GUSTAVE FLAUBERT AND HENRY JAMES:
A STUDY IN CONTRASTS
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SUMMARY

This thesis is not primarily a study of Flaubert's influence on James, nor is it much concerned with making comparisons between their novels. It tries to suggest to the reader the critical confrontation which results from considering together the different kinds of art for which each writer stands. Its main subject is the contrasts between their novels and, to make these contrasts clearer, each novelist is discussed independently of the other. Reference back and forth between the novels - for instance, between Madame Bovary and The Portrait of a Lady - is made but it is kept implicit.

After describing how it is proposed to do this, the thesis proceeds to broach one of its central pre-occupations: the elusiveness, for the nineteenth century novelist, of a fully "tragic" art. This theme is initially explored through a discussion of Flaubert's "œuvres de jeunesse" and his letters and then through James's critique of Flaubert's novels. It is suggested that, whereas Flaubert's thought is potentially "tragic", James's response to Flaubert reveals what is "un-tragic" in his own thought. This explains his resistance to the content - as opposed to the form - of Madame Bovary. An attempt to qualify James's criticisms of the novel, together with those of Arnold and Sainte-Beuve, is made through a detailed analysis of it which begins by looking at some of the passages which Flaubert omitted from the final version. It is argued that all three critics lamented the absence from Madame Bovary of precisely the kind of emotional personal involvement with its heroine which Flaubert had been at such pains to discipline in himself. They wanted a more reassuringly hopeful novel than Madame Bovary is and in wishing that Emma had been nobler, and easier for them to identify their own humanity with, they showed their own
proneness to a kind of bovarysme. It is Flaubert's ability to make the reader see his own humanity in Emma's which exonerates him from Arnold's charge of inhumanity. It is suggested that Flaubert was not, like James, concerned to present life through the eyes of the exceptional individual because his art was more "general" in scope.

There follows a description of the conflict within Flaubert's art between his desire for "impassibilité" and his need to subscribe to a kind of post-religious determinism. The former is illustrated by his response to Shakespeare and by his rendering of the landscapes in Madame Bovary, the latter by the way the novel is plotted. What saves his art from the excesses of determinism is that its "tragic" force is rescued from exaggeration by his sense of comedy. This comedy is what has been least appreciated by Anglo-Saxon readers of the novel. The argument for seeing Madame Bovary as "tragic" is then qualified with the help of D.H. Lawrence's discussions of the novel. Only a limited kind of tragedy is open to Flaubert: he succeeds better in making Emma's world seem "tragic" than in giving the stature of tragedy to Emma herself - he is, as Lawrence suggests, afraid to let her nature expand. However, Lawrence's argument that Flaubert's mistake was to try to put his tragic sense into characters too small to sustain it is not accepted. It is argued on the one hand, that Emma Bovary is not, as James and Lawrence felt, simply a little person; on the other hand, that Flaubert's own peculiar tragic sense found its happiest expression in smaller, less conscious people than Emma. Far from trying to invest Emma with his own feeling for tragedy, Flaubert withholds it from her. The discussion of Flaubert concludes with an examination of Un Coeur Simple and La Legende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier. This questions James's notion that Madame Bovary is completely successful at a formal level and goes on to suggest that
Flaubert's art has a richer form, and is nearer tragedy when, as in the case of St Julien, he did not have to deal with a modern subject.

At this point the argument turns to James, to Roderick Hudson. It attempts to show that James was in no position to criticise Flaubert for writing life down by dwelling on characters incapable of fully living it. This is what he was doing himself, without realising it, in siding with Rowland Mallet against Roderick. It is suggested that when James's imagination penetrates most deeply in this novel its findings run counter to the rationalised, surface meaning of his art. This tendency, which makes James's novel both so fascinating and so unsatisfactory, is closely bound up with his adoption of the technique of the "central consciousness".

The difference between his handling of this technique and Flaubert's handling of it is brought out through a consideration of The American, The Europeans and Washington Square. Whereas Flaubert ironises on the self's sense of its own uniqueness James tends to corroborate that sense of uniqueness by being a partial, over-sympathising narrator of what goes on in a character's mind. The context of this reading is a discussion of James's predilection for "romance" - as exemplified both by these novels and by his critique of Flaubert - which suggests that his art may be grounded in a standing away from life more radical than that which Flaubert is usually accused of. Throughout this discussion an attempt is made to question Dr Leavis's reading of James and his dismissal of Flaubert: Dr Leavis's thought is seen as antipathetic to the notion of tragedy.

The core of the discussion of James centres on The Portrait of a Lady. It is questioned whether the novel succeeds in being either truly "tragic" or truly "comic". James is seen as investing too many of his own feelings in Isabel Archer herself to give an account of her marriage which has sufficient human coherence for Osmond's point of view to be imagined too.
(There is an implicit contrast with Flaubert's account of the marriage of Emma to Charles Bovary.) It is argued that James's less morally directed perceptions about Isabel nonetheless undermine his wish to present her as a kind of tragic heroine at the same time as he tries to give that wish scope. It is far from clear that she really desired that richer life which Osmond encouraged her to hope for and then, apparently, deprived her of. James succumbs to the temptation of pitying Isabel and misses his chance of achieving a "tragic" understanding of her story. The upshot of the argument is that it is difficult to read The Portrait without feeling that thought and imagination often work at cross purposes in it. This does not necessarily mean that it is a failure.

The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of James's criticisms of L'Education Sentimentale and a comparative study of that novel, The Princess Casamassima, The Bostonians and In the Cage. The object of this conclusion is to qualify the central argument of the thesis by describing the qualities which James's art possesses and Flaubert's lacks, qualities which help to suggest what is valid in James's critique of Flaubert. It is still maintained that James's own limitations prevented him from doing full justice to Flaubert but the thesis tries to end by raising questions rather than by supplying conclusions. James's reading of Flaubert provides the occasion for a perennial debate about the different directions which the novelist's art can take.
NOTE

Unless otherwise stated all references in this thesis to works by Flaubert are to Oeuvres Complètes de Gustave Flaubert, 22 vols (Conard, Paris, 1926-1933), and all references to works by James are to The Novels and Stories of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock, 35 vols (Macmillan, London, 1921-1923).

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

**For Works by Flaubert**


ES = L'Education Sentimentale: Histoire d'un Jeune Homme.

MB = Madame Bovary: Moeurs de Province.


OJI = Oeuvres de Jeunesse Inédites, 3 vols (Conard edition).

**For Works by James**

Amer. = The American

AN = The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, ed. with introd. by R.F. Blackmur (1934).

Bost. = The Bostaniens.

CT = The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. with introd. by Leon Edel, 12 vols (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961-1964).

ELE = Essays in London and Elsewhere.

Eur. = The Europeans: A Sketch.

FPN = French Poets and Novelists.

NN = Notes on Novelists and Other Notes.

PC = The Princess Casamassima.

PL = The Portrait of a Lady.

PP = Partial Portraits.

RH = Roderick Hudson.

SL = The Selected Letters of Henry James, ed. with introd. by Leon Edel (1956).

WS = Washington Square.

The abbreviations GF (for Flaubert) and HJ (for James) are also used, with some reluctance, in footnotes.

Unless otherwise stated the place of publication of books with titles in English is London and of books with titles in French Paris.
CHAPTER ONE

A Comparative Approach to Flaubert and James

Before beginning this thesis I spent two years in North America and then a year in Paris. Wherever I happened to be during this time I was reading French, American and English novels. The habit of looking at them in relation to each other thus became a natural part of that inveterate process of comparing foreign countries with one's own country which is the experience of any traveller. I found the study of the nineteenth century novel overlapping with my day to day observations of life in the present. This must be a familiar feeling. An interest in the past begins and ends in the present, just as, perhaps, an interest in a foreign literature finds its deepest roots in an interest in the literature of one's own country. In each case it is as differences become clear that a comparative habit takes over and then, because of the need to make sense of a bewilderingly rich experience, thought is forced upon one.

How can we reach a simultaneous awareness of disparate ways of seeing life which gives us more than a baffled sense of their disparateness? How respond to two such different writers as, say, Flaubert and James together and continue to respect the uniqueness of each of them? In considering such questions two equally inadequate approaches, each vying with the other, begin to offer themselves to the critic: a compulsion to schematise and a wish to lapse into mere relativism. We hurry after quick connections across centuries and continents, or we dub a lazy habit of calling the past the past and the foreign the foreign by the grander name of pragmatism. We are faced by one of those problems which we may try to solve but which never really do seem soluble.
It seems best to begin a description of the methods of this thesis on a personal note because it may help to make clearer that what I am going to say about "comparative literature" is not a mere gnawing at a bone of academic contention. It is, in any case, "personal" only in the necessary, non-subjective sense of that word to say that a wish to write about the writers of the past begins in present issues. The reason for beginning from personal experience here is that it clarifies some of the ways in which a joint-study of two writers in different languages is difficult - difficult in a way that a comparison of two writers in the same language is not. The first difficulty which arises is that the critic, however widely he has read to equip himself for the task, is faced with the fact that one of the languages he is dealing with will not be his native language. This can be a handicap even for the most bilingual and biliterate - as one can see in the slightly erratic judgements about English verse which a Charles Du Bos could make. A disadvantage in point of culture is also, of course, something which the critic can turn to advantage if he is prepared to respond to French literature as an Englishman or to English literature as a Frenchman, if he does not try to cover up his partiality of viewpoint by a pose of cosmopolitanism. The reason I mention this is that it indicates some of the other factors which make a comparative study difficult. If one asks an Englishman why he loves his Shakespeare or a Russian why he loves his Pushkin it is soon clear that more than his literary taste is involved: his feeling is compounded of all sorts of social, religious and national responses as well. All these things bulk largely in comparative study, especially when the writers discussed are of different nationalities from the student himself. They are among those things which prompt thought and discrimination at the same time as they remind him of everything in his judgements which must always remain
provisional. They make it clear that any method of comparison we can invent is much more of an acknowledgement of our difficulties than a sign of our ability to resolve them. They remind us not to succumb to the main temptation of the comparatiste: the illusion that what we have learnt about other literatures will permit us to survey the whole field from above. The essential feature of whatever method one chooses is, therefore, that it must be all the time adapting itself to the complexities it tackles and that it is all the time a make-shift way of making the best of one's limitations.

I put this emphasis on what makes "comparative literature" a formidable subject, evoking a simultaneous feeling both of its problems and of one's own inadequacies for coping with them, not to suggest that it is simply daunting but as a way of pointing out the value it might have. This value I have in mind is not something often visible in the pages of journals like Comparative Literature or La Revue de la Littérature Comparée. It would perhaps be surprising if it were. Faced with the kind of problems I have sketched out one is tempted to opt for the schematic and then swathe it in pedantry. What frequently happens is that the questions raised by looking at two writers in different languages together get shelved by reducing the comparison to the study of how one writer was an "influence" on the other. Article after article applies this technique with meticulously detailed scholarship and in a spirit of narrow positivism. A sufficient accumulation of biographical material plus a careful cataloguing of resemblances between plots, themes, phrases, techniques and so on in two different books will come to seem good grounds for claiming that one writer learnt from another. What is finally a speculation about a process in a writer's mind which we can never fully understand appears to become susceptible of proof. There are several disadvantages to this method.
Firstly, it seems to reduce creative learning to a kind of imitation with personal variations grafted onto it. Then, even more surprisingly, it often tends to lay stress only on the writer influenced, leaving the influencer as a sort of given and known quantity. Also, it has the effect of confining two great writers to just those elements in the one which might influence the other. Similarities are made to seem more important than differences. The result is a mechanistic model of literary history in which the originality of each writer in a tradition is played down and replaced by a series of assumptions about him. The writers seem to become counters for the critic to play ingeniously with instead of being worlds for him to explore. At best, the individuality of only one of the two writers is illuminated at the expense of the writer who preceded him. Often, the reader is confronted with a factitious hybrid - a Stendhal/Tolstoi or a Ruskin/Proust - which has more reference to what has gone on in the critic's mind than to what his mind has been working on. In other words, a concentration on influences - especially when they are not seen in the context of a specific tradition - can be a hindrance to genuine comparison.¹

Anyone who has read a lot of "comparative" articles will, I hope, excuse, in what I say about them, an element of parody which may seem unfair to the real but limited kind of usefulness they have. I mention them

1. I have had to simplify and generalise these criticisms here but similar points are made in a more specific context in my review of Michael Egan's HJ: The Ibsen Years (1972) in The New Edinburgh Review, no. 21 (1973), 30-32. They might also be made about Philip Grover's 1972 Cambridge Ph.D. thesis HJ and the French Literary Mind. A more circumspect discussion of HJ's debt to the French novelists occurs in Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, The Early Development of HJ (1930). All of these critics seem to me to fall down at times by trusting too quickly to the justice of HJ's views of the writers they think influenced him. (N.B. Unless otherwise stated, London is the place of publication of all books in English mentioned in this thesis. In the case of English editions of books first published in the U.S.A., however, the publisher is given.)
simply to provide a context for the explanation of a different approach and not in order to grind an axe. The point is that there is no inherent reason why comparative studies should be restricted to this rationalising amalgamation of writers simply because there are a few facts which link them together. Comparison depends as much on the points at which two writers are different and unique as on what they have in common. A writer has to be unique to create new life for the tradition he finds himself in. This seems a basic proposition to begin from, even if we do not care to take it to its romantic extreme, as Baudelaire did in his article on "L'Exposition Universelle de 1855":

Dans l'ordre poétique et artistique, tout révéléur a rarement un précurseur. Toute floraison est spontanée, individuelle. Signorelli était-il vraiment le générateur de Michel-Ange? Est-ce que Pérugin contenait Raphaël? L'artiste ne relève que de lui-même. (2)

Roland Barthes expresses a similar point of view, at the same time making it clear that there are also dangers in seeing each great artist as being just a sort of supernatural apparition. He is criticising the kind of tracking down of influences which he finds endemic to literary studies in French universities:

... les différences qui existent entre le modèle et l'œuvre (et qu'il serait difficile de contester) sont toujours mises au compte du "génie"... les ressemblances de l'œuvre relèvent ainsi du positivisme le plus rigoureux, mais par une singulière abdication, ses différences de la magie. Or ceci est un postulat caractérisé; on peut soutenir avec autant de droit que l'œuvre littéraire commence précisément là où elle déforme son modèle... (3)

In comparing two writers especially when they write in different languages, it is plain that this deforming (or transforming) of the "modèle" has much

2. "Exposition Universelle 1855", Curiosités Esthétiques in Oeuvres Complètes de Baudelaire, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec (1954), p.694. (Unless otherwise stated Paris is the place of publication of all books in French mentioned in this thesis.)

to do with the fact that one writer is bringing the perceptions of a different mind, culture and social context to bear on another. This means that his learning is not simply a process of finding out what is already there but also a process whereby what is there will inevitably seem different from the way it seemed to its creator. It can be understood in new ways and it can also be misunderstood. Lucien Goldmann puts the consequences of this for the critic very clearly, if rather heavily, in his *Le Dieu Caché*:

... on isole de leur contexte certains éléments partiels d'une œuvre, on en fait des totalités autonomes et l'on constate ensuite l'existence d'éléments analogues dans une autre œuvre, avec laquelle on établit un rapprochement. On crée ainsi une analogie factice, laissant de côté consciemment ou non le contexte qui, lui, est entièrement autre et qui donne même à ces éléments semblables une signification différente ou opposée. (4)

The reasonableness of this may dissuade one from thinking in terms of influences but it is not a bar to comparisons, although it reminds us that we can only compare writers or understand a foreign literature if we have first taken note of the ways in which such studies solicit us to superficial thinking. James himself took note of this early on in his career as a critic of French literature when he reviewed *Van Laun's translation of Taine's Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* in 1872. Taine seemed to him to be limited by the unconsciously assumed Gallicism of his judgements. It was not the fact that he refused to pretend to be English which irked James but that he had not sufficiently pondered his own Frenchness. In consequence:

... his treatment of the subject lacks that indefinable quality of spiritual initiation which is the tardy consummate fruit of a wasteful, purposeless, passionate sympathy. (5)


Such sympathy may well be the best of methods but need it be our only one? James abhorred schematic approaches to art himself and it would be self-defeating to apply them to his own work. Yet one needs some kind of method if one is interested in comparing the work of two writers, if it is only to find a way of relating the sympathy one has for each of them.

In this essay on Taine, James commends the "method" of Sainte-Beuve:

His only method was fairly to dissolve his attention in the sea of circumstance surrounding the object of study, and we cannot but think his frank, provisional empiricism more truly scientific than M. Taine's premature philosophy. (Shapira, p.43)

"Provisional empiricism" may seem unduly vague or fragmentary despite the delicacy the phrase implies. It might seem to lead me to the solution of writing two separate essays, one on Flaubert and one on James, and just putting them side by side. The method would then be simply to let the reader reflect on the connections and differences which would, hopefully, become apparent. This is a part of what I want to do but it is not the whole. One reason it could not be is that there is more connection between the two writers than this implies. What constitutes it is not so much the fact that they met or that we can find similarities of technique or theme in their works, nor even the fact that they saw their rôle as artists in similar terms, as that James wrote some of the finest criticism on Flaubert that we have in English. It is criticism which is always that of a fellow novelist and it gives us a rare sense of the complexity of the learning which goes on when one writer is creating work which, as Barthes puts it, "déforme son modèle". Actually, this process makes that word "modèle" seem misleading because what is revealed is something new about both writers and their common form.

