely the proper course, in works not avowedly scientific, is to use only as much of local peculiarity of speech as will give proper dramatic value to the talk of a character, as will not confuse the eye with queer spelling, or render any remark unintelligible without special knowledge” (quoted in McMahon, 1973: 22). Likewise did James, signaling this standard, “cry out” in 1870 “for a little romance, a particle of poetry, a ray of the ideal” (1984a: 862). It is in this last point by James, most of all, that lets us mark not only James’s reluctance to display his ability to mimic talk in his fiction, but also his placement of his own fiction in the debate regarding one contemporary understanding of the art of fiction.

A writer’s reliance on “literalness” seems to have been understood as a compensation for a shallow imagination. To avoid literalness, then, even in a character’s speech, was to represent one’s imaginative depth. In a May 1874 review T. S. Perry accuses Trollope of an inability to see beneath the surface of the world, which is indicated by his attention to literal realism (McMahon, 1973: 25). This is the same charge James, complaining about William Dean Howells’s lack of intellectual curiosity, made in his August 9, 1871 letter to Charles Eliot Norton. In that letter James wrote that Howells had so little intellectual curiosity, that “here he stands with his admirable organ of style, like a poor man holding a diamond + wondering how he can wear it. . . . For myself, the love of art and letters grows steadily with my growth” (James, 2007a, 2: 415). That this idea of fiction is reinforced in the *Atlantic* by Perry is significant, since Perry did much of the reviewing (and thus importing) of French fiction for the readers of the *Atlantic*. It is in James’s commitment to that continental tradition, represented both for him in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* and elsewhere and also for *Atlantic* critics in Turgenev, that we can find both one reason for his tendency to leave con-

versational realism out of his fiction in favor of conversational beauty, as it were, and also the importance that private talk, actual not bookish talk, holds for James in the representation of human intimacy.

Writing in 1884 while rereading Turgenev's fiction, James is "struck afresh with their combination of beauty and reality" (1984b: 1023). And it's the beauty part, the part that hasn't a literal relation to the world we would inevitably know if we had sufficient time and opportunity, that relates not only to James's refusal to employ dialect, but also marks his place in the debate about the nineteenth-century novel. Oddly, while there is no shortage of contemporary commentary on the relation of manners, motives, or location to indicate the best writing – whatever it was judged to be – there is far less discussion of the proper specification of the accuracy of character speech. George P. Lathrop's 1874 review of Turgenev's *Smoke* is an exception. For that novel, wrote Lathrop, is "a studiously simple record of what two persons said and did" (quoted in McMahon, 1973: 56). In this, it is neither Balzac's nor George Eliot's example that informs James's representation of talk, but Turgenev's.

What James admires in Turgenev's fiction – or anyone else's – expresses what he values in his own. In his 1873 review of Turgenev, James specifies that Turgenev's "line is narrow observation" (1984b: 968), by which James means that Turgenev "notes down an idiosyncrasy of character, a fragment of talk, an attitude, a feature, a gesture, and keeps it, if need be, for twenty years, till just the moment for using it comes, just the spot for placing it" (1984b: 969). It's not the exhaustive duplication of the world Turgenev observes that merits James's attention and praise. It's the selective, well-chosen, and well-placed detail that matters. For James, the single detail produced by the "narrow observation" is the means by which the novelist produces art. And the aim of art, as James promotes it, is not to duplicate the world we know, but rather, it seems, as James, writing on Turgenev, puts it, to give "us absolutely a greater amount of information about the human mind" (1984b: 973). This, James continues, is "the great question as to what a poet or novelist is" (p. 992). Given the way James builds *The Portrait* by way of his series of selected details, moments, scenes from his history of Isabel Archer, one could say that the representation of the character's mind is likewise "the great question" of what a novel should be as well. Literal accuracy in all things, talk included, is not a part of that "great question." For James the record of talk has other meaning, which is recorded in his letters, dramatized in his mimicry, and displayed in his extraordinary 1884 *Atlantic Monthly* memorial essay on Turgenev.