6. GF's importance to HJ as an example of the Artist comes out in his review of volume IV of GF's letters, "Gustave Flaubert", Essays in London and Elsewhere (1893), pp.128-158.
The word "modèle" opens up an objection that Marius Bewley makes when he argues that James's deepest debt was to the tradition initiated by Hawthorne: "To focus James's art against a background of continental writers is not to focus it at all..." In fact, I am not proposing to "focus James's art" against any "source" at all and I certainly don't want to see Flaubert, whom I think the greater novelist of the two, as a "background". The influence of Flaubert on James is only an incidental aspect of this study, although I shall refer to it from time to time. My main intention is to try to set going some general thoughts about the way the novel developed in different literatures in the later part of the nineteenth century and this intention does, in a way, spring from a similar feeling to Bewley's. Flaubert and James seem to me radically different writers whose differences become especially clear at those points where they seem closest. It is this which makes the general interest of seeing them together. The ultimate trend of any comparison is towards a general thought, even though it must proceed by a scrupulous attention to particulars - in this case, by a sympathy for what makes particular works of art themselves unique. As a brief example of one such general issue which my subject opens up I could cite the fact that both Flaubert and James to some extent set out as exponents of a form which, broadly speaking, they saw themselves as inheriting from Balzac. To think about this fact is to begin thinking about larger things than the work of either of them, about the difference between the French and the Anglo-Saxon traditions and about the scope of the novel itself. These thoughts arise quite naturally from the perception that each writer transformed what he found in Balzac and that each did this in a highly personal way.

A speculation that might be worth advancing on the basis of James's

own development is that the influence of one writer on another is
clearest and easiest to trace in the apprentice work of the younger writer.
 Critics have often seen a generalised debt to the French novel in James's
work but they are only more or less unanimous about where to find it in
the case of the indebtedness of his earliest tales to Balzac. James had
begun reading Balzac in Newport, under the tuition of the painter John
La Farge, in the late 1850s. Like many other people he soon became
immersed. His companion at that time, T.S. Perry, recalled in a memoir for
Percy Lubbock's edition of James's letters that:

He was continually writing stories, mainly of a romantic kind.
The heroes were for the most part villains, but they were white
lambs by the side of the sophisticated heroines, who seemed to
have read all Balzac in the cradle and to be positively dripping
with lurid crimes. (9)

What critical comment there is on the earliest published tales is full of
remarks like these: "son véritable premier modèle fut Balzac"; "un monde
dessiné visiblement à la Balzac" and so on. With work written a little
later we still find comments like Saintsbury's stricture on The American -
"He has read Balzac, if it be possible, just a little too much..." - but
we also find a critic like Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, who is most concerned
with James's formative influences, saying of the earlier Roderick Hudson
that "He had passed beyond the place where Balzac could help him" (op.cit.,
p.215). James could still describe himself, in the late essay "The Lesson

6. See Notes of a Son and Brother (1914), pp.67-68.
10. Charles Cestre, "La France dans l'Oeuvre de HJ", Revue Anglo-Américaine,
X (1932), p.5.
11. R. Michaud, Mystiques et Réalistes Anglo-Saxons. d'Emerson à Bernard
Shaw (1918), p.166.
Card (1968), p.45. (See also Marie-Reine Garnier, HJ et la France (1927),
p.60.)
of Balzac" (1905), as "an emulous fellow-worker, who has learned from him more of the lessons of the engaging mystery of fiction than from any one else," but by that time he was well aware of the difference between Balzac's genius and his own. In the preface to Roderick Hudson he recalled that "one nested, technically, in those days, and with yearning, in the great shadow of Balzac". The emphasis is on a kind of imitative dependence which did as much to obscure as to reveal his own true direction: "nested", "yearning", "shadow".

This digression helps to define the kind of relationship between Flaubert and James that I shall not be looking for. I shall explore the significance of James's admiration for Balzac later, when I discuss Roderick Hudson, but for the moment I want to quote T.S. Eliot's suggestive placing of the debt. What he says helps to point me towards one way in which Flaubert and James can be seen together:

James owes little, very little, to anyone; there are certain writers whom he consciously studied, of whom Hawthorne was not one; but in any case his relation to Hawthorne is on another plane from his relation to Balzac, for example. The influence of Balzac, not on the whole a good influence, is perfectly evident in some of the earlier novels; the influence of Turgenev is vaguer, but more useful. That James was, at a certain period, more moved by Balzac, that he followed him with more concentrated admiration, is clear from the tone of his criticism of that writer compared with the tone of his criticism of either Turgenev or Hawthorne. In French Poets and Novelists, though an early work, James's attitude to Balzac is exactly that of having been very much attracted from his orbit, perhaps wholesomely stimulated at an age when almost any foreign stimulus may be good, and having afterwards reacted from Balzac, though not to the point of injustice... (15)

Some of this may seem simplified but on the whole one can assent to it. What I want to fasten on in Eliot's judgement is that phrase "attracted

from his orbit". Perhaps "The Lesson of Balzac" suggests that James always did partly see his own aims as being similar to Balzac's but I think Eliot is right to use such a phrase of an influence which was essentially a very early one, prior to James's own finding of himself. The point is that an influence which has its roots in youthful admiration and imitation is likely to be of a fairly superficial kind which does as much to obscure as to reveal the true creative bent of the writer influenced. Eliot is right to suggest that what we find in James's earlier essays on Balzac is an immense admiration kept in check by native judiciousness and then finally distanced. The distinctive feature of the tone of the essay on Balzac in French Poets and Novelists (1878) is a scrupulous maintenance of critical detachment. James seems more intent on reminding us of his distance from Balzac than of his involvement with him. This stance may partly explain why he chooses to put such an ambiguous stress on Balzac's vulgarity and want of charm, why he tends to betray what Pound described as "a desire to square all things to the ethical standards of a Salem mid-week Unitarian prayer meeting".16 This tone disappears in the more mature essays on Balzac and all that remains of it is our sense of an influence long ago assimilated and resolved in the writer's mind.

In contrast, James's essays on Flaubert always give us an inextricable mixture of admiration and reaction, they have a tense critical alertness and irony which makes the great 1902 essay one of James's most elusive pieces of prose, even in his late manner. What this complexity suggests is not so much a grappling with an early influence, though there is some of that there, as a critical confrontation of two very different minds and views of life. The strength of James's criticism is that it permits us to imagine not only his own response to reading Flaubert but also how Flaubert himself

might, conceivably, have reacted to that response: it sets up a dialectic in our minds between their two sensibilities. It does this because it lets us glimpse, beyond the judgements it makes, at the impetus towards self-discovery which Flaubert must have constituted for James. It is criticism which develops from a constant tension between admiration and reservation, mirroring a creative learning process too rich to be described as a matter of "influence". Perhaps this distinction, in fact, holds for any really authentic influence which is more than a simple case of derivation and imitation? Proust provides me with a good description of the nature of what I call "creative learning", in his fine essay on Ruskin, who was one of his own masters:

Les personnes médiocres croient généralement que se laisser guider ainsi par les livres qu'on admire, enlève à notre faculté de juger une partie de son indépendance. "Que peut vous importer ce que sent Ruskin: sentez par vous-même." Une telle opinion repose sur une erreur psychologique dont feront justice tous ceux qui, ayant accepté ainsi une discipline spirituelle, sentent que leur puissance de comprendre et de sentir en est infiniment accrue, et leur sens critique jamais paralysé. Nous sommes simplement alors dans un état de grâce où toutes nos facultés, notre sens critique aussi bien que les autres, sont accrues. Aussi cette servitude volontaire est-elle le commencement de la liberté. Il n'y a pas de meilleure manière d'arriver à prendre conscience de ce qu'on sent sciême que d'essayer de recréer en soi ce qu'a senti un maître. Dans cet effort profond c'est notre pensée elle-même que nous mettons, avec la sienne, au jour. Nous sommes libre dans la vie, mais en ayant des buts: il y a longtemps qu'on a perçu à jour le sophisme de la liberté d'indifférence. C'est là un sophisme tout aussi naif qu'obèissent sans le savoir les écrivains qui font à tout moment le vide dans leur esprit, croyant le débarrasser de toute influence extérieure, pour être bien sûrs de rester personnels. En réalité les seuls cas où nous disposons de toute notre puissance d'esprit sont ceux où nous ne croyons pas faire œuvre d'indépendance, où nous ne choisissons pas arbitrairement le but de notre effort. Le sujet du romancier, la vision du poète, la vérité de philosophe s'imposent à eux d'une façon presque nécessaire, extérieure pour ainsi dire à leur pensée. Et c'est en soumettant son esprit à rendre cette vision, à approcher de cette vérité, que l'artiste devient vraiment lui-même. (17)

Proust conjures up for me the idea of a more subtle relationship than that of influence, one which prompts an independent interest in Flaubert as well as an interest in James. Resemblances are apparent but they are of a kind which suggest analogies rather than direct links to us. Walter Allen remarks that:

We know James as a novelist better than any other apart from Flaubert, and in the history of the English novel James holds a position analogous to Flaubert's in the French: both strove to give the novel the aesthetic intensity of a great poem or a great painting. (18)

Within this general analogy there is plenty of room for the kind of discrimination which will keep the art of each writer separate in our minds.

In James's essays on Flaubert we have a unique opportunity to study the ways in which a writer learns from a predecessor: we have glimpses of what he will take over and transform or develop, of the new things he found in his predecessor, of the things he reacted against and the things he misunderstood, the lessons he failed to learn. All this only becomes a true subject for literary history if it is seen critically because it is a process in which light is simultaneously cast on the strengths and limitations of both writers. It is a process which has an alchemy too subtle for any critic to try to tabulate. What thinking about it can do for the critic or the literary historian is to force him to keep the two writers as distinctly individual in his mind as possible. The kind of equal relation across time between two great novelists which we can imagine from the 1902 essay therefore provides me with an epitome of the subject of this thesis. I shall try to organise my study so as to give the sense of confrontation rather than of simple linear development. What I mean might be expressed by the analogy of two mirrors set face to face, each reflecting

the other and being reflected back by it simultaneously. Their constant inter-reflection, made up of unusual angles and subtle misrepresentations, gives some of the sense of a dialectic in action which one has in thinking of Flaubert and James together. To try to recreate this sense it will be necessary to begin by distinguishing Flaubert's art and his view of life from the way James himself interpreted them. This means arguing out my own reading of Madame Bovary, the novel which interested James most, against the 1902 essay. Then I shall continue by discussing some of James's earlier fiction, and especially The Portrait of a Lady (1881), because I think it may be said to show James in full command of his own art on a large scale for the first time, and also because it reveals most clearly the differences between Flaubert and James when it is set beside Madame Bovary. I shall reserve direct comparison between James's fiction and Flaubert's until my last chapter. By keeping each author separate in my reader's mind I hope that he will start to make his own connections between them and perhaps come to find some of the same significance in thinking about them together that I do. There are so many books published nowadays which are exclusively devoted to one writer, and which consequently seem to leave that writer in a state somewhere between Valhalla and limbo, that it seemed worth trying to see whether this sort of joint-study might not give one a more live idea of the ways in which great literature is great.

In the rest of this introduction I want to begin to indicate the more general questions which this thesis also seeks to explore.

To write a comparative study which centres on James's reading of French literature is inevitably to feel that James too was an inveterate comparer of civilisations and has been there before one. This is one of the justifications of my approach: that James realised his own Americanness through an exploration of Europe. Pound perceived that: "The essence of
James is that he is always 'settling-in', it is the ground-tone of his genius." (Essays, p.332) This "ground-tone" can be heard in all of the early travel writings and criticism dealing with English and European subjects. It makes it clear that his interest in European literature was always part and parcel of a larger interest in European life. In a sense, his early critical essays on the French novelists are also a kind of travel writing. To approach them for some idea of the context which James gives us to see French literature in we therefore have to look first at what it meant to be a young American in Europe in the decade after the Civil War. For to James criticism was not separable from living.¹⁹

Before the Civil War an American in Europe was able to remain comfortably assured of his Americanness. In a review of Hawthorne's French and Italian Journals in the Nation in 1872 James describes Hawthorne as:

... the last pure American - attesting by his simple responses to dark canvas and cold marble his loyalty to a simpler and less encumbered civilisation. (20)

For James's own generation this was no longer possible:

An American as cultivated as Hawthorne is now almost inevitably more cultivated, and, as a matter of course, more Europeanised in advance, more cosmopolitan. (20a)

Many things brought this new "cosmopolitan" American into existence and one of them was the reading of European literature. James's novels and tales are full of young American visitors to Europe who have already read about everything new which they see in Dickens, Balzac and the other novelists. Their reading had been very different from the reading of the Concord generation of Emerson, Thoreau and even Hawthorne. Van Wyck Brooks gives an acute account of the consequences of this change:

¹⁹. See the 1891 essay "Criticism" in ELE, pp.271-278.
... the younger men no longer read the Greek and Roman authors, who had once afforded the models that stirred the young. They read, along with works of science, the new French novelists and playwrights, who pictured city life as the only life for ambitious men and described the life of the province as dull and silly. This change in reading habits was decisive; for, while those who had known their Plutarch and Virgil had grown up to spacious lives in villages, in hamlets and on farms, as the older statesmen and writers abundantly proved, the young men, steeped in modern books, were almost all uprooted before they read them. This reading confirmed their habits as déracinés. They could no longer feel that 'the mind is its own place', when the place where the mind existed was the country or the village. Indeed, they feared the 'local habitation', which meant for them obscurity and worse; and Emerson's noble saying, 'Make much of your own place', became for them a menace and a byword. (21)

Much, though by no means all, of this is applicable to the James of the 1879 study of Hawthorne. The rider one needs to add is that it was by exploring this "uprooted" condition that James was able to understand America and what it meant for himself to be American. The word "déracinés" lacks this suggestion of a new situation positively embraced. Many years later James rejected the word "expatriate" to describe his condition and proposed the word "dispatriation". 22

Perhaps the main result of James's wider travel and reading was that it encouraged a certain relativism in his outlook which became the source of his ability to make so many delicate discriminations between different nationalities. Travel nurtured the characteristic ambiguity of response which often makes it so tantalisingly impossible to know quite where he stands at any given moment. An ironic distance from whatever society he happens to be talking about developed out of his habit of making comparisons. This can be inferred from a passage in an essay called 'Occasional Paris' from Portraits of Places:


It is hard to say exactly what is the profit of comparing one race with another, and weighing in opposed groups the manners and customs of neighbouring countries; but it is certain that as we move about the world we constantly indulge in this exercise. This is especially the case if we happen to be infected with the baleful spirit of the cosmopolite - that uncomfortable consequence of seeing many lands and feeling at home in none. To be a cosmopolite is not, I think, an ideal; the ideal should be to be a concentrated patriot. Being a cosmopolite is an accident, but one must make the best of it. If you have lived about, as the phrase is, you have lost that sense of the absoluteness and the sanctity of the habits of your fellow-patriots which once made you so happy in the midst of them. You have seen that there are a great many patriae in the world, and that each of these is filled with excellent people for whom the local idiosyncracies are the only thing that is not rather barbarous. There comes a time when one set of customs, wherever it may be found, grows to seem to you about as provincial as another; and then I suppose it may be said of you that you have become a cosmopolite. (23)

James may not have believed very deeply that it was better to be the "concentrated patriot", that Brooks would have liked him to be, but he obviously had no wish to be a pseudo-European. Exactly what cosmopolitanism meant for him, in terms of subtlety, a possibly dangerous invitation to aloofness or a lonely retreat into the self, I shall try to bring out later. For the moment I want to emphasise that the situation he describes in Portraits of Places was one that many Americans found themselves in. A generation later he came to feel that a kind of ambiguous nationality was the hallmark of the American artist, as he noted, rather whimsically, in an essay on his painter friend John Singer Sargent in 1893:

Moreover he has even on the face of it this great symptom of an American origin, that in the line of his art he might easily be mistaken for a Frenchman. It sounds like a paradox, but it is a very simple truth, that when today we look for 'American art' we find it mainly in Paris. (24)

23. Portraits of Places (1883), pp. 75-76.
When critics have noticed something similar in James himself they have usually felt it as a tenser and more thought-provoking quality:

... if the side he presents to the English seems "very artistic" and French, his attitude toward the French themselves is consistently that of the "English-speaking consciousness". (25)

James wore his cosmopolitanism urbanely, but not lightly.