In that essay the language of talking serves as a trope not for Turgenev's art but for his moral significance to James, for his humanity, and thus serves James with a way to represent his intimacy with the Russian and his awareness of "life." James not only uses Turgenev's "voice" to include him in a tradition of Russian writers, but also to insist that "he was an individual" (1984b: 1008). James continues to distinguish Turgenev's writing from his talk, his importance as an artist from his importance as an individual. In so doing, James continues to underscore the relative lack of importance talk, represented as he heard and remembered it, would have in his fiction. At

the same time, he emphasizes the importance of talk to foster and promote private relationships:

for it was not only with the pen that nature had given Turgéniéff the power to express himself. He was the richest, most delightful, of talkers, and his face, his person, his temper, the thoroughness with which he had been equipped for human intercourse, make in the memory of his friends an image which is completed, but not thrown into the shade, by his literary distinction. (James, 1984b: 1008)

Even James's aural memory of Turgenev becomes a metonymy for the man, but not for his writing, as he indicates in the following parenthetical remark, itself a part of but also graphically separate from the discussion of Turgenev's technique in fiction, which surrounds it: "(I give his name [Ivan Serguéitch] without attempting the Russian orthography, as it was uttered by his friends when they addressed him in French)" (1984b: 1010). And it's his talk, James's memory of it at least, that James uses to represent the man, at Flaubert's home on Sundays, a place where the literary was abundant, yet the personal was most significant: "It was . . . in Flaubert's little salon . . . [that] Turgéniéff's beautiful faculty of talk showed itself at its best. He was easy, natural, abundant, more than I can describe, and everything that he said was touched with the exquisite quality of his imagination" (1984b: 1013). At the same time, distinct from those meetings and conversations, "No one could desire more than he that art should be art; always, even, incorruptibly, art" (p. 1014). When James visited Turgenev's apartment, fittingly in terms of the logic of his essay, there was little to show that he was a "man of letters." "Few books even were visible; it was as if everything had been put away" – except his talk (p. 1018).

James's description of the way others talked about Turgenev both reinforces James's point concerning the importance of selected details in artful fiction and also reminds us of the relation of James's privately held sense of talk to the importance of human relations:

One of our friends had, when he spoke French, a peculiar way of sounding the word *adorable*, which was frequently on his lips, and I remember well his expressive prolongation of the *a* when, in speaking of the occasion afterwards, he applied this term to Ivan Serguéitch. I scarcely know, however, why I should drop into the detail of such reminiscences, and my excuse is but the desire that we all have, when a human relationship is closed, to save a little of it from the past – to make a mark which may stand for some of the happy moments of it. (1984b: 1021)

Talk, then, was never lost from James either in meaning or in its idiosyncratic nuances. It represented the life that he knew and he lived. When it played a particular role in his fiction, however, which was not often, it wasn't to represent him directly or his life. It was as a detail to convey a broader view of art, which, in turn, could represent James's wider, not narrower, imagination. This was the strategy he employed and

wanted to emphasize and have recognized in *The Portrait*. Isabel Archer's story is one of art, not a copy of life. At the same time, a placement of *The Portrait of a Lady* wants consideration of its relation to popular American fiction of its day, in addition to continental fiction and to that promoted by the *Atlantic Monthly*. That relation is all the more important because James worked to conceal it.