I ought not to leave the passage from "Occasional Paris" to suggest that travel made James cultivate a simple empiricism; he travelled more to flex his imagination than to sharpen his common-sense. There was in him some of Hawthorne's American resistance to Europe, as well as a conflicting sense of the romance of the old world, and both these feelings took him beyond mere observation. In a famous letter, written to Charles Eliot Norton in 1871-2, he said:

It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe. (26)

The superstition came partly from that sensitivity to romance which he inherited from Hawthorne; the responsibility of "fighting" it from the ironical spirit of the "cosmopolite". In other words, whatever James saw or read in Europe he not only registered but began at once to criticise and re-make in the light of his own imagination, just as, at the end of his life, whenever he read a new novel, he immediately began to re-tell it in his own mind. In 1903 he wrote a biography of his Roman friend from the early 1870s, the sculptor William Wetmore Story, and he describes just such a transforming of Europe in its pages. As he reminisces about his Roman past, spinning out his fond evocations of it in long, leisurely phrases, he says that he is willing to brave:

... even the imputation of making a mere Rome of words, talking of a Rome of my own which was no Rome of reality. That comes up as exactly the point - that no Rome of reality was concerned in our experience, that the whole thing was a rare state of the imagination, dosed and drugged, as I have already indicated, by the effectual Borgia cup, for the taste of which the simplest as well as the subtlest had a palate. (27)

All this leads us to expect a criticism which, from the first, was essentially creative, for we can, I think, adapt James's general observations about European places to the way in which he read European literature. One imagines that as the critic in him surrendered to the experience of what he read, the novelist was already wondering how it could be transmuted into something new and American. There is a letter to T.S. Perry in 1867 which might be taken as a prologue to his activity as a reader of the French novel. It is well-known but too relevant to omit here:

I feel that my only chance for success as a critic is to let all the breezes of the West blow through me at their will. We are Americans born - il faut en prendre son parti. I look upon it as a great blessing; and I think that to be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilisation not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically etc) claim our property wherever we find it. To have no national stamp has hitherto been a regret and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. We must of course have something of our own - something distinctive and homogeneous - and I take it that we shall find it in our moral consciousness, our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour. (28)

This was hardly the philosophy of a déraciné weaned away from the culture of his ancestors by modern French novels! In fact, its stress on the "spiritual lightness and vigour" of the American moral sense reappears in

all of James's essays on those French novels. It is most evident in the essays on Flaubert and characterises the point of view from which he read Madame Bovary. Before I go on to discuss that novel I therefore want to give a brief summary of the general attitudes which come out most often in James's American cosmopolitan reading of French literature. I hope the usefulness of this will compensate for the presumption of trying to condense the gist of James's complex reaction to the French mind in a few pages.

In the essay on Maupassant in Partial Portraits James, considering the French and the Anglo-Saxon ways of writing fiction, says: "The feeling of life is evidently, de part et d'autre, a very different thing." This sense of the relativeness of the "feeling of life" fascinated him and he was always trying to describe it. It accounts for quite as much of his criticism on French novels as the study of "form", which he is usually thought of as going to the French for. His main subject of reflection in a book like French Poets and Novelists is, in fact, how the French genius for clarity of form might be made compatible with the less definite subtleties of the Anglo-Saxon moral sense. In the novels he knew either quality seemed to preclude the presence of the other. He is quick to react against simple aestheticism in his essay on Baudelaire:

The crudity of sentiment of the advocates of 'art for art' is often a striking example of the fact that a great deal of what is called culture may fail to dissipate a well-seated provincialism of spirit. They talk of morality as Miss Edgeworth's infantile heroes and heroines talk of 'physic' - they allude to its being put into and kept out of a work of art, put into and kept out of one's appreciation of the same, as if it were a coloured fluid kept in a big-labelled bottle in some mysterious intellectual closet. It is in reality simply a part of the essential richness of inspiration...

30. French Poets and Novelists, 1st edn. 1878, 2nd edn. 1884, 4th reprinting (1919), pp.64-65. (It is worth adding that HJ's ideas about the artist's relation to his public owed something to Gautier, not least because GF's ideas on the subject owed so much to Gautier. In fact, my impression is that HJ's tales of writers and artists reflect the attitudes of the preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835), more than the attitudes of GF's letters. GF is always more stoical about the lot of the writer in the nineteenth century than either Gautier or HJ.)
This may be unfair to Baudelaire, and it would surely be wrong to see Flaubert's ideal of "impassibilité" as aesthetic in this narrow sense, but the criticism seems nearer its mark when we apply it to the less resonant polish of a writer like Gautier. James knew he had gifts which were seldom revealed in English novels but he was alert to the "provincialism" these gifts might entail. This "provincialism" was mainly a matter of presenting human nature as something smaller than he felt it to be:

This has been from the beginning the good fortune of our English providers of fiction, as compared with the French. They are inferior in audacity, in neatness, in acuteness, in intellectual vivacity, in the arrangement of material, in the art of characterising visible things. But they have been more at home in the moral world; as people say today they know their way about the conscience. (31)

This is not simply smug, even if one feels that the "conscience" is not something one can know one's way about so confidently. In making the same point in a review of Zola's Nana in 1880 James admitted that in England and America the novel "is almost always addressed to young unmarried ladies" but he chose to lay stress on its "humour". Zola, he felt, "would probably disapprove of humour if he knew what it is" (op.cit., p.279). For James "humour" is closely related to the free, un-moralising moral explorativeness he finds in the English novel. He goes on to say in his review of Nana:

This is what saves us in England, in spite of our artistic levity and the presence of the young ladies - this fact that we are by disposition better psychologists, that we have, as a general thing, a deeper, more delicately perception of the play of character and the state of the soul (op.cit., p.280).

This conviction keeps coming back in the essays on Flaubert, who failed, in James's opinion, to listen at "the chamber of the soul" (EL, p.158).

It may well be that what James was reacting to in the French was the heritage of their own moralists, the kind of definiteness of perception into human behaviour which is associated with La Rochefoucauld and which sometimes seems schematic to the Anglo-Saxon mind. The epigram is a typically French mode of expression in its combination of acuteness with clear form. Charles Du Bos was making one when he said that "ce qui n'est pas exprimable n'est pas français". James spoke of this quality in a letter he wrote to Paul Bourget in 1898, after reading his novel La Duchesse Ileue:

Your love of intellectual daylight, absolutely your pursuit of complexities, is an injury to the patches of ambiguity and the abysses of shadow which really are the clothing - or much of it - of the effects that constitute the material of our trade (Lubbock, I, pp.268-269).

The kind of depth he is asking for would owe much to the irony and the imagination which are fostered by seeing things relatively. To convey life fully it seemed to him necessary to begin exploring it from a wondering sense of its imponderableness. This was something he missed in the French treatment of society as well as of character. In the essay on Balzac in French Poets and Novelists this feeling is expressed in what are, perhaps, the terms of the cosmopolitan who tries to understand societies, including his own, from outside and who has to work for initiation:

... we often see in the visions and systems of Frenchmen what may be called a conventional infinite. The civilisation of the nineteenth century is of course not infinite, but to us of English speech, as we survey it, it appears so multitudinous, so complex, so far-spreading, so suggestive, so portentous - it has such misty edges and far reverberations - that the imagination, oppressed and overwhelmed, shrinks from any attempt to grasp it as a whole. The French imagination, in the person of Balzac, easily dominates it, as he would say, and without admitting that the problem is any the less vast, regards it as practically soluble (FPN, p.61).

Admiration and doubt are very close here and it comes as no surprise to

find the balance of James's feeling swinging either way for a moment.

For example, an awe at Balzac's comprehensiveness is to him quite compatible with this remark from the review of Balzac's letters later in the same book:

He was neither a poet nor a moralist, though the latter title in France is often bestowed upon him - a fact which strikingly helps to illustrate the Gallic lightness of soil in the moral region (FPN, p.136).

We must not expect to pin down even the early James.

It is apparent from the remarks just quoted that James preferred to see life from several angles at the same time and to cultivate a spirit of inquiry which might become either the kind of romancing of reality which he describes in the Story biography or a taking of its many-sidedness as a warrant for giving freedom to an instinct for intellectual play. If the world has so many different faces, if on top of that you are a cosmopolitan who has "lost that sense of the absoluteness and the sanctity of the habits of your fellow-patriots", then reality becomes something that dominates you less and allows you to play with your own impression of it more. This play is characterised by the kind of irony which involves an alertness to moral possibilities. It may be, therefore, that what made James uncomfortable with novelists like Balzac, Flaubert and Zola was their thorough-going rigorousness in exposing the reader to the pressure of a reality which seems to be beyond the control of their characters and ultimately to grind them down. He remarked on this when writing about both Le Père Goriot and Madame Bovary and, in the 1902 essay on Zola, he speaks of L'Assommoir as giving the reader "almost insupportably the sense of life". In the same essay Balzac is described as being "personally overtaken by life, as fairly hunted and run to earth by it" (NN, p.47). James's own novels may sometimes seem to give us a similar sense but characters like Isabel Archer, Fleda Vetch,

34. Notes on Novelists and Other Notes (1914), p.49.
Strether or Milly Theale can always find in themselves a last refuge in a sort of Pyrrhic moral heroism which is not open to Goriot or Emma Bovary or Zola's Gervaise.

This refuge, even when it is most ostensibly tragic, has much to do with the "humour" which James found lacking in Zola. "Humour" created "good-humour", a quality James often finds missing in the French novel, and he thought that an artist was always free to give it rein. In his review of Flaubert's Correspondance James compares Flaubert's grim and bitter letters to George Sand's consolingly optimistic replies to them, and it is interesting to see how much more affinity he feels for George Sand's way of looking at life:

Their letters are a striking lesson in the difference between good-humour and bad, and seem to point the moral that either form has only to be cultivated to become our particular kind of intelligence (EL&., p.140).

This may seem complacently moral in the way it implies that any one in the grip of suffering or depression can simply turn round and tell his misery to go away: fortitude seems a more difficult thing than that. I shall try to argue in this way later, when I discuss the 1902 essay on Flaubert, but, for the moment, I want simply to point out that for James "good-humour" is something which preserves one from the kind of all-consuming emotions that always over-ride the "intelligence" of Balzac characters like Goriot, Pons and Balthasar Claës. He comes to feel it as one of the advantages of the English tradition that its novelists do not deal in such single and total reactions to life:

Even those of our novelists whose manner is most ironic pity life more and hate it less than M. de Maupassant and his great initiator Flaubert. It comes back to our good-humour (which may apparently also be an artistic force)... (PP, p.273).

How far this "good-humour" was real gaiety in James and how far it was a kind of insurance against the tragic sense of life varies and is never easy to determine. He tended himself to be ironic or evasive about it. In a letter in 1883 to Grace Norton, which is in the Houghton Library, he tells her:

You really take too melancholy a view of human life, and I can't afford — literally haven't the moral means — to hold intercourse with you on that basis. I am never in high spirits myself, and I can only get on by pretending that I am. But alas you won't pretend — that you are; and scarcely even that I am. (36)

It is best not to speculate about this too much for the moment, since it is only a particular letter written to a particular person, but, without trying to fit it into an overall view of the way James read some of the French novelists, we can use it as a sidelight on that reading.

It would be misleading to suggest that James did not find many things in the French novel which appealed deeply to his own outlook on life. Du Bos noted that the *Comédie Humaine*, for example, offered him a world made up of a multiplicity of inter-knitting selves which was especially calculated to appeal to his own dislike of seeing life from any one fixed point of view:

... combien l'idée que l'individu puisse valoir par sa seule autonomie, puisse en quelque sorte n'exister que par lui-même, est une idée qui au fond répugne à James. Il est une des explications de son amour sans réserve pour Balzac. (37)

It was not, of course, "sans réserve" but it was love. If his criticism of the French novelists sometimes seems severe or impatient its impatience came from this love and not from chauvinism. It is not easy to generalise about the many essays he wrote about them, at all stages of his career, but I think one can assert that this is always true. James may seem more morally


37. *Journal*, vol. 1, p.252. (The chapter on The Portrait of a Lady, below, gives a rather different reading of HJ's attitude to individualism.)
inflexible in his early work, as Pound thought, but I think, too, that he always appears as the American advocate of "spiritual lightness and vigour", in search of more than just national roots, that we see in the 1867 letter to Perry. Sidney Waterlow's diary reports him as saying, in what must have been a rather grumpy mood, in 1908:

He suggested a good subject for a dissertation, the vulgarity of modern French literature... The vulgarity he defined as consisting, not in the absence, but in the badness of their moral standards. They are vitiated through and through, blind to all distinction between good and evil; hence that emptiness and thinness in their work which is what we mean by vulgarity. And it is just as real, he insisted, in France as in England, though masked in France by perfection of form. In England there is constant vulgarity of form in addition to other vulgaries. (38)

James was certainly never interested in assuming a French way of seeing which was not his own. This is what makes his criticism the useful kind that one can quarrel with. Geoffrey Strickland remarks that:

To read James is to realise the falsity of the commonly held view that to judge French literature in a personal way, and hence to judge it as Englishmen or Americans, is to judge it blindly. (39)

He knew enough about France not to imagine that any one attitude could be typically French and he did not judge blindly, but because he was willing to be personal his judgements force us to respond personally too. Whatever we think of them we at least owe them more than mere agreement. They always teach us to take the writer more seriously than the man writing about him.

In the essay on Turgenev in French Poets and Novelists James says:

"The great question as to a poet or a novelist... How does he feel about life? What, in the last analysis, is his philosophy?" (40) It is a question that can only be answered by looking at his art itself but some suggestions towards an answer can be gleaned from his criticism and I have tried to

40. FFR, p.243. (N.B. It is relevant to my argument here that this essay goes on to criticise Turgenev's own "philosophy" for its "pessimism", p.249.)
take up a few of these in James's to give an idea of the sensibility he brought to a reading of Flaubert. The upshot of these gleanings is to point to a flexible moral openness which prefers to see life relatively. Critics noticed this quality in James's novels as soon as they appeared and were often puzzled by his habit of leaving their endings open and ambiguous. In a review of The Portrait of a Lady, R.H. Hutton, one of the best of the early critics, speaks of his "very agnostic view of Art" (Gard, p.94). James was well aware of this and prided himself on it. In a letter written to Mrs. F.H. Hill in 1879 about the British public's reaction to his depiction of the English characters in An International Episode he wrote:

Nothing is my last word about anything - I am interminably super-subtle and analytic - and with the blessing of heaven, I shall live to make all sorts of representations of all sorts of things. It will take a much cleverer person than myself to discover my last impression - among all these things - of anything (SL, p.106).

This quality, for which relativism is perhaps too crude a word, goes with "humour" and "spiritual lightness and vigour" to suggest the Jamesian "philosophy" for the time being.

I want to leave James and look at the very different "philosophy" we find in Flaubert's letters and his early writings. It seems to me that Flaubert had a "philosophy" which was as nearly tragic as that of any of the great nineteenth century novelists and that it was above all this that James confronted in him. James himself is sometimes read by critics as a tragic novelist but I shall argue later, when I come to discuss The Portrait of a Lady, that his is a limited and false kind of tragedy which it is perhaps wrong to consider as tragedy at all. His criticism of Madame Bovary helps me to try to show why I think this and a study of Madame Bovary itself will enable me to explain what I mean by tragedy in the context of a nineteenth century novel. I take this point of departure in response to a
feeling that although there are many novels of the period, such as Middlemarch, Little Dorrit or Anna Karenina, which seem to me to come close to being tragic none of them finally reaches tragedy. 41 Madame Bovary strikes me as having more of tragedy in it than any of them and yet it too seems in many ways to represent a very new kind of tragedy. This is something which James perhaps could not, given his own "philosophy", fully understand in it. To think about him in relation to Flaubert is, therefore, for me, to set on foot a general inquiry into how far the novelists of the nineteenth century were able to realise a tragic art of which they might dream. This may tell us much about the period, perhaps about the novel form itself, but it constitutes a question which can at first only be put in this vague and assertive way and which it will take the rest of this thesis to pose properly. As Pound said:

A critic must spend some of his time asking questions - which perhaps no-one can answer. It is much more his business to stir up curiosity than to insist on acceptances (Essays, p.289).

Flaubert's early writings and his correspondence seem the best place for me to begin to ask my question.

41. I have argued towards this view of Little Dorrit in "The Poetry of Little Dorrit", The Cambridge Quarterly, IV, no. 1, Winter (1968-9), 38-53. I would now take the views expressed there further by taking up the claim in F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (1970), that Little Dorrit is "Shakespearian", Shakespearian tragedy seems to me to offer a very different experience from that conveyed by the sufferings of Clennam and Amy. (GF's view of Shakespeare is discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.)
CHAPTER TWO

Flaubert's Tragic Thinking

The cadence of lament pervades Flaubert's letters throughout his life: "Comme tout se dégarnit, comme tout s'en va, quel dégel continu que la vie!" He wrote this in 1847 but its mood is almost the same as that of his laments over Gautier or George Sand over twenty years later. We can only tell that it is a young man writing because the feeling seems more lyrical and less bitter than the feeling the later volumes of the Correspondance leave us with.

Flaubert's sense of mortality, of life as a perpetual thaw, almost seems to have pre-dated his real experience of life. The hero of Mémoires d'un Fou (1838) wonders if: "il était peut-être ma destinée de vivre ainsi, lassé avant d'avoir porté le fardeau, halestant avant d'avoir couru". What prevented him from bearing the burden of living was a sense of death which made all human effort seem unreal. It took the form of ennui: the adolescent Flaubert adopts the mask of an old man through which to recount his feelings in the Mémoires. Flaubert often explained (or romanticised) this sense of death by playing with the idea of metempsychosis. He liked to believe that he was conscious of the prior incarnations of his soul. They would account for his having a premature awareness of death which made him, as it were, see through life before living it. The hero of Novembre (1842) - who shares the gloomy panache of the hero of the Mémoires - says that: "il me semble quelquefois que j'ai duré pendant des siècles et que mon être renferme les débris de mille existences passées" (OJII, II, pp.163-164).

He is compensated for his ennui by feeling that it is the possession of an exceptional knowledge of the nature of things which causes it. "Mille existences passées" make ordinary human experience, and the saving lies which enable it to be lived at all, unnecessary for him. Sometimes the younger Flaubert seems half-proud of his sense of death. We find him, in 1846, writing to Louise Colet that:

Je n'ai jamais vu un enfant sans penser qu'il deviendrait vieillard, ni un berceau sans songer à une tombe. La contemplation d'une femme nue me fait rêver à son squelette. (Corresp., I, p.221).

There is a gruesome relish of the grotesque in such a statement which seems too boyishly solemn for the tragic feeling behind it. Flaubert is too intrigued by his own feelings to say much to ours, let alone Louise's. As Sartre says:

Celui qui écrit: "Je suis né avec le désir de mourir", ce n'est pas la condition humaine qu'il donne à voir, c'est son conditionnement particulier. (3)

But Madame Bovary itself surely speaks of the "condition humaine"? And Sartre would probably admit that it could only do so through the choices involved in its author's "conditionnement particulier". This, at least, is my reason for starting with that particular conditioning in the attempt to understand how the mature novelist can speak to us of our condition.

As a child Flaubert would peer into his father's dissection theatre, in the Hôtel-Dieu in Rouen where the family lived, so that he could watch the students at work. Most things which repelled Flaubert attracted him too and he was attracted to death, as he was attracted to the bourgeois, at an early age. The desire to die which he claimed to have been born with facilitated in him a penchant for generalising about life. In Art et Progrès, the newspaper he and his friend Ernest Chevalier produced at the start of

their schooldays in the Collège de Rouen, he announces that "le monde, c'est l'enfer" *(OUI, I, p.6). It seemed so to him, perhaps, so it must be so to everybody. The few extant sheets of the paper reveal an endearingly naif child fluently repeating the *vanitas vanitatum* of the prophet. How could anyone seem so conversant with death while knowing so little of life? An awareness of death ordinarily depends on a prior awareness of why the life death threatens is precious. Yet the young Flaubert already sounds bored with life. One explanation is that he had simply decided that what other people called 'life' was essentially the same thing as he imagined death to be. And "la mort n'a peut-être pas de secret à nous révéler que la vie" *(Corresp., VI, p.126). This does not mean that Flaubert saw life in terms of death because he was more than usually reconciled to the idea of death. It is at least as true that it was a more than normal fear of death that made him side with it. To pretend to speak from the realms of death was his youthful way of protecting himself from the thought that death lay outside of his own ago, in wait for it. Hence the "mille existences passées". The fancy of metempsychosis put death in the past and took it out of the future, where it belonged.

In his early and more personal writings Flaubert often uses the idea of death as a spring-board for a desire for the absolute rather than as a *memento mori*: "Oh! que je donnerais volontiers toutes les femmes de la terre pour avoir la momie de Cléopâtre! 4 "La momie de Cléopâtre" represents beauty which is dead. To be able to call it up from the past would be to possess an experience which has already been experienced, thus evading the "suite de morts partielles" which a real experience in time would be. Flaubert's wish seeks to transcend his human sexuality by directing it beyond the only sphere in which it can exist. The thought of the dead Cleopatra

4. *Par les Champs et par les Grèves* (Conard, 1910), p.35.
opens a way for him to see his living passion with mystical detachment. Imagination transforms it into a fiction of immortality. This idea of death as being in the past is a cover against Flaubert's sense of the passage of time; 'death' thus liberates the self from its context and confirms its autonomy. But Flaubert's scepticism is in proportion to his desire. His "recherche de l'absolu" is only seen in terms of the imagination; it cannot be expressed as a concrete external activity, such as Balthasar Claes's experiments in Balzac. One can follow how the man who desired "la momie de Cléopâtre" came to describe in Novembre, his hero's egocentric love for a prostitute: "j'ai peur de n'aimer qu'une conception de mon esprit et de ne chérir en elle que l'amour qu'elle m'avait fait rêver" (OII, II, p.238). This is not simply a case of desire transcending its object. The hero's desire aspires to exist without any object because its possible object, Marie, is mortal and finite whereas the desire is felt as immortal and infinite:

Oh! si l'on pouvait extraire de soi tout ce qui y est et faire un être avec la pensée seule! si l'on pouvait tenir son fantôme dans les mains et le toucher au front, au lieu de perdre dans l'air tant de caresses et tant de soupirs! (OII, II, p.237).

The life outside himself is too elusive and mobile to catch: he can never possess it. Marie, who initiates him into love, feels conversely. No man has ever possessed her as she dreams of being possessed:


In either case, searching or waiting, the self finds its objects unable to satisfy the desires it directs on them. Marie remains essentially a virgin to herself, the hero dreams of creating the object of desire through thought alone so that he can control that object. There is hope of permanence in the self's conceptions but the non-self promises only frustration: it subtracts from the freedom of the self and never adds to it. Both Marie and the hero refuse to acknowledge in the non-self an equivalent reality.
to their own.

The external objects of desire necessarily lie in the future; that is, their possible attainment lies in the desirer's future. But in Flaubert the future is generally the unreal. As in the case of Emma Bovary's dreams, it is always accompanied by his sense of death: he sees the old man in the child. Can such a look still see the child or does it end by seeing simply the old man? The hero of the early tale *Quidquid Volueris* (1837), the outcast and misunderstood Djaloh who "semblait né pour la tombe" (*OJ*, I, p.211), helps us define this question. Looking, Hamlet-like, at a skull he exclaims:


If reality is the extinction of the self then life, the operation of the self, must be unreal. Desire therefore becomes unreal because the reality of death constantly jeopardises its objects and makes them seem unreal. Thus the hero of another early tale, *Smarh* (1839), feels, after he has been shown a vision of the world by the satanic genius who rules it:

Adieu donc, tous ces beaux rêves, ces belles journées que l'aurore menteur m'annonçait si resplendissantes et si pures; j'aurai donc entrevu un monde d'enthousiasme, de transports, l'éclair aura brillé devant mes yeux et m'a laissé ensuite dans les ténèbres, sous ce paradis de pensées dont le large glaive froid de la réalité m'épargne pour l'éternité (*OJ*, II, pp.115-116. My italics.)

Flaubert's romantic valuation of the self is stifled by a non-romantic sense of the smallness of the self. Man has no hand in making his destiny and no knowledge of its meaning. Any meaning his life has can only be apprehended from outside the arena of the self in which that life is lived. Flaubert generalises this particular destiny into a view of human life as a whole as subject to an inscrutable "fatalité", so inscrutable that in his mature work the romantic word "fatalité" has become too presumptuously definite.
to define it.\textsuperscript{5} Here is a passage from \textit{Par les Champs et par les Grèves} (1847) where, during a visit to Nantes, the sight of a telegraph operator, aloft and alone in his cabin, sets Flaubert meditating:

\begin{quote}
Le but? le but? le sens? qui le sait? Est-ce que le matelot s'inquiète de la terre où le pousse la voile qu'il déploie, le facteur des lettres qu'il pêche, l'imprimeur du livre qu'il imprime, le soldat pour la cause pour laquelle il tue et se fait tuer? Un peu plus, un peu moins, ne sommes-nous pas tous comme ce brave homme, parlant des mots qu'on nous a appris, et que nous apprenons sans les comprendre. Éparpillés en ligne et se regardant à travers les abîmes qui les séparent, les siècles se transmettent ainsi de l'un à l'autre l'éternelle énigme qui leur vient de loin pour aller loin, ils gesticulent, ils rament dans le brouillard, et ceux qui, postés sur les sommets, les font se mouvoir n'en savent pas plus long que les pauvres diables d'en bas qui lèvent la tête pour tâcher d'y deviner quelque chose (\textit{Par les Champs}, p.50).
\end{quote}

In case this sounds deterministic, despite its eloquence, I will try to show how Flaubert arrived at its thought through dreams of resistance to fate rather than through acquiescence in it. This will, I hope, suggest a source for the detachment which enables him to view human blindness with apparently open eyes. For the passage just quoted marks a step towards the irony of \textit{Madame Bovary}.

\textit{Quidquid Volueris} (1837) and \textit{Passion et Vertu} (1838) are often taken as sources of \textit{Madame Bovary}. \textit{Quidquid Volueris} seems, at first, such a fantastic and trumped-up tale that one does not want to take it seriously; then it becomes clear that it is precisely its absurdity which demands to be taken seriously from a biographical viewpoint. It is the story of Djalioh, the child of a negro slave and an ape; an outcast, a monster, and a wishfully Byronic surrogate for the young Flaubert. Djalioh is the scorn of people too base to perceive the riches within him. He is the protegé of a young bourgeois who parades him as a \textit{pet monster}. We first meet him

\textsuperscript{5} Cf. Charles Bovary's "grand mot" when he meets Rodolphe after Emma's death: "C'est la faute de la fatalité!" \textit{Madame Bovary: Moeurs de Province, Œuvres Complètes de Gustave Flaubert}, 26 vols. (Conard, 1910-1954), p.480. (This edition contains 13 volumes of GF's letters.)
at the home of his master's fiancée Adèle, whom he begins to fall in love with. As he does so his monstrosity comes home to him more and more because he is sensitive to the fact that he repels her. Endowed with human feelings and an animal's physique he is doomed to frustration: "... né pour la tombe, comme ces jeunes arbres qui vivent cassés et sans feuilles" (OJII, I, p.211). Flaubert phrases it as a consequence of this condition that the (bourgeois) human world holds no possibility for Djalioh: he is seen as a victim of fate. Forlorn in society, Djalioh falls back on communion with nature. At first, he indulges his feelings in a kind of Rousseauesque pantheism. Walking in his master's park, absorbed in his sadness, he senses the consoling presence of "cette nature entière qui chante tristement", corroborating his misery (OJII, I, p.228). Failing to identify with the immediate non-self (society), he projects his feelings onto nature. But his Rousseauesque feeling for nature soon turns into a variant of Sade's. Although Djalioh's monstrous origin was the result of a bourgeois prank which his master perpetrated for a wager, Flaubert exteriorizes the cause of his suffering into a trick played on him by the universe. Nature, as in Smarh, is governed by the spirit of evil. Consequently, Djalioh cannot commune with it like Rousseau. He can only free himself from it by emulating its persecutions, thus asserting the viability of his own being to himself. But it transpires that, like the young Flaubert who felt born with the desire to die, his being can only be asserted through death. This is how the solution is arrived at: after hearing nature echoing his sadness he concludes that he can echo nature; he then wonders if "le vrai serait-il le néant?"; his master marries Adèle, who gives birth to a child; Djalioh lives with them, desiring Adèle more and more, the more rebarbative she finds him; her failure to understand the beauty of his feelings (Flaubert tells the tale from his view-point), coupled with his sense of fate's sporting with him, leaves him only one means of self-
realisation: he murders Adèle and her child and then himself. His cruelty to others is vindicated by the cruelty of nature towards himself. His bourgeoisie master's life is left in ruins.

Put like that the emotional syllogism behind Djalioh's action may seem foreign to the sensitive nature Flaubert attributes to him. And it may seem odd that the revenge he takes on man and nature also involves suicide. The missing factor in the equation is his sense of time passing. Bound up with his feeling that the future holds nothing for him is a feeling of mutability. His fixation on death, which is due to his disbelief in the reality of life (or the future), necessitates his own death as a means of triumphing over time. As I tried to show in discussing Flaubert's wish for "la momie de Cléopâtre", death is conceived not as the symbol of temporality but as its conqueror. The desire to rival time is, I think, the deepest Flaubertian wish in the story. The description of Djalioh's feelings just before the murder of Adèle and her child strikes me as the most authentic note in this tale of self-romanticisation:

Pour lui, que lui faisait le passé qui était perdu, et l'avenir qui se résumait dans un mot insignifiant: la mort? Mais c'était le présent qu'il avait, la minute, l'instant qui l'obéissait; c'était ce présent même qu'il voulait anéantir, le briser du pied, l'égorger de ses mains (OJI, I, p.228).

The self cannot accept the conditions of its being.

Passion et Vertu follows a similar pattern to Quidquid Volueris, although it is marginally less fantastic. I will spare the reader the gory details. Suffice it to say that the heroine, Mazza, has the same feeling of communing with nature as Djalioh and that it also comes to her at a point when she feels deserted by human beings, in her case by a lover:

Tout était triste comme elle dans la nature, et il lui semblait que les vagues avaient des soupirs et que la mer pleurait (OJI, I, p.257).

The crucial phrase here is "il lui semblait". Flaubert suggests that her feeling of harmony with nature is as illusory as her past feelings of
harmony with her lover were. And so, when her tragedy follows the murderous pattern of Djaliqh's, Flaubert tells us that, in violence, she has "rendu au ciel des crimes pour ses douleurs" (OJII, I, p.268). She too circumvents fate by taking it into her own hands. The young Flaubert seems to be seeking an active way of dominating fate rather than see life as an affliction to be borne passively. He said, forty years later, to George Sand: "on ne fait pas sa destinee, on la subit. J'ai ete lache dans ma jeunesse, j'ai eu peur de la vie" (Corresp. VII, p.122). The form of his lacheté was precisely the horror of time which he tries to sublimate in Quidquid Volueris. It is revealed more clearly in Novembre. The hero, like Charles Bovary, is in the process of blaming "fatalité":

... la fatalité, qui m'avait courbé dès ma jeunesse, s'étendait pour moi sur le monde entier, je la regardais se manifester dans toutes les actions des hommes aussi universellement que le soleil sur la surface de la terre, elle me devint une atroce divinité, que j'adorais comme les indiens adorant le colosse ambulant qui leur passe sur le ventre; je me complaisais dans mon chagrin, je ne faisais plus d'effort pour en sortir, je le savourais même, avec la joie désespérée du malade qui gratte sa plaie et se met à rire quand il a du sang aux ongles (OJII, II, pp.164-185).

Suffering is a destiny which can be embraced with laughter and appetite even if one is doomed to it.

It is not my intention to embark on a psychoanalysis of this apparent sado-masochism in the young Flaubert (as Sartre has done), and I do not want to approach his art as material for such a study, but I do believe that the analysis I have been attempting sheds light on his conception of the kind of artist he was when he wrote Madame Bovary. Perhaps, for the moment, I could leave the reader with two quotations from letters Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet during the composition of that novel? The first recalls the streak of sadism which we have just encountered:

Il est beau d'être un grand écrivain, de tenir les hommes dans la poêle à frire de sa phrase et de les y faire sauter comme des marrons (Corresp. II, p.329).
The second quotation is more reminiscent of the sense of suffering evinced by the passage just quoted from Novembre:

Non, nous ne sommes pas bons; mais cette faculté à s'assimiler à toutes les misères et de se supposer les ayant est peut-être la vraie charité humaine. Se faire ainsi le centre de l'humanité, tâcher enfin d'être mon cœur général où toutes les veines éparse se réunissent, ce serait à la fois l'effort du plus grand homme et du meilleur homme? Je n'en sais rien. (Corresp. III, p.225. My italics.)

A mixture of arrogance and modesty is quintessential Flaubert. And it springs, like the preceding quotation, from a wish to transcend an acutely suffering self by identifying it with what he saw as the cause of its suffering. Only for a short time could Flaubert seriously try to detach himself from the conditions of his being by imagining a Djalich, because he feared time, or a "Garçon", because he felt persecuted by the bourgeoisie into which he was born. We can see, in the passage in Par les Champs et par les Crèves which was inspired by the telegraph operator, that Flaubert wants to see life from further outside the self than either of those solutions allow. It was necessary for him to create his conception of the Artist to achieve his desire. And so he writes a novel, Madame Bovary, against what he believes is his naturally lyrical bent and, when it is finished, he can say, in response to the solicitation of a prospective biographer: "Je n'ai aucune biographie" (Corresp. IV, p.326). The artist who has tried to make himself "le centre de l'humanité" and its "cœur général" does not see himself as a finite individual. He no longer draws a line between the self and the world.

Flaubert's aspiration to an art which would be universal and representative has important repercussions in his views on history and politics. The first point to note is that he adhered to an apparent stoicism: life is seen as being lived under the aegis of fate. Therefore, he does not seek to rectify the limitations of his romantic ego through commitment to
any nineteenth century ideal of human community. His romantic idea of
the artist debar the possibility of solutions to his predicament, even
though it is partly a mal de siècle. There is something of Vigny's
Chatterton in him; the "Paria intelligent". So the self is not for him
transcended by relating it to other selves, any more than it was to be for
Emma Bovary. Instead, the attempted relation is to fate, to nature and to
history. Emma's plight can be duplicated under the sun of ancient Carthage
in the person of Salammbô. It is not a plight peculiar to herself. Jean-
Paul Sartre says of Søren that its "processus de la désillusion est
envisagé comme un caractère objectif de l'expérience". If this is so there
is no longer a hope that the disillusion can be cured in the future by the
mediation either of individuals or of any community, for it is not felt as
a purely personal feeling. Its causes are external, unvarying and
irresistible. This helps us to define Flaubert's aspiration to become a
"coeur général". It is less a generalised feeling of humanity than a
generalisation of humanity's condition. A condition is borne passively and
Flaubert's sympathy does not go to those who try to change their world. The
"coeur général" is proud but inactive:

Mais moi, je la déteste, la vie. Je suis un catholique; j'ai
au cœur quelque chose du suintement vert des cathédrales
normandes. Mes tendresses d'esprit sont pour les inactifs, pour
les ascètes, pour les rêveurs. (Corresp. III, p.396).