Like many writers past and present Henry James borrowed and thus cited plots, genre styles, and character types. He borrowed from Turgenev's *Virgin Soil* to write *The Princess Casamassima* and from *As You Like It* for *The Europeans* (Nazare, 1997). Pierre Walker (1995) describes James's incorporation of French literature, and Adeline Tintner puts the matter of James's borrowing plainly when she wrote that "James's early tales contain many borrowings from literature and in his own words show 'an admirable commerce of borrowing and lending [...] not to say stealing and keeping'" (quoted in Wadsworth, 2001: 125 n.18). Such explicit borrowing enabled James to represent his authorial identity through his association with the authors of those borrowed citations. In turn, that identity provided a way for readers to view him and his writing. But James did not restrict the strategy to his fiction. References to Balzac and Scherer and George Eliot are examples of this citational strategy in his critical writing. His failed attempt to penetrate the inner circle of French literary culture early in his career, and his habit of dropping important names into his letters home during his early London years, are examples of that associational strategy in his life. Leavis's inclusion of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the "Great Tradition" depends upon the similarities between James's novel and English ones Leavis hears James announce in *The Portrait*.

There is also unacknowledged, private borrowing and citation, perhaps more significant than the acknowledged placement of the novel. Developing implicitly Nina Baym's point on James's placing of *The Portrait* in the discourse of the American Girl, Sarah Wadsworth (2001) has shown James's borrowing of the "American Girl" for "Daisy Miller: A Study" from Mary Murdoch Mason's *Mae Madden: A Story*, which itself participates in the then-familiar subject of the young American woman traveling abroad. Written only a year after "Daisy Miller," *The Portrait of a Lady* also participates in that narrative, extending James's work in the earlier story. By associating "Daisy Miller" with *Mae Madden* James could find a place in the circle of writers writing and readers reading the American Girl. James did not begin a conversation with popular fiction with "Daisy Miller" and *The Portrait of a Lady*. His first published tale, "The Story of a Year," shows his familiarity with popular fiction and his willingness to borrow from it. Adeline Tintner writes, "certain details indicate that he may have been reading [Alcott's] *Hospital Sketches*" (quoted in Wadsworth, 2001: 125, n.18). Beyond the borrowing from Mason and Alcott, James's comments on the place of popular fiction, especially Cummins's transatlantic blockbuster, *The Lamplighter*, as a formative influence on his literary imagination is worth remembering because it serves as an example of how important it was for James to place *The Portrait* not only in terms of Turgenev and the art of the novel, as it were, but also in terms of more commercially viable popular fiction of the time, albeit implicitly.

James's familiarity with popular American fiction is shown in his review essays as well as in his borrowing for his fiction. Of 54 reviews published between 1865 and 1914 on American fiction and nonfiction, 19 are on work we could name now as "popular" or "noncanonical" American fiction by men and women and 10 on writers whom we would see now as canonical.<sup>6</sup> That is a general remark. In James's day, of course, all of the 29 essays addressed writers whom readers were reading, publishers were publishing, and reviewers were reviewing without regard to our notions of canonicity and related issues. In addition to the 29 reviews of American fiction, James published 10 more in an "American Letters" series and also several longer essays that deal with American literary culture, such as "The Future of the Novel" (1899) and "The New Novel" (1914). So by both his citational strategy in his fiction and his professional work as a reviewer and critic we can estimate James's close and frequent reading of the popular fiction that informed not only "Daisy Miller" but *The Portrait of a Lady* too.

While James openly acknowledges what he learned from writers such as Balzac and Flaubert and, as Leavis reminds us pointedly and repeatedly in *The Great Tradition*, George Eliot, through whose association he sought to represent his public identity, James played down an association with those whose reputation he judged would frustrate his reputation as an artist. This indirection has been seen before, only in a slightly different way. For example, Gianna Fusco reminds us of Donatella Izzo's point on James's indirection in "Daisy Miller." As Fusco translates Izzo: "The text deploys . . . [certain norms] only in order to elude systematically such identifications, and to propound itself as 'other than' those labels it seems to validate" (Fusco, 2008: 110). This position is not contrary to Sarah Wadsworth's, nor does it deny James's citational strategy. Instead, it notices James's indirection and suggests a way that James could both cite and then distance himself from the consequent association. James's claim in his 1865 review of Alcott's *Moods* that "We are utterly weary of stories about precocious little girls" (1984a: 189) even as precocious girls would remain for him a subject through much of his career is consistent with a method of citing and then de-emphasizing that association. The strategy of using the citation but denying its source seems not to have been unusual for James.