This passivity is not seen as the product of living in a particular society
- except, perhaps, in L'Éducation sentimentale (1869). Nor does it boil down
to a simple projection of Flaubert's own psychology onto the world. There
remains the prior fact of death which is also external, unvarying and
irresistible. That fact lies prior to its acceptance into an individual

6. Chatterton, Oeuvres Complètes d'Alfred de Vigny, ed. F. Baldensperger,
being or to society's combat with it. In the *Education* we feel the rhythm of time, in the journey down the river, before we know much of Frédéric Moreau or the society he lives in.

This discussion is beginning to suggest that Flaubert's disbelief in the possibility of changing his own psyche, because it was enclosed by his sense of the imperiousness of death, was paralleled by a similar disbelief in social change, because he saw politics as being a mere repetition of history. To bring out the point I want to associate a few of his ideas about history with a few of his pronouncements on politics.

In a description of his student dinners with Flaubert and Alfred Le Poittevin, Maxime Du Camp notes that: "Je ne crois pas qu'une seule fois nous ayons parlé politique..." Par les Champs et par les Grèves suggests that they often talked about the past. In that book Flaubert has this to say when he sees the dumb portraits and the desolate tombs of the Château de Blois:

> L'histoire est, comme la mer, belle par ce qu'elle efface: le flot qui vient enlève sur le sable le trace du flot qui est venu, on se dit seulement qu'il y en a eu, qu'il y en aura encore; c'est là toute sa poésie et sa moralité peut-être? (Par les Champs, p.35).

At other times Flaubert conceived this poetry ironically, as in this extract from a scenario for his projected novel on the orient: "... le héros principal devrait être un Barbare qui se civilise près d'un civilisé qui se barbarise". The moral stance behind a comic denial that the world can ever change is incredibly exalted. The projected characters would not, presumably, have been explored from within. Flaubert could have regarded them as a headmaster regards schoolboys brought up on the carpet. For those

who subscribe to the idea of his moral neutrality the implications must seem disturbing. For such neutrality as this allows unfettered freedom to judge, even if the freedom is not exploited. To the young Flaubert it also gave scope for some flamboyant gestures, like this thrown-off remark about revolutions in *Agonies, Pensées Sceptiques* (1836): "Et qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une révolution? un souffle d'air qui ride l'océan, s'en va et laisse la mer agitée" (OUI, I, p.417). The romantic historical perspective permitted Flaubert to stand watching on the shore.

The political drift of this is made clearer by an entry in the *Journal des Goncourts* for 1679. Flaubert is describing his long-cherished idea for a novel on the battle of Thermopylae:

Je vois dans ces guerriers une troupe de dévouée à la mort, y allant d'une manière gaie, ironique... Ce livre, il faut que ce soit pour les peuples une MARSEILLAISE d'un ordre élevé. (10)

There is naivété in the idea of such a book evoking the energies summoned by the Marseillaise. It appears in the intervention of personal bias in the phrase "dévouée à la mort". For even if such devotion is to death it must come from life: devotion to the point of ignoring the fear of death. We have seen that the transcending of that fear had a special value for Flaubert and we now see why. Like the warriors of Thermopylae, he derived a feeling of exaltation from contemplating what he knew would destroy him. Life alone may be only a breath of air ruffling the ocean but when it is pitted against its opposite that breath becomes a passion. The objects of life alone cannot do this. They provoke trapped feelings of depression and smallness but not gaiety and irony. We are nearer than at first seemed possible to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* or to the gay, glittering eyes of the old men in Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli". The direction which the fear of death takes in Flaubert is not finally to the effete passivity of *Novembre*.

but to the kind of vitality found in the unblinking endurance of tragedy. The revolutionary might not deny this vitality but he would say that it comes from dwelling not on the acts of man but on the acts of God. And he might describe Flaubert's tragic view of history as a metaphysical compensation for the depression which actual, unfinished history caused Flaubert. That view denied the existence of history at all, in the Marxist sense of an evolution, although Flaubert did not use it to exonerate the Second Empire. Even if we balance his hatred of the bourgeoisie against his social success in Imperial circles he still seems to see his own epoch as a steady decline into muflisme. The point is that, for the present, Flaubert introduced a notion of historical entropy which differed from the effacing poetry he found in accomplished history. Because he had no belief in the future the present was hollow and so it was ultimately futile either to attack or to defend the régime which represented it. To the artist, it was simply there to be represented.

Albert Cassagne, in his still-useful study of l'Art pour l'Art, has

11. I would not wish to press the parallels with Nietzsche or Yeats too far. They are suggestive in this context because both tried to describe the way in which tragedy is exhilarating and not depressing, but both seem to me to differ from GF in the way they tend to vaunt their sense of tragic joy. Yeats, in particular, seems to see this joy as an emotion felt mainly by the tragic poet himself, whereas it seems to me that, as far as one can make such a distinction, it is a kind of sublime bonus to the spectator of a tragedy. Another difference is that it is arguable that the most fluently passionate tragic moments in GF's novels are often moments of comedy, and even of satire, too.

12. For example: "Adieu tout ce que nous aimons! Paganism, christianism, muflisme. Telles sont les trois grandes évolutions de l'humanité. Il est désagréable de se trouver dans la dernière". CORRESP. VI, p.201.

13. Cf. The following passage from Edgar Quinet's Ahasverus (1833), a book much admired by the young GF: "Une étrange maladie nous tourmente en ce moment. Comment l'appellerai-je? Ce n'est pas seulement la tienne, René, celle des ruines. La notre est plus vive et plus cuisante. C'est le mal de l'avenir. Ce qui nous tue, c'est plus que la faiblesse de notre pensée, c'est le poids de l'avenir à supporter dans le vide du présent." Quoted by René Dumesnil in La Vocation de GF (1961), p.250.
some hints towards a definition of this condition. He says of the second romantic generation in France, writers like Flaubert, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, Ménard and Bouilhet: "Surtout elle considère que la contrainte des lois sociales n'est rien auprès de l'oppression de la nature". Their feeling for the indifference of fate and history made them politically uncommitted. Cassagne puts this clearly, underlining the social logic behind their position:

La bourgeoisie éprouve à l'égard de l'art une défiance instinctive. Elle craint de l'avoir contre elle, mais elle ne tient pas beaucoup à l'avoir avec elle. Ce serait un allié dangereux, compromettant. Le mieux est qu'il soit neutre. Or il l'est par la théorie romantique de l'indépendance de l'art ou de l'art pour l'art, qui le sépare de la vie sociale. (15)

This theory of the romantic generation of 1830 had died hard by Flaubert's time. 16

To conceive of politics as a repetition of history lead Flaubert into the unusual conservatism which is on nobody's side. It received its fullest expression in the Education sentimentale but it was after the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune that it became most extreme. Flaubert is most like St. Polycarpe, born out of his proper time, in the 1870s. At the end of 1871 he wrote adamantly to George Sand: "Je vaux bien vingt électeurs de Croisset" (Corresp. VI, p.297). He even suggested that government should be relegated to the control of a minor branch of the Academy! At the same time he was denouncing the bankruptcy of the parties of reaction. In the famous letter he wrote to the Conseil Municipal de Rouen, over their reluctance to erect a statue to the memory of his friend

15. Cassagne, p.38.
16. It is worth quoting an observation from a later novelist, Thomas Hardy: "A man who advocates aesthetic effort and deprecates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter". The Return of the Native (1878), Bk. 3, chap. 2.
Bouilhet, he attacked them as conservatives who conserve nothing:

Avec tous vos capitaux et votre sagesse, vous ne pouvez faire une association équivalente à l'Internationale! Tout votre effort intellectuel consiste à trembler devant l'avenir. (17)

The diagnosis parallels Quinet's forty years earlier. All it does for Flaubert is to plunge him deeper into a static bitterness which allows him to conserve enough hauteur to put the blame on other shoulders and satisfy his spleen at the expense of his judgement. The impasse is the main consequence of watching the agitated sea of history from the shore. If you conceive of the world as an immutable barrier to consciousness that is what it turns into.

This is not the place for an analysis of Flaubert's mood after the débâcle of 1870-1 but it does give me the opportunity to raise a general question about realism. Was the ageing Flaubert's depression in any way a consequence of his decision, in the writing of Madame Bovary, to become a realist? This question springs from the hypothesis that there is a relation between realism, which reflects society as accurately as possible in fiction, and the attitude to history and politics I have been describing in Flaubert's thought. Realism perhaps led to the same erosion of the consciousness of possibility and change by its faithful immersion in the actual. That same frustrating pressure of the actual which led Emma Bovary to her death, helped conduct Flaubert to the prolonged depression of the 1870s, when the world he hated in so many ways at last showed signs of disintegrating. One explanation of this paradox is that inherent in realism, as a determinant of its reaction from romanticism, was a need to believe in the world as it was. That is why Flaubert felt himself a lost survival from the past after 1870: he needed his known world, even if it were only the

tawdry splendours of the Second Empire. 18 He could never get that world out of his mind; even on his journey down the Nile he was constantly picturing the grey Seine at Croisset. The aloofness of his historical perspective on his society was perhaps a protection against his own absorption in it. Hence, his constant preoccupation with the idea of writing a novel about life under Napoléon III. The realist in him wanted to transfix the period in which he had done his work. And so there may be a case for suggesting that the failure of Emma and Frédéric to find any authentication of their desires from their society was a result, not just of the kind of society it was but of their creator's desire to record it realistically. 19

My discussion of Flaubert's attempt to see life from more than a simply individual point-of-view may have created the false impression that


19. Variations of this suggestion about the nature of "realism" in the novel can be found in Sartre, Lucien Goldmann (Pour une Sociologie du Roman, 1964) and Lukács. Here is Lukács discussing Zola: "... Zola effectue le passage du réalisme, au sens propre du terme, au naturalisme. La raison sociale déterminante de cette transformation est que l'évolution sociale de la bourgeoisie a dégradé les écrivains du rang de participants au développement social, d'acteurs dans les grandes luttes de l'époque, à celui de simples spectateurs et chroniqueurs de la vie quotidienne." Naturalisme therefore becomes "l'essai d'inventer une méthode grâce à laquelle l'écrivain dégradé au rang de simple spectateur sera mis en état de dominer la réalité de façon créatrice et réaliste." Balzac et le Réalisme Français, trans. Paul Levene (1967), p.97. This is not, of course, something HJ ever suggested, although much of what he wrote might be used to back it up. In fact, at the time when HJ dreamed of becoming a sort of American Balzac, he seems to have assumed that it is to the novelist's advantage to be conservative and traditionalist: "Balzac is... passionate conservative - a Tory of the deepest dye. How well, as a rich romancer, he knew what he was about in adopting this profession of faith, will be plain to the most superficial reader." (FPK, p.83) The issues this raises are too complex for a note; suffice it to say that to "faire concurrence à l'état civil", as Balzac did, is rather to state the actuality of society than to question it on behalf of other possibilities. And how many novels of the period seem to end, as GF says revolutions always end, with the gradual subsiding of an agitated sea?
he cultivated an impersonality which was no more than the self-defensive detachment of a proud man from a world which disregarded his pride. I think, in fact, that he imagined far more than this sort of grandiose version of 

bouvarisme. The strain of detachment in his thought testified ultimately to his immersion in the world that made him suffer, never to a facile pose of indifference to it. There was no final recoil from the contemplation of the non-self into some transcendence of the self. On the contrary: "L'idéal n'est fécond que lorsqu'on y fait tout rentrer. C'est un travail d'amour et non d'exclusion". (Corresp. IV, p.15) He always knew that the world was there before he was. The self was not the biggest thing he knew and, perhaps, in the course of his works, his search for "impassibilité" was most determined by a wish to dispense with the demands of the ego, to shed the thin and artificial skin which disguised his nakedness from a world that exposed it. This "impassibilité" is far more than the stony imperviousness it is often imagined to be. Perhaps I was wrong to imagine the young Flaubert as watching the agitated sea of history from the shore? I did not, however, mean that he had found a technique for the evasion of suffering. In watching from the shore he discovered the distance which could make suffering clearer to him because it was no longer his own. In Flaubert moments of understanding or spiritual release always occur at a distance from the ordinary world, from Smarh carried into the skies by the devil to Emma Bovary looking down from the window of her room in Yonville and St. Julien transported heavenwards by the leper.

The need for distance from his characters in order to introduce the non-personal dimension of their situations does give Flaubert a name for hardness towards them. Such a view is false, it seems to me, in so far as it

20. Cf. This comment of Santayana's on the tragic poet: "His philosophy can build only on such knowledge of the world as the world can give". "Tragic Philosophy", Scrutiny, IV, no. 4 (1936), 375.
fosters the idea that his "impassibilité" prevented him from feeling truly inward with them. It makes his irony seem a deliberate posture by ignoring the tension within it. James, at least in French Poets and Novelists, comes up with a version of the stony, impervious Flaubert:

M. Flaubert's theory as a novelist, briefly expressed, is to begin on the outside. Human life, we may imagine his saying, is before all things a spectacle, an occupation and entertainment for the eyes. (FPN, p. 201)

This is a Flaubert who had the emotional leisure to step back from the world and coolly decide how he would set about describing it. Surely words like "spectacle", "occupation" and "entertainment" suggest far more casual creations than those of Flaubert? They square neither with what we know of his "affres du style" nor with what it can be like to read him. Could the kind of writer they imply have made Zola feel that "on est pris comme par un poignet de fer qui vous fait crier d'angoisse"? Zola suggests a variant of the Commendatore in Don Giovanni but James suggests a mere cynic. This is where he gives his case away: he makes it seem too easy to size Flaubert up. His inviting "we may imagine" makes one feel that something is being smoothed over. The slightly pompous airiness of the generalisation attributed to Flaubert is hard to imagine in Flaubert's own mouth. He is conceived of as being personally disengaged from the life he describes; he even begins from a "theory".

James's implied antithesis between two ways of rendering experience - from the "outside" or from a more inward psychological angle - strikes me as being just a neat way of explaining his opposition to Flaubert in the limited terms of a debate about literary methods. They exemplify a tendency in James which has been noted by Maurice Blanchot, a tendency to disguise human or philosophical positions beneath a literary terminology. Here,

the plausible emphasis on method begs the real issue: that James felt that human experience was most fully rendered as it was seen by the individual human consciousness, whereas Flaubert did not. The ironical distance of the narrator of Madame Bovary had been there to show that man is not the measure of all things, that the world was there before him and was bigger than him. James's hypothesis of an outside and an inside approach to character enabled the advocate of a religion of consciousness to oppose this position more easily. My argument against the Jamesian view will be that, by seeing Flaubert's novels too exclusively in terms of their characters, it tends to ignore their distinctive kind of poetry.

The idea of describing the self's relation to the world in terms of an outside/inside dualism was not peculiar to James among Flaubert's nineteenth century critics. James found it later in Faguet's division of Flaubert into a romantic and a realist; Zola said of Flaubert that "c'est par le dehors qu'il nous fait connaitre le dedans"; Brunetière has an interesting variation of the idea when he says, recalling Sainte-Beuve, that Flaubert "ne conçoit pas qu'il y ait au dedans de l'homme quelque chose qui fasse équilibre à la poussée, pour ainsi dire, des forces du dehors". Brunetière points to more than simple dualism when he uses the word "équilibre" of the relation between the self and the non-self and it is by following his remark that we can begin to counter James's view.

Jules de Gaultier, one of the most influential of the early critics of Flaubert, had the merit of invoking the outside/inside dualism in terms of

23. Auguste Emile Faguet, Flaubert (1899), passim.
25. Ferdinand Brunetière, Le Roman Naturaliste (1892), pp.206-207. Sainte-Beuve's remark is from the article on Salammbo: "Faut-il que, ni au dedans ni au dehors de ces murailles de Byrsa, pas un homme ne dise en son coeur: Je suis un homme!..." Nouveaux Lundis, 13 vols, n.d., IV (1897), p.76.
of the psychology of *bovarysme* in a way James does not. This makes these
difficult, and perhaps makeshift, concepts easier to use clearly. Gaultier
defined *bovarysme* as "la faculté départie à l'homme de se concevoir autrement
qu'il n'est".26 The defect of the definition is that it assumes that what
a man is is determinable in isolation from the precise nature of where that
man is. Gaultier suggests that a true conception of the self is shaped by
what is external to the self, which he calls reality. A man realises his
true nature when he accepts what this reality in his situation impresses
upon him. But this is taking the *tabula rasa* of empiricism to an extreme.
It means that Emma Bovary would find a true understanding of herself if she
buckled down and accepted the humdrum life her situation predicates for her.
Which turns Charles and Homais into embodiments of reality. Since, if this
were so, Emma would become an embodiment of reality to them there can be no
fixed definition of what any one self is. The situation Flaubert gives us
is dialectical in a way which makes it an abstraction for Gaultier to say
that she has mistaken her real self. Her world has given her back nothing
which could make her feel she has found a real self. She finds no route to
the snug insertion of herself into the world which Gaultier has at the back
of his mind. Flaubert does not, that is, present life as the kind of
immutable juxtaposition of the outside and the inside that Gaultier imagines.
He suggests a constant circuit of relations between the two which is far
more fluid than that. It is, besides, less schematic to think in the relative
terms of Emma and Yonville than in Gaultier's categories of the self and
the world: the artist reveals more subtle relations than the philosophical
critic. This subtlety of Flaubert's consists in his seeing that there is
no one point - outside or inside - from which an examination of Emma's
situation can be taken up. To invent such a point - and I think James would

have done - would have been to make her dilemma theoretically soluble along Gaultier's lines in a way in which it is not soluble. Flaubert's wisdom consisted in more than the self-flattering idea that man can fathom his relation to the reality that lies outside himself.

The setting off of the self against the world outside it is, of course, a common feature of romanticism. Naturalism and symbolism are both directions that were taken from it. Flaubert's greatness was perhaps that he took neither direction. He did not, for example, go along with the viewpoint of Baudelaire's essay _Puisque Réalisme il y a:

> Le Poësie est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, c'est ce qui n'est complètement vrai que dans un autre monde. Ce monde-ci, dictionnaire hiéroglyphique. (27)

Flaubert only got as far as wishing so radical a solution were possible.

Those abrupt jolts he gives to his characters' dreams of going beyond their situation - when Emma sees Charles take a penknife from his pocket or when Julien comes up against the dying stag - all come from "ce monde-ci" and they signify a world far less tractable than Baudelaire's "forêt de symboles".

Flaubert is furthest away from the spirit of Baudelaire's remark when he seems closest to it. When Taine, who was researching into the psychology of creativeness, asked Flaubert whether the "imagination intensive" made images which became confused with the "objet réel" which prompted them, the reply was:

> L'image intéressée est pour moi aussi vraie que la réalité objective des choses, - et ce que la réalité m'a fourni, au bout de très peu de temps ne se distingue plus pour moi des embellissements ou modifications que je lui ai données. (28)

"Aussi vraie". Even if the "autre monde" could become real it could never be separated from "ce monde-ci". The self (in this case the self which is a

28. _Corresp. Supplément_, II, pp.91-92 (Taine's questions are quoted on p.91.)
post) and the non-self are not seen as categories but as part of a continuum in which perception occurs. This sometimes led Flaubert to doubt that "les choses" were separate entities - he once wrote to Maupassant:

Avez-vous jamais cru à l'existence des choses? Est-ce que tout n'est pas une illusion? Il n'y a de vrai que les "rapports", c'est à dire la façon dont nous perçevons les objets. (Corresp. VIII, p.135)

- but he never believed that the imagination could leave them behind.

One of the key statements in Flaubert's Correspondance is relevant here: "je ne connais rien de plus noble que la contemplation ardente des choses de ce monde". (Corresp. IV, p.357). The nobility was in the intensity of the "rapports" he had with things. They enabled him to express himself as well as any strictly human vocabulary of passion could and at an intenser level than that of straightforward simile or emblem: "j'ai au coeur quelque chose du suintement vert des cathédrales normandes". One of the clearest expressions of such "rapport" is found in a letter to Louise Colet (who was no doubt displeased by its innocent lack of conventional romantic tact):

A force quelquefois de regarder un caillou, un animal, un tableau, je me suis senti y entrer. Les communications entr'humaines (sic) ne sont pas plus intenses. (Corresp. III, p.210)

Flaubert contemplates the pebble; he is not interested in any anthropomorphic projection of himself into it. The pebble stays where it is and if he enters into its being it is not because he tries to possess its nature but because he let himself be possessed by it. The pebble does not become just an element of his personal experience. Looking at it induces in him a state of tranced passiveness before what is other. This dwelling on the pebble is neither coolly scientific nor a mystical forgetting of the self; it is a "communication". I think it symbolises for us the spellbound state in which poetry is conceived. Flaubert would have understood the
Wordsworthian "wise passiveness" much better than most novelists. To let the world be was to let himself be. The closed circuit of the mind was broken. Not, then, for Flaubert, the Baudelairean exploit of getting up and walking away with the world.

A tranced receptiveness before the world was the complement of what is, as it were, officially thought of as Flaubert's impersonality. The Jamesian consciousness, struggling to interpret the world and piece it together, to make the world explicable to the self, is a radically different thing. The "inside" sphere it enabled James to inhabit would have been impossible to Flaubert if he wanted to conserve his poetic openness because his creativeness was based on the fact that any demarcation between the self and the non-self was impossibly schematic. He defined genius not as an ability to grasp the world but as a talent for exposing oneself to it:

Le génie, après tout, n'est peut-être qu'un raffinement de la douleur, c'est à dire, une plus complète et intense pénétration de l'objectif à travers notre âme. La tristesse de Molière, sans doute, venait de toute la bêtise de l'Humanité qu'il sentait comprise en lui. (Corresp. III, p.358)

Perhaps this makes genius sound too like an heroic martyrdom? It is certainly not difficult to find evidence for taking that idea further and making Flaubert out to be a figure who was, morally, what the flayed Mâtho was physically. But the point I want to dwell on here is that, whatever else it may be, this trance-like "raffinement de la douleur" is a state which effects

29. I include George Eliot in this remark, despite her debt to Wordsworth. When she says that a "keen vision" of "ordinary life" would be like "hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat" so that "we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence", (Middlemarch, chap. 20), she expresses a fear of the wisdom. The fear of nature which Wordsworth and GF sometimes felt was of a different sort. Wordsworth, I think, was unlike GF in being over-eager to resolve this fear into a sense of harmony with nature; his interest in tragic experience was in getting over to the other side of it.

29a. 'Poetic openness' in GF is, of course, the reverse of a taste for the poetical: "Extrayons-la (i.e. la poésie) de n'importe quoi, car elle git en tout et partout: pas un atome de matière qui ne contienne la pensée; et habituons-nous à considérer le monde comme une œuvre d'art dont il faut reproduire les procédés dans nos œuvres." (Corresp. III, p.138. My italics.)
a breaking down of the ego. That it also contradicts James's notion that there could be an inside and an outside in Flaubert's world is part of the same point. What James had objected to in Flaubert's method was essentially that it degraded the status of the self. But if I am right to suggest that Flaubert's trance is poetic because it makes it impossible for him to start within a separate, individual "I", in the way George Eliot and James do, then it becomes a moot point whether or not it really does subvert selfhood at its deepest levels. It is after all what lies beyond the self which makes possible its extension and the ego can easily bar its way.

To summarise this perhaps obscure argument I would like to quote from Georges Poulet's essay on Flaubert. He is discussing the same relation between the self and objects in Flaubert that I have tried to describe:

... la particularité de l'objet n'existe que pour qui maintient dans sa conscience un écart entre la chose perçue et l'esprit percevant; elle n'existe plus pour celui qui, effaçant en lui toute idée d'un moi représentant et d'une chose représentée, borne sa conscience présente à la représentation même... l'âme étant ce qu'elle représente, et l'objet n'existant que dans la représentation que s'en fait l'âme, il ne reste plus qu'un être unique, qui peut s'appeler indifféremment âme ou nature... (30)

This idea of the ego being supplanted by an "être unique" which is "âme ou nature" clarifies Flaubert's wish to become a "coeur général". The presence of this "être unique" is what led me earlier to discuss the young Flaubert in terms of what might be called a tragic psychology. Tragedy is partly, I think, a state in which the (Jamesian?) "écart" Poulet describes is broken down. It will be one of the main speculations of this thesis that Flaubert moved in the direction of tragedy whereas James inevitably moved away from it.

Before I try to explain more clearly what I mean by tragedy here I

must quote a remark of F.R. Leavis's which is both a useful caveat and also a way for me to get nearer what I want to say:

**To postulate a 'tragic experience' or 'tragic effect' and then seek to define it is to lay oneself open to the suspicion of proposing a solemn and time-honoured academic game. Yet the critical contemplation of the profoundest things in literature does lead to the idea of such an experience...** (31)

If the prospect is daunting the case of Flaubert does correspond to Leavis's second sentence here. The reader may be less put off if I add that my main interest for the moment is in Flaubert and I shall do no more than define the word tragedy in the limited sense in which the experience of reading him makes me bring it in. The questions I am asking are not of the order of "What is Tragedy?" but more limited ones: "How far is Flaubert's art tragic?" and "How far was tragedy possible at the time he was writing?"

This does not mean that I shall indulge in ponderous speculations as to whether or not tragedy has died: I think it follows quite naturally from my decision to use the word tragedy as a way of understanding those elements in Flaubert's make-up which I have already touched upon. The fact that these thoughts are questions will, I hope, become clearer when I begin to discuss Lawrence's criticism of Flaubert and to compare *Portrait of a Lady* with *Madame Bovary*. Such comparisons should make it plain that what I have to say about tragedy will be focussed on the novel. It will not necessarily apply, or be intended to apply, to what is conventionally thought of as tragedy: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Racine. To look for some generalised pattern of the experience they give us, in the works of a man writing at an entirely different time in a different form, would indeed be to propose "a solemn and time-honoured academic game". There is no point in supposing that there is a kind of Platonic form of what tragedy is - a set of critical or philosophical rules to be applied to works of art from the outside. Every

tragedy is a new tragedy which cannot be entirely defined by old tragedies. It seems to me that the whole concept is best used with a kind of loose precision: as delicately and selectively as possible and in such a way that the reader is allowed enough mental room to fill in its meaning from his own experience. For tragedy is less interesting as a concept than because of the concrete experience to which it points. If I use definition it will only be through the comparison of one experience with another, of James with Flaubert. For if the word 'tragedy' is used too portentously - and one cannot be forever trying to define it - it is probably being used to do the critic's own work for him and becomes a discussion-stopper.

Unfortunately, solemnity of the kind Leavis refers to is found not only in writers on tragedy but in tragedians themselves. Pomposity and bravura in the descriptions of man's trials with "la fatalité" can be found even in Corneille. I once saw a mediocre performance of Le Cid where the hero found a way of roaring his alexandrines with such relish that it was impossible to imagine him as suffering at all. With the buskin thumping kind of tragedy Flaubert had nothing to do, save perhaps in certain early works where he was still under the spell of Eyron. He detested Racine, and, when he was in his twenties, he and his friends Du Camp and Bouilhet planned to write a mock-classical tragedy: Jenner ou la Découverte de la Vaccine. This is how Du Camp describes it:

Dans les tragédies les plus sombres, Flaubert ne voyait que le burlesque, la phraseologie prétentieuse et violente des Scythes ou de Denys le Tyran le mettait en joie; il déclara - il décretta, - que nous allions faire une tragédie selon les règles, avec les trois unités, et où les choses ne seraient jamais appelées par leur nom. (32)

Flaubert, always attracted by what repelled him, had been ploughing through piles of lofty eighteenth century tragedies by Voltaire and Marmontel. Part 32. Souvenirs Littéraires, I, p.238.
of his impatience with their august pathos was perhaps prompted by the feeling that the conventional tragic idea of man's being ennobled by suffering had become the excuse for mere self-glorification. At a much later date he wrote to George Sand that: "Le malheur n'est bon à rien, bien que les hypocrites prétendent le contraire". (Corresp. Supp. III, p.214)

The suffering he knew had nothing grand about it, and to imagine it had was to try to alleviate it in a dishonest way. His impatience resembles that expressed by Leavis in "Tragedy and the 'Medium'" when he quotes a passage of nobly suffering self-indulgence from Bertrand Russell's *A Free Man's Worship*. So it is no surprise to us when we find that Flaubert preferred Aristophanes to Racine. His niece has this to report: "Combien de fois lui ai-je entendu dire qu'il sût désiré avant tout être un grand poète comique!" If there is any more proof needed that his approach to tragedy is going to differ profoundly from classical tragedy it is to be found in his ironical attitude to Charles Bovary's lament over "la fatalité". Flaubert doubts whether it is the gods that man is up against at all.

Flaubert's feelings are not uncommon ones among nineteenth century novelists. There is a sense in which classical tragedy in particular is based on completely different principles from any realistic novel. Manzoni has this to say about the way the formal concentration of tragedy makes the passions it displays too remote from life:

It was necessary, therefore, to bring this will to life more rapidly by exaggerating the passions, by denaturing them. For a character to come to a final decision within twenty-four hours, an altogether different degree of passion is required than in the case of one with which he has been battling for a month.

And:

The tragic poets were in a way reduced to painting only this small number of clearcut, dominant passions... the theatre

became filled with fictitious characters who figured as abstract types of certain passions rather than as passionate beings... Hence the exaggeration, the conventional tone, the uniformity of the tragic character... (34)

It is the unrealistic treatment of character in time which Manzoni objects to. His interest is in the character's "final decision". It is a man-centred view. The concentration of classical tragedy - which had once been an almost ritualistic way of showing man in conflict with his gods - seemed a convention which denatured the passions. Manzoni is essentially arguing that man should be seen in a historical rather than an eternal light. The imposition of the unities permitted a "denaturing" generalisation of passions because it was a way of seeing man a-historically. It is at this point that we can begin to see differences between Manzoni's attitude and Flaubert's way of thinking about individuals. Flaubert would not have thought that a fidelity to the human condition could be adequately achieved through the realistic description of human emotions alone.

The consequence of Manzoni's argument, that the novel needs to show human experience as the slower, more protracted process it really is, is perhaps the creation of a new kind of sympathy which is different from that of the classical dramatist. In saying this I am thinking of an observation of George Eliot's. She is talking about the way the novelist should treat the humbler, less dramatic fates of ordinary people, people like Manzoni's "promessi sposi" or Emma and Charles Bovary:

I find a source of delicious sympathy in those faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions. (35)

She seems to associate tragedy of the old kind with greater possibilities of action than those enjoyed by the inhabitants of the circumscribed,

35. Adam Bede, chap. 17.
unheroic world she herself portrays. In *Middlemarch* (in the passage already quoted from) she speaks of the "element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency" as being not yet "wrought" into "the coarse emotion of mankind". (Chap. 20) This seems to suggest that the question of whether or not tragedy was possible in the nineteenth century soon gets subsumed into the larger, and even more difficult, question of whether everyday nineteenth century life itself could be tragic. And nothing could be less "world-stirring" than *Madame Bovary*. As Baudelaire said: "Soyons donc vulgaire dans le choix du sujet, puisque le choix d'un sujet trop grand est une impertinence pour le lecteur du XIXe siècle". But vulgar subjects and characters who lead a "monotonous homely existence" do not account on their own for the association of tragedy with the stilted and the unrealistic. Probably, the restricted possibilities of the religious life in the nineteenth century had some bearing on the feelings of Manzoni and George Eliot? Tragedy shares a generalising attitude to human passions with the religious way of thinking.

It is whom religion is mentioned that a discrimination between Flaubert and the other two novelists becomes possible. As I have tried to show, Flaubert was never afraid of making the jump from the contemplation of the single life to reflections on the human condition, to seeing life *sub specie aeternatis*. He did not share George Eliot's emotional need to particularise each individual lot and he would not have found a "delicious source of sympathy" in the small and the humdrum. Sainte-Beuve criticised him, as George Eliot might have done herself, for saying that the small and humdrum were small and humdrum. Flaubert preferred to survey human smallness in a less cosily consoling manner. Often his picture of life reminds us of Lear's phrase about "this great stage of fools". A keener, more piercing wind blows through the "sympathy" he feels for his people. George Eliot tries to see

Adam Bede or Hetty Sorrel from within an orbit of feeling which they themselves might share. Flaubert, like Lear, wants to take upon himself "the mystery of things" as if he were God's spy. The story of Félicité in Un Cœur Simple is concerned not only to make us feel the pathos of her particular life but the way in which it reflects something the reader can share with her through more than just sympathy: a sense of her life as part of "l'éternelle énigme qui... vient de loin pour aller loin".37

Perhaps I can clarify why there is reason to speak of tragedy here simply by putting a characteristic passage of Flaubert against what strikes me as a fruitful idea of the kind of position from which tragedy is written? The second passage, from an early essay by Georg Lukács, comes first:

La tragédie est un jeu... un jeu dont Dieu est le spectateur.
Il n'est que spectateur et jamais sa parole ou ses actes ne se mêlent aux paroles et aux gestes des acteurs. (38)

The distance of this all-seeing and unsiding onlooker is what creates the tragic feeling that "les gestes des acteurs" are made without hope of response from outside themselves. It enables us to see man exposed to the worst that life can do to him. God is present only in the sense that he is present in Christ's cry on the cross: "My God, my God - why hast Thou forsaken me?". The incorporation into a work of art of a perspective like that of Lukács' onlooking God has the opposite effect from that of the

37. The sceptical reader may be interested in the following remarks which Sartre makes about Smarh: "Il lui suffira de glisser encore un peu, de refuser l'anthropomorphisme, de rappeler que la création n'est pas faite pour l'homme - idée scientifique, précisément, et bourgeoise parce qu'elle ne s'accompagne pas d'une prise de conscience sociale - et le voilà en mesure de s'identifier à l'ouragan, au cyclone: le point de vue de l'absolu devient celui de la négation radicale de l'humain". "F: Du Poète à l'Artiste", p.472. (This seems to me to apply better to GF's youthful, romantic Satanism - which Sartre sometimes treats in a too solemn and rationalising manner in the Temps Modernes articles - than to the mature novels. Many of GF's views about life are fairly constant throughout his career but one central change from the early to the mature works is, along with a less theatrical sense of irony, a much greater compassion. I shall try to bring this out in the next three chapters, which will also, I hope, make it more clear that, in linking remarks made by GF at different stages of his career in the present chapter, I am having to generalise much more than a biographer would do.)