Michael Anesko (2008) exposes two elements of what I'm offering as James's indirect citational method. One element overlaps with and also adds to what Leavis, Baym, Wadsworth, Fusco, Izzo, and Tinter have already shown about James's covert and ironic citations of popular fiction. The second gives an additional way to understand James's borrowing from popular fiction, which Henry Nash Smith noted as James's "unacknowledged attraction toward the procedures of the popular novelists" (Smith, 1974: 47).

Anesko shows that important elements of James's critical portrait of Hawthorne were taken, some nearly *verbatim*, from Émile Montégut's writing on Hawthorne, which James, in *Hawthorne* itself, indicates he read. Anesko writes: "In composing his critical biography, Henry James was, if not an outright plagiarist, then at the least a transparently deceptive appropriator of another distinguished critic's work" (Anesko,

2008: 36). What is important here is additional to both the borrowing that Wadsworth finds and the indirection that Donatella Izzo and Gianna Fusco describe. Rather than making explicit or implying an association between himself and the one from whom he borrowed in order to affect the reception of his public identity, Anesko reveals that James's borrowing from Montégut occurs in the context of James's explicit *derogation* of Montégut. Thus James conceals his borrowing by exaggerating Montégut's position and then placing himself in opposition to the now morphed French critic. Anesko puts it this way: "By emphasizing a distinction more apparent than real, James could reinvent many of Montégut's insights as his own" (2008: 44). The analogous position for James as fiction writer is to emphasize a distinction between his writing and that of more popular writers that by his description was more apparent than real. With this strategy, James could reinvent or at least offer a convention or strategy of popular writing as his own. Daisy Miller as James's invention of the American Girl is one example of the success of this strategy. His famous chapter 42 in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer's vigil, in the context of his recurrent derogation of popular fiction, especially Cummins's *The Lamplighter*, is another. But before proceeding, we would need to see similarities between James's style and that of the popular writers from whom he separated himself. In the case of popular fiction, James's relation might be seen as his camp element, in the original sense of the term: exaggerated and over the top, and also finding his place in that famous formulation made by Susan Sontag so much later, treating the frivolous with seriousness and representing the serious frivolously. And if James is read as a campy writer, the irony of camp provides distance between himself and what he has made the camp from.

Jonathan Warren recognizes James's career-long use of fictive strategies that are common to so-called "sensational" romance literature, certainly to the kind of fiction like *The Lamplighter* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. Warren names these strategies "camp" Henry James. For Warren James's camp is an "irresistible blend of the base and the exalted [which] allowed plenty of opportunity for dialogue brimming with ominous innuendo and insinuated abysses, for plot rife with theatrical, over-the-top turnabouts, and for character and situation broadly evoking despicable extremity barely concealed . . . by the accouterments of excessive refinement" (Warren, 2008: 375). If James did inherit by training and taste a preference for what he offered as campy strategies from popular fiction and then employed them in order to take part in the culture of the popular novel while also separating himself from it – whether to subvert it as Smith contends or to use it to his own popular advantage as I propose, then it would make sense, first, that the connection between James and popular fiction would be found in those narrative elements that defined to a large degree popular fiction for James and, second, that those elements would persist in his style.<sup>7</sup> One important relation is that of *The Portrait of a Lady* to *The Lamplighter*.