38. "Métabusique de la Tragédie" (1908), quoted by Goldmann in Le Dieu Caché, p.10.
closeness George Eliot wants with her characters. She relates "aux paroles et aux gestes des acteurs" until she becomes a sort of answering universe to them, a bosom in which their joys and sorrows find that echo which tragedy refuses to give. Where she does parallel the Flaubertian "impassibilité" is in her control of her narrative in a novel like Middlemarch, in that omniscience shared by all the earlier nineteenth century novelists. It, too, brings Lukács remark to mind. The novelist had, perhaps, been forced into filling the place that God seemed to have vacated. 39

In the early Souvenirs, notes et pensées intimes (1838-1841) Flaubert gives his picture of how he imagines the world to appear to the eyes of God. He has just been discussing Sade's revelation of limitless power but I don't think the passage's obvious debt to Sade (it recalls SidoindVoluerie and Passion et Vertu) should lead one to dismiss it:

Montez sur une tour assez haut pour que le bruit se perde, pour que les hommes soient petits; si vous voyez de là un homme en tuer un autre, vous n'en seriez guère ému, moins ému à coup sûr que si le sang rejaillissait sur vous. Imaginez une tour plus haute et une indifférence plus grande - un géant qui regarde des myrmidons, un grain de sable au pied d'une pyramide et imaginez les myrmidons qui s'égorgent et le grain de poussière qui se souleve, qu'est-ce que tout cela peut faire au géant et à la pyramide - maintenant vous pouvez comparer la nature, Dieu, l'intelligence infinie, en un mot, enfin à cet homme qui a cent pieds, à cette pyramide qui en a cent mille - pensez d'après cela à la misère de nos crimes et de nos vertus, de nos grandeurs et de nos bassesses. (40)

39. It is, however, a mistake to assume that this omniscience (which is, in part, an inevitable result of the novelist's having to invent his own plot) also entails omnipotence. George Eliot herself felt that it made for uncertainty: "When one has to work out the dramatic action for one's self under the inspiration of an idea, instead of having a grand myth or an Italian novel ready to one's hand, one feels anything but omnipotent". The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon Haight, 7 vols. (1954-1956), IV, pp.300-301. GF's desire to check his novels against reality - e.g. his enquiries into the manufacture of porcelain before describing Arnoux's factory in L'Education Sentimentale - must have been prompted by similar feelings.

It is a spine-chilling thought and yet, perhaps, in thinking it, Flaubert acquires a certain strength and consolation from his sense of the finiteness of human suffering. The streak of sadism in the passage — what Sartre would describe as the "négation radicale de l'humain" which Flaubert's pride involves — serves to explode any tendency to put an ultimate value on the individual ego. Sartre would probably be correct if he saw a strong element of fantasy in this particular passage: one does feel that Flaubert is hankering after Godhead. There is perhaps a touch of that desire in most manifestations of the tragic instinct? It springs from dissatisfaction with the exclusive state of being human.

Yeats says, reminding us of Flaubert looking at the pebble, that:

... in mainly tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there...(41)

Touched, for Yeats, by images which "haunt the edge of trance". Flaubert would, I think, have gone some way with Yeats in thinking that "character" could not provide a final expression of human experience. (One thinks of his contempt for Stendhal and Stendhalians.) In a way, he wished to see human life from a point midway between the "indifférence" of God and the passions of men. He was sufficiently near in spirit to the religious imagination to want to see life as going forward under the unchanging aegis of fate or the gods, sufficiently near to cherish the idea of "impassibilité"; but he was also the mystical sceptic, and the son of a free-thinking scientist to boot, who could say "Je suis mystique au fond et je ne crois à rien". (Corresp. II, p.412). So life seen from the top of the pyramid could have an element of comedy, even farce, in it as well as an element of

tragedy. With no God or mysterious fate to give a pattern to experience, even an indeterminate pattern like that of King Lear, a tragic world can easily seem the province of the arbitrary comic demon of bad luck. Either that, or the novelist's desire to become a "coeur général", could lead him into the trap of playing God himself.

42. Cf. Two highly characteristic remarks: "... tout Beau se compose du tragique et du bouffon". (Corresp. I, p.63); "... le grotesque et le tragique... ne sont que le même masque qui recouvre le même néant". (Corresp. III, pp.407-408)
CHAPTER THREE

James's Reading of "Madame Bovary"

Madame Bovary is a classic of modern European literature. As such it is a novel which a novelist writing in English can only ignore to his own disadvantage. To begin in this way is, in an English context, to risk limiting what follows to the realm of polemics and even of paradox. For Flaubert's novel has perturbed and rankled the Anglo-Saxon sensibility too much for one to pretend that there is any consensus as to its greatness in this country. No other French novel has given us so apt a cue for definitions of the very different virtues of our own tradition in fiction; none has evoked such deeply-felt resistance. Our praise of Flaubert has been double-edged whilst our criticisms of him have often seemed like declarations of faith. It sometimes seems as if he has been more debated here than read. This applies as much to his friends as to his enemies. When Pound and Eliot used him as a whip with which to beat the English for their artistic immaturity they were, in a way, as guilty of making Flaubert subservient to their own critical battles as is Dr. Leavis in those stern asides in which he offers him up on the altar of the "Great Tradition".¹ There is little to choose between making Flaubert a war-cry or a bête noire: either response depends on the assumption that the critic is dealing with something already known, something to be epitomised and abstracted. But if the English critic of Flaubert soon comes up against this kind of road-block he hardly helps himself by trying to by-pass it. To try to by-pass Pound and Eliot and Leavis - and, perhaps, Arnold, James and Lawrence too - would be like by-passing a part of his own sensibility. What could this lead to but the blind alley of imitation Frenchness? And so there is nothing for it

¹. There is a perceptive discussion of Pound's and Eliot's reading of GF, in relation to Remy de Gourmont's and James's, in the article by G.R. Strickland which was cited in Chapter I.
but to relegate that ideal opening to a faraway conclusion and join in
the "debate". What might seem a detour is really the most direct way into
the subject.

It would be crude to suggest that Flaubert has done no more in
England than to provide a case over which to fight a running battle between
Anglo-Saxon insularity and continental modernism. That would be to retreat
into a colourful fantasy of George Moore's. In fact, Moore's own rather
euphoric francophilia resulted in less permanently searching criticism
than that of those critics for whom Flaubert had the effect of getting,
morally and intellectually, under their skin. Since the admonitions of
Matthew Arnold, much of the best criticism has been written by writers who
have been challenged by Flaubert into self-definition, who have felt his
art to be incompatible with the art they themselves were seeking to create.
This is especially true of James and of Lawrence. Both achieved the kind
of creative adverse criticism which can spark off in the reader a live
exploration of its subject. Such criticism has been too uncommon in France
between Sainte-Beuve and Sartre for it to be forgotten. Yet it cannot be
said to have borne much fruit, even in this country. James and Lawrence
focussed their deepest attention on Flaubert's novels as novels but later
critics who have taken up their thoughts have tended to see the novels
refracted through the Correspondance. Ironically, the saint of Art has got

2. I am referring to Moore's exuberant early enthusiasm for GF. His
attitude in later years was much cooler although he retained his immense
respect for GF's "technique". For a full picture of his response to GF
see the following: Georges-Paul Collet, George Moore et la France (1957);
Walter Ferguson, The Influence of F on George Moore (Philadelphia, 1934);
W.C. Frierson, L'Influence du Naturalisme Français sur les Romanciers
Anglais (1925); Mary Neale, F en Angleterre: Etude sur les Lecteurs
Anglais de F (Bordeaux, 1966). The kind of "influence" of GF on Moore
which these authors describe, with its cycle from imitation to reaction,
serves to highlight the much greater creativeness of HJ's response to
GF. (Moore's near eulogy of L'Education - "A Tragic Novel", Cosmopolis,
VII, July-September (1897), 38-59 - is discussed in Chapter X below.)
in the way of his own creations as readers have learnt more of his effort to keep himself out of them. One can see this beginning to happen in Middleton Murry's perceptive essay and one suspects Eliot of going to Flaubert more for a critical theory than for an artistic experience. With Leavis, who seems at first to be treading in the footsteps of James and Lawrence, Flaubert has become a "case" against which to bring out the qualities of other writers. Madame Bovary is not a great book about life and death, it is referred to only as a monument to the "perverse heroism" of its author's pursuit of "form". In other words, Leavis does not extend the thought of James and Lawrence, he pushes it to an extreme where it becomes little more than a hostile version of George Moore's. It is no surprise to find that Martin Turnell, writing in Scrutiny, sums up Flaubert's claims to greatness by calling him a "great literary engineer", a mere quarry for the techniques of his successors. One presumes that Leavis must have accepted this crude divorce of the form and the content of a writer who regarded the two things as inseparable and the two words as meaningless.

3. For example, the fact that most of the letters to Louise Colet were written late at night, when GF was feeling tired after a stint of arduous writing, has given the false impression that his work was all self-punishment. Victor Brombert has good reason to say that "the Correspondance admirable though it is, ultimately rendered the author a disservice". The Novels of F: A Study of Themes and Techniques (Princeton, New Jersey, 1966), p.39.


5. The Great Tradition: George Eliot, H. J. Joseph Conrad (1962), p.17. Leavis's remarks on GF are scattered throughout his writings on the novel; they are brief, combative and become repetitious. The form they take in his later work is more dismissive than in The Great Tradition, e.g. "I would without hesitation surrender the whole œuvre of Flaubert for Dombey and Son, or Little Dorrit". (Spectator, January, 1963). I myself would want something to set against Florence Dombey and Amy Dorrit but I think Leavis's belligerent asides deserve currency for the challenge they offer the admirer of GF.

6. "Flaubert, II", Scrutiny, XIII (1945-1946), 291. (I should add that Turnell is aware of the contradictions in this statement and tries to qualify it. I do not mean to deny the general value of his essays on GF but just to attack the idea of GF's art which they have helped to popularise.)
in isolation. At their worst, such views make Madame Bovary's status in France seem incomprehensible and at best they only confirm it as a classic of the classroom, a good essay subject. They do not help us to recapture a freshness of response to the novel as James and Lawrence do. 8

James and Lawrence are especially relevant to my argument in the next three chapters and I shall turn to them constantly. For they both suggest the possibility of seeing Madame Bovary as a tragic novel at the same time as they offer a test for the ideas put forward in the last chapter. James's essays on Flaubert also provide an opportunity for floating speculation which will be explored further in the second half of this thesis: that James himself, when compared with Flaubert, is an essentially untragic writer. It is this which, to me, explains the way Flaubert's impersonality is misrepresented, in French Poets and Novelists, as a frigid aloofness to

7. The idea of GF popularised by Leavis and Turnell applies to so few of his thoughts about style that it is worth countering with a few brief quotations from the Correspondance: "il faut sentir fortement afin de penser, et penser pour exprimer". (VII, p.290); "tu n'êteras pas la forme de son idée, car l'idée n'existe qu'en vertu de sa forme". (I, p.321); "l'esprit est comme une argile intérieure. Il repousser du dedans la forme et la façonne selon lui". (III, p.280); "la force plastique défaillie toujours à rendre ce qui n'est pas très net dans l'esprit". (III, p.52); "le lecteur ne s'apercevra pas, je l'espère, de tout le travail psychologique caché sous la forme, mais il en ressentira l'effet". (IV, p.3); "je crois la forme et le fond deux subtilités, deux entités qui n'existent jamais l'une sans l'autre". (VII, p.290). For many more similar remarks see Charles Carlot, La Correspondance de F. Etude et Répertoire Critique (1968), pp.390-394. It is irritating to hear GF still being described as an "aesthete".

8. The above paragraph is necessarily sketchy. There was, of course, a good deal of routine Puritan disapproval of MB in the Victorian reviews as well as some perceptive appreciation from such writers as Pater and Saintsbury. See my bibliography for fuller details of the latter. For the history of GF's reception by English-speaking readers see Neale (op.cit.); Ernest Jackson, The Critical Reception of GF in the United States, 1860-1960 (The Hague and Paris, 1966); the unpublished Sheffield M.A. thesis by Annie Rouxville, F and the English Literary Reviews in the Second Half of the 19th Century (1971). GF has never been very widely read in this country, with the exception of MB. It is worth noting that there is no mention at all of him in E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel (1927).
human life. I shall try to argue that Flaubert gives us a sense of common human suffering which goes deeper than the empathy and pity for the lot of particular individuals, whether Emma Bovarys or Milly Theales, that James missed in his work. The distinction to make here is one that Johnson puts into the mouth of Pekuah in Besselas: "nothing, said she, is more common than to call our own condition, the condition of life". The Jamesian stress on the individual point-of-view can work against the expression of this "condition of life" whereas Flaubert's impassibilité, acting as a check on the constant tendency of the novel to dwell too much on particular dilemmas, makes such an expression more possible. My case is that it is precisely by not making us brim over with personal sentiment on behalf of his characters that Flaubert achieves a quality, more often found in poetry than fiction, for which another Johnsonian name suggests itself: "the grandeur of generality". It is not a quality which should be associated with any mere penchant for generalisation, something Flaubert was more prone to, as we have seen, in his early years. What the Oeuvres de Jeunesse remind us of are all those purely personal feelings which, in some ways, always remained with him, feelings which were not only at the root of his true generality but which were often a block to it. James, it hardly needs saying, is the last critic to allow us to gloss over such feelings.

In the essay on Turgenev in Partial Portraits, in the course of a description of Turgenev's friendship with Flaubert, James relates Flaubert's preoccupation with "form" and "style" to an inadequacy in his emotional make-up:

... there was something ungenerous in his genius. He was cold, and he would have given everything he had to be able to glow. There is nothing in his novels like the passion of Elena for Insseroff, like the purity of Lisa, like the anguish of the parents of Bazaroff, like the hidden wound of Tatiana; and yet Flaubert yearned, with all the accumulations of his vocabulary, to touch the chord of pathos. There were some parts of his mind that did not "give", that did not render a sound. He had too much of some sorts of experience and not enough of others. And yet this failure of an organ, as I may call it, inspired those who knew him with a kindness. If Flaubert was powerful and limited, there is something human, after all, and even rather august in a strong man who has not been able completely to express himself. (PP. pp.319-320)

If James's compassion here is slightly tinged with complacency it is perhaps because Flaubert is seen as trying desperately to be the kind of novelist James himself was in, say, chapter 42 of The Portrait of a Lady? After meeting him in 1876 James had felt that he could "easily - more than easily - see all round him "intellectually"", and he had written to William that: "In poor old Flaubert there is something almost tragic; his big intellectual temperament, machinery, etc., and vainly colossal attempts to press out the least little drop of passion. So much talent, and so much naïveté and honesty, and yet so much dryness and coldness". Did Flaubert yearn to "touch the chord of pathos" and to "press out the least little drop of passion" from Emma's sufferings? Or was James really asking for Emma's story to be told in the way she herself would have wanted it to be told? The question that James really raises is whether Flaubert's effort was not in the opposite direction of emotional restraint. It might seem that Novembre comes nearer to satisfying James's demands of fiction than Madame Bovary does.

There is, then, no need, in trying to answer James, to deny the presence of a certain coldness in the way Madame Bovary is narrated. What has to be explored is whether this coldness is simply the consequence of

an inherent lack of feeling in the author. An obvious place to begin looking is the laconic conclusion of the *Première Partie*. Charles has just agreed to move from Tostes, in the hope that a change of air will cure Emma's nervous illness; Emma, in the course of preparing for the move, comes across her faded bridal bouquet and, in an impulse of despair, throws it on the fire:

Elle le regarda brûler. Les petites baies de carton éclataient, les fils d'archal se torçaient, le galon se fondait; et les corolles de papier, racornies, se balançant le long de la plaque comme des papillons noirs, enfin s'envolèrent par la cheminée.

Quand on partit de Tostes, au mois de mars, Mme Bovary était enceinte. (12)

The tight-lipped ending reveals more than a Flaubert who with-holds sympathy from Emma because of his relish for the twists of her fortunes. Her pregnancy comes as a shock to us because it comes as a shock to her. Any conventional sympathising with her condition here would therefore run counter to her own real feelings about it. The curt effect of the irony is not a pose of the narrator's but a way of mirroring the aggressive finality with which what happens to Emma clashes against what she is feeling. Flaubert can jolt us, as well as Emma, with the pressure of a stark and unwelcome fact by breaking up the rhythm of her own reveries. It is his matter-of-fact interjection which prompts us into an understanding of her suffering, not just her sense of her own pathos, which is conveyed so delicately through that lingering, almost sighing, cadence in the prose as the remnants of the bouquet float up the chimney. In fact, the lingeringness of that "enfin s'envolèrent" suggests that it would have been only too easy for Flaubert to "glow" as James wanted and that what seems "cold" in the ensuing irony is partly there to check that tendency. It is as if Flaubert needs to distance himself from Emma to make clear and articulate what is

near to being a feeling of mere unbearableness. Detachment is as much a moral need as an aesthetic aim. If there is any suggestion that there is something forced in the way the chapter ends it is not, I think, because Emma's pregnancy has been rigged by the author but because he does not find detachment easy to sustain: his tone is only ostensibly dead-pan and its shortness really testifies not to what he is unable to feel but to feelings which seem half-throttled. A semblance of serenity is won from a state of acute tension. In a letter to Louise Colet in 1853 Flaubert writes, rather wishfully, that: "Le seul moyen de vivre en paix, c'est de se placer tout d'un bond au-dessus de l'humanité entière et de n'avoir avec elle rien de commun, qu'un rapport d'œil". (Corresp., III, p.178)

Neither pride nor coldness can fully explain such an aspiration. For Flaubert, peace of mind entails a kind of desperate mysticism which is, perhaps, a defensive rebound from his feeling of being implicated in, and exposed to, the suffering he depicts. It is in this way that he gives his impassive account of Emma's suicide at the end of the novel: with the acrid taste of poison in his own mouth.

The Flaubert I am trying to set against James's Flaubert was not so much struggling to "completely express himself" as struggling to express something more than what was personal in his own sensibility. This is why writing Madame Bovary was, unlike writing Novembre or the first Tentation, such a discipline to him. His achievement was to discover in himself a strong compassion for characters who had at first seemed totally other to him. It was only in this way that the disguised self-pity of the hysteria which is the ground-tone of Novembre, could be transformed into a genuine intimation of lacrimae rerum. To imagine an Emma was a way of confirming that his own suffering was not simply private and unique but that it was echoed, beyond the self, as intrinsic to human life:
Tout ce qu'on invente est vrai, sois-en sûre. La poésie est une chose aussi précise que la géométrie. L'induction vaut la déduction, et puis, arrivé à un certain point, on ne se trompe plus quant à tout ce qui est de l'âme. Ma pauvre Bovary, sans doute, souffre et pleure dans vingt villages de France à la fois, à cette heure même. (Corresp., III, p.291)

This remark speaks for itself. The effect of its spontaneity is not just to make James's word "ungenerous" seem ill-chosen, it also makes it impossible to imagine Flaubert as harbouring any conscious, calculating desire to "touch the chord of pathos".

There is formidable corroboration of James's point about Flaubert's coldness in both Matthew Arnold and Sainte-Beuve. In fact, the latter's review of Madame Bovary had probably influenced the James of French Poets and Novelists. He too refused to subscribe to Flaubert's anger against life:

Cependant, l'office de l'art est-il de ne vouloir pas consoler, de ne vouloir admettre aucun élément de clémence et de douceur, sous couleur d'être plus vraie? La vérité d'auteurs, à ne chercher qu'elle, elle n'est pas toute entière et nécessairement du côté du mal, du côté de la sottise et de la perversité humaine. (13)

Arnold's Flaubert is equally incapable of glowing:

But Madame Bovary... is a work of petrified feeling; over it hangs an atmosphere of bitterness, irony, impotence; not a personage in the book to rejoice or console us; the springs of freshness and feeling are not there to create such personages. Emma Bovary follows a course in some respects like that of Anna [Karenina], but where, in Emma Bovary, is Anna's charm? The treasures of compassion, tenderness, insight, which alone, amid such guilt and misery, can enable charm to subsist and to emerge, are wanting to Flaubert. He is cruel, with the cruelty of petrified feeling, to his poor heroine; he pursues her without pity or pause, as with malignity; he is harder upon her himself than any reader even, I think, will be inclined to be. (14)

It is James's view expressed without James's urbanity. The "treasures of

compassion, tenderness, insight" are another version of Sainte-Beuve's "clémence" and "douceur" without the suggestion of Gallic grace. And if Sainte-Beuve does not make the point here that Flaubert's anger is directed against his characters he did make it when he came to review Salammbo.

Faced with the joint testimony of three such critics as Sainte-Beuve, Arnold and James it would be foolhardy to simply indulge a desire to prove them wrong. The most I can do, for the moment, is to suggest that before their criticisms are allowed to stand it is necessary to ask whether a novel which did possess the virtues they find absent from Madame Bovary would really be a greater novel than Madame Bovary. Or would it dissipate our sense of Emma's tragedy with its own sympathetic warmth, replacing our recognition of her humanity with a consoling sense of its author's? What, for example, would the end of the Première Partie be like? I ask these questions because the confidence of all three critics in the rightness of their own moral feelings suggests a response to Flaubert's art which is self-protective. Emma's tragedy has an indelible actuality that fills the mind too much for the reader to import so easily an alternative idea of "la vérité" into his reading. ¹⁵ This actuality is not mere naturalism, it becomes a way of asking us to use our imaginations to recognise in Emma something which is also in ourselves. Sainte-Beuve, Arnold and James are all intent on asking the novel for a moral satisfaction for themselves, for the consolation of pity. It is Arnold who allows us to see the difference between pity and fellow-feeling most clearly. Although he complains of Flaubert's "malignity" to Emma he unwittingly reveals that he morally dissociates himself from her: Flaubert is "harder upon her himself than any reader even, I think, will be inclined to be". (My italics.) Is

a sensitive response to Emma's sufferings likely to prompt Arnold's word "guilt" or to make us feel that that "guilt" conflicts with our compassion for her? What Arnold wants is to feel for Emma simply as an individual and her lack of Anna Karenina's "charm", as a solvent of her "guilt", prevents him. But it is essential to Flaubert's ability to make us see the general "condition of life" in Emma's story that Emma should not seem to be distinguished by any of that special romantic "charm" which particularises Anna. Arnold's compassion wants to be allowed to choose its object and this casts a doubt on what he means by "the treasures of compassion, tenderness, insight": do they represent a charity that begins at home? Nevertheless, despite their ex cathedra sternness, Arnold's remarks do contain a genuine challenge to the admirer of Madame Bovary and it is not enough to simply see them as a plea for a morally cosier novel. The debility he sees in Flaubert himself gives him the feeling that Emma is not so much harried by life as by her creator, that she is the victim not of the irony of fate but of the irony of the novelist. This is a damaging criticism and I shall explore it in the next chapter, but, since it rests on a speculation about Flaubert's own relation to his novel, it is first of all necessary to explore what he saw himself as trying to do in it. Did he see any alternatives to coldness or being glowing?

For Flaubert, the greatest reaches of art were represented in the writings of Cervantes, Molière, Homer and, above all, Shakespeare. Early in 1854, we find him taking time off from the composition of Madame Bovary to give himself to a reading of King Lear:

J'ai relu cette semaine le Ier acte du Roi Lear. Je suis effrayé de ce bonhomme-là, plus j'y pense... L'ensemble de ses œuvres me fait un effet de stupéfaction et d'exaltation comme l'idée du système sidéral. Je n'y vois qu'une immensité où mon regard se perd avec des éblouissements. (Corresp. IV, p.46)
This "exaltation" does more than just stimulate Flaubert's fantasy desire to "se placer tout d'un bond au-dessus de l'humanité", although Shakespeare's appeal to him was partly to such feelings. His deepest response is also made up of wonder and humility. What his letters about Shakespeare remind us of is an essential part of his sensibility which the reader of the novels sometimes forgets: a readiness to be swept off his feet by great art, a capacity for intense exhilaration and almost naively self-forgetful enthusiasm. One of his favourite adjectives for the art which he admired most was "tonifiant". The feelings the storm scene in Lear arouse in him have a physical force which is very different from the moral-emotional consolation which, I think, is what Sainte-Beuve, Arnold and James all wanted from Madame Bovary:

... j'ai été écrasé pendant deux jours par une scène de Shakespeare (la Ire de l'acte III du Roi Lear). Ce bonhomme-là me rendra fou. Plus que jamais tous les autres me semblent des enfants à côté. Dans cette scène, tout le monde, à bout de misère et dans un paroxysme complet de l'être, perd la tête et déraisonne. Il y a là trois folies différentes qui hurlent à la fois, tandis que le bouffon fait des plaisanteries, que la pluie tombe et le tonnerre brille... Oui, cela m'a bouleversé. Je ne faisais que penser à cette scène dans la forêt, où l'on entend les loups hurler et où le vieux Lear pleure sous la pluie et s'arrache la barbe dans le vent. (Corresp. IV, pp.18-19)

Arnold's "treasures of compassion, tenderness, insight" suggest too exclusively humanist an outlook to describe this "paroxysme complet de l'être" in the storm. Compassion can only be a part of Flaubert's response to Shakespeare's more ultimate, religious conception of man's place in nature. He feels the agony of "le vieux Lear" but he can also go beyond any conventional Romantic projection into it to a sense of the world which Lear inhabits. It is not just the image of the suffering king which he cannot get out of his mind but the wild immensity of wind and rain. His pity is stiffened with awe. He sees that Shakespeare needed to do more
Flaubert would have exploded in laughter and annoyance at any linking of his name with Shakespeare's. After a reading of Pericles (especially the brothel scenes) he told Louise Colet that, "il me semble que, si je voyais Shakespeare en personne, je crèverais de peur". (Corresp. III, p.45) He would not want, as Homais would with Racine and many a Shakespeare critic with Shakespeare, to "discuter avec lui pendant un bon quart d'heure". (MB, p.124)

Flaubert's humility before the plays took a curious, but characteristic, form; to him Shakespeare is "un colosse qui épouvante; on a peine à croire que n'ait été un homme". (Corresp. I, p.386)

Whenever he mentions him he sounds staggered. He does not subscribe to the familiar sentimentality which sees Shakespeare as ourselves writ large.

In the same letter, in 1846, he explains his admiration further and, in doing so, gives us a clue as to how to imagine what his reaction would have been to James's theory that he would have "given everything to be able to glow":

"Car il y a deux classes de poètes. Les plus grands, les rares, les vrais maîtres résument l'humanité; sans se précouper ni d'eux-mêmes, ni de leurs propres passions, mettant au rebut leur personnalité pour s'absorber dans..."

In suggesting that GF's impersonality is ultimately the expression of a kind of death-wish, Sartre makes a general comment about the Œuvres de Jeunesse which is particularly relevant to this admiration for Shakespeare: "Macrocosme, microcosme - combien de fois retrouverons-nous ces mots si bien adaptés à la pensée médiévale de Flaubert - le second, en se totalisant, devient le reflet du premier qui est le Néant totalisé. L'homme, miroir du monde: une lacune qui prend conscience de son non-être au sein du néant universel. Le vieillissement, c'est le rapport toujours plus étroit et plus profond du microcosme au macrocosme; en un mot c'est la mort au ralenti ou, si l'on préfère, la mort elle-même se réalisant par le moyen de la vie. On ne meurt pas de vieillesse; aux yeux du jeune Flaubert on vieillit de mourir. Quant à la Vérité complète, cette correspondance homothétique de l'univers et de l'individu, elle se réalise en celui-ci, au terme d'un processus d'involution, par l'aménissement", L'Idiot de la Famille, I, p.196. My own interpretation of Madame Bovary in chapters IV and V coincides with some of these remarks but I am not convinced that the novel is limited by the same subjectiveness. Not yet convinced, perhaps, because, at the date of writing, the fourth volume of Sartre's essay, dealing with Madame Bovary, has not yet been published.
Shakespeare is the type of the first kind of poet, Byron and Musset of the second. He is seen as a writer who can resume humanity in his own imagination and yet Flaubert finds it hard to conceive of him as a man. This apparent contradiction is explained by Shakespeare’s serenity which is the fruit of his ability to detach his understanding of "the condition of life" from his "own condition", his self. The self and the imagination are distinct for Flaubert. In contemplating life from the Shakespearian perspective on it, a perspective neither cold nor glowing, Flaubert can for a brief time "vivre en paix":

Quand je lis Shakespeare je deviens plus grand, plus intelligent et plus pur. Parvenu au sommet d’une de ses œuvres, il me semble que je suis sur une haute montagne, tout disparaît et tout apparaît. On n’est plus homme, on est œil; des horizons nouveaux surgissent, les perspectives se prolongent à l’infini; on ne pense pas que l’on a vécu aussi dans ces cabanes qu’on distingue à peine, que l’on a bu à tous ces fleuves qui ont l’air plus petits que des ruisseaux, que l’on s’est agité enfin dans cette fourmilière et que l’on en fait partie. (Corresp. I, p.339)

This is reminiscent of the passage, quoted in the last chapter, from Souvenirs, Notes et Pensées Intimes which describes how the world would appear if seen from the top of a pyramid. What is new in it is the way Flaubert’s exhilaration is unalloyed with pride and is qualified by humility. For a moment he becomes an "œil" but he now understands that the self remains part of the "fourmilière" which this "œil" contemplates from above. At its best, what Jean-Pierre Richard calls the Flaubertian "arrachement de soi" distances the self in order to understand what it is
to live in the self.\textsuperscript{17}

The ideal which Shakespeare represents to Flaubert, the simultaneous immersion in the world and transcendence of it, is infinitely difficult to realise. Flaubert thought about it constantly but he often characterised it in different ways and the letters in which he refers to it are speculations rather than expressions of any coherent philosophy. The spontaneity of the Correspondance is such that what one letter says often seems to be contradicted in another. This is so in the present context. There are two kinds of "haute montagne" on which the artist can stand and Flaubert sometimes fails to distinguish between them. The Shakespearian one makes possible a general reflection on life which relates back to life:

Ce qui distingue les grands génies, c'est la généralisation et la création. Ils résument en un type des personnalités éparse et appartiennent à la conscience du genre humain des personnages nouveaux. Est-ce qu'on ne croit pas à l'existence de Don Quichotte comme à celle de César? Shakespeare est quelque chose de formidable sous ce rapport. Ce n'était pas un homme, mais un continent; il y avait des grands hommes en lui, des foules entières, des paysages.

(\textit{Corresp. III, p.31})

At other times Flaubert conceives of this impersonality as the kind of escape from the self which Frédéric Moreau is looking for when he decides to write his \textit{Histoire de la Renaissance}:

\begin{quote}
Peu à peu, la sérénité du travail l'apaisa. En plongeant dans la personnalité des autres, il oublia sa sienne, ce qui est la seule manière peut-être de n'en pas souffrir. (10)
\end{quote}

He remains prone to the mood of the pyramid passage in which seeing the

\textsuperscript{17} Jean-Pierre, "La Création de la Forme chez F", \textit{Littérature et Sensation} (1954), p.152. (The contrast between Mazza, the heroine of \textit{Passion et Vertu}, and Emma backs up the point of this paragraph. Emma is not allowed to indulge her violent feelings except in contempt for people like Tuvache. In a passage in the \textit{Nouvelle Version} GF writes: "Ce besoin de destruction ne trouvant pas à s'assouvir, retomba sur elle-même avec féroceit" (p.443). But note that Emma's intense frustration is only fully felt if we also feel the intensity of her desires.)

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{L'Éducation Sentimentale}: \textit{Histoire d'un Jeune Homme} (Conard, 1923), p.266.
world from above becomes, not a way of revealing it, but a way of evading and forgetting it:

Prends la vie de plus haut, monte sur une tour (quand même la base craquerait, crois-les solide); alors tu ne verras plus rien que l’éther bleu tout autour de toi. Quand ce ne sera pas du bleu, ce sera du brouillard; qu’importe, si tout y disparaît noyé dans une vapeur calme. (Corresp. II, p.326)

It is perhaps when Flaubert looks on the world in this mood that he wants to "tenir les hommes dans la poêle à frire de sa phrase et de les y faire sauter comme des marrons". The frightening serenity of Salammbô may have originated in such an instinct of self-defence. There are even places in Madame Bovary where Flaubert succumbed to the same temptation inherent in his quest for "la généralisation et la création", moments when, as it were, he stood on the wrong mountain. For example, there is a great difference between the true, unforced awareness of death in the scene in which Homais and Bournisien watch over the dead Emma and the fake melodrama with which Flaubert manipulates the blind beggar's appearance while Emma is on her death-bed. It would be a mistake to claim that his art is the same in both cases: the Flaubert of Sainte-Beuve and Arnold certainly exists. What I hope to show is that this was, in many ways, because of the problems involved in giving expression to a tragic vision of life in a realistic nineteenth century novel. James's criticism of Flaubert alerts us to these problems; its failure to do justice to him helps us to see a difference between the two writers which Pound, in terms reminiscent of Flaubert's praise of Shakespeare, also insisted upon:

He (James) never manages the classic, I mean as Flaubert gives us in each main character: Everyman. One may conceivably be bored by certain pages in Flaubert, but one takes from him a solid and concrete memory, a property. Emma Bovary and Frédéric and M. Arnoux are respectively every woman and every man of their period. Maupassant