James's autobiographical writing shows the way formative moments in his past both gained symbolic importance in his imagination and also persisted in his fiction. Just as his grandmother's peach trees that James recalled so fondly in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913: 4, 70, 71) found their way into *The Portrait of a Lady* (1963: 22–3)



– serving the same meaning in both places, “to represent but the boundless fruitage of that more bucolic age of the American world” (1913: 70), so did some of the popular fiction he loved as a boy find its way into his writing later and signal his placement of *The Portrait of a Lady* in relation to popular fiction. Rather than representing “the bucolic age of the American world,” such fiction represents for James the world of adulthood, independence, the forbidden and exciting. James tells us that popular fiction became a part of his consciousness when he visited the *New York Tribune* office with his father. During that visit, James writes, he became aware of a new novel by Solon Robinson, “rather oddly entitled ‘Hot Corn.’” He continues, “I also became aware that even the most alluring fiction was not always for little boys to read. . . . I remember the soreness of the thought that it was I rather who was wrong for the book – which was somehow humiliating” (1913: 75–6). One page later, with the subject of popular fiction and its highly personal meaning having been broached, James connects that first moment of his fortunate fall from the innocence of fresh peaches, which recall “the general Eden-like consciousness” (1913: 71) to the experience of “Hot Corn.” Important is James’s introduction to and finally deprecation of Cummins’s *The Lamplighter*, which he associates with the experience of discovering Robinson’s *Hot Corn* in the *Tribune* office:

An absorbed perusal of *The Lamplighter* was what I was to achieve at the fleeting hour I continue to circle round; that romance was on every one’s lips, and I recollect it as more or less thrust upon me in amends for the imposed sacrifice of a ranker actuality – that of the improper Mr. Robinson, I mean . . . There was no rage at any rate in *The Lamplighter*, over which I fondly hung and which would have been my first “grown-up” novel – it had been soothingly offered me for that – had I consented to take it as really and truly grown-up. (James, 1913: 77–8)

In addition to standing for James as a sign of his slide into the world of popular fiction and for us of how deeply embedded in his memory was popular fiction (despite his distancing himself from it with the “had I consented to take it really and truly as grown-up”), the persistence of *The Lamplighter* also signals the way it and the fiction it represents to James remained a part of his writing and, perhaps, of himself, at the same time as he did not celebrate the relation.

A study of James in terms of some of the narrative strategies of popular fiction provides a way to understand *Portrait* and James as novelist. An important moment in *The Lamplighter* and one in *The Portrait of a Lady* demonstrate James’s citational method and thus his relation to popular fiction. Each fictive moment is pivotal because from those points each respective heroine becomes an adult, as it were, setting out from that moment in the plot on a course of suffering and duty fitting to the discourse of female adulthood in popular fiction. And like Wadsworth’s work with “Daisy Miller” and the American Girl, I don’t suggest that James necessarily borrowed directly from a single example (here Cummins’s novel) – though it might have been the conscious or unconscious choice. Instead, I would speculate that the particular

fictive moment – like the American Girl – was a known and expected element of the popular genre, which by so citing James would suggest his association with those popular writers and give readers something they would regard as familiar without having to announce the citation or the association more directly.

In *The Lamplighter*, the central character, Gertrude Flint, is forced to make a choice that, like Isabel Archer's in *The Portrait of a Lady*, centers on the achievement and use of her "freedom." This is, as Baym (1976) teaches us, a common enough plot situation, which is, after all, part of the point. Gertry's moment of clarity about herself and her relation to the world, like Isabel Archer's after her, follows immediately an intense argument with a domineering man, who, the narrator tells us, "was one of those persons who never believe themselves in the wrong" (Cummins, 1995: 182). Unable to sleep that night after the upset of the argument, which has forced her to examine the state of her life and consider her departure both from the domineering man and the girl who depends on her – plot elements James uses in *Portrait*, Gertrude

seated herself at the window, where, watching the now descending moon, and the first approach of dawn, she found, in quiet self-communing, the strength and courage which, she felt, would be requisite to carry her calmly and firmly through the following day; a day destined to witness her sad separation from Emily, and her farewell to Mr. Graham. . . . (Cummins, 1995: 144)

Of course Gertrude leaves as a confirmation of her independence. Later, under circumstances that define her care for Emily as reconfirmation of that independence, she returns; a plot device that James also uses in *The Portrait* when Isabel leaves her oppressive situation in order to care for someone who is dying (her cousin Ralph) and then returns to care for someone who depends on her (her stepdaughter, Pansy Osmond).

The scene in *Portrait* is touching in a campy, operatic sort of way, depending, as does *The Lamplighter*, on the obvious and traditional meaning associated with the language of light and dark. In Cummins's novel the light is shown first from the nominal lamplighter, Trueblood Flint, and then from the moon and stars. For Isabel, witnessing her own passage to adulthood, the light of truth shines from her cousin, Ralph Touchett: "Ralph's little visit was a lamp in the darkness . . . He made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been" (1963: 400).

Whether the parallels in the scenes and the novels are deliberate or are due to James's knowledge of popular conventions and thus take part in the kind of campy rhetoric of popular writing may be beside the point. What matters most is James's lifelong attention to a range of popular fictions, his incorporation of important elements of them into his own fiction, his refusal to show his borrowing when it doesn't suit the identity he seeks to offer the public, and his choice at the end of his career, nearly at the end of his life, to use an important and popular novel, *The Lamplighter*, to mark – either figuratively or actually – a significant moment in his own development as a novelist. We can use these observations of citational strategies in the

narrative to look for others that, like those Wadsworth has located, may help to describe James's debt to and association with popular fiction of his day not only as a reviewer but as a novelist. We can study that strategy and those associations to learn not only the importance of popular fiction in the literary culture of the United States in the nineteenth century – so much of which we've forgotten – but also to the work of writers we continue to remember, such as Henry James.

## NOTES

- 1 The work of Pierre A. Walker (1995), Anne-Claire Le Reste (in her dissertation "La Question de la Réalité dans les Romans de la 'Période Médiane' de Henry James (1881–1890): Le Réalisme à L'épreuve du hors-texte." Université de Rennes 2, 2007), and Annick Duperray (2006), among others, add to our understanding of James and continental literature.
- 2 For discussions of James's fiction and the American Girl, see Baym (1976, 1978), Fowler (1984), and Wadsworth (2001, 2006, 2008), for example.
- 3 Letter to Grace Norton, March, 31, 1876. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1094 (899).
- 4 In letters to Thomas Sergeant Perry, April 18, 1864 (Duke University microfilm); to William James, May 21, 1867 (Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1094, 1925); to William James, March 22, 1874 (Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1094, 1959); to Mary Walsh James, June 8 or 9, 1876 (Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1094, 1837).
- 5 It's relevant that Krause's study of the New York Edition revisions for *Portrait* shows that James was able to advance both the art of the novel (in terms of greater "precision and particularity" of metaphor, Krause 1958: 84) and a more natural, less bookish-sounding dialogue through "a simpler, more relaxed syntax" (p. 84) and "the introduction of contractions and colloquialisms" (p. 85). James's later essays on "American Letters," which he published in *Littérature* April to July, 1898 (James, 1984a: 651–702, esp. 658 [on Hamlin Garland]; 662, 672 [on Whitman], 697 [on contemporary speech]), also show a greater acceptance of the use of the colloquial in fiction than he had been willing to express in earlier writing.
- 6 A breakdown of James's 54 reviews of American writing: 29 total essays on fiction, comprising 19 total essays on popular fiction, with 10 on popular women fiction writers (e.g., Julia Constance Fletcher, Helen Hunt Jackson, Harriet Spofford) and 9 on popular male fiction writers (e.g., Henry Harland, Julian Hawthorne, Henry D. Sedley), and 10 on now canonical American fiction writers (e.g., Rebecca Harding Davis, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Dean Howells, Nathaniel Hawthorne); 25 essays on other American writers (poetry, nonfiction). Add to this total (54) 10 essays on "American Letters" and his several longer essays that deal with American literary culture, such as "The Future of the Novel" (1899) and "The New Novel" (1914).
- 7 In a long tradition of reading the novel as anything but camp, Sigi Jöttkandt (2005) and Peter Rawlings (2008) offer two of the most recent studies.

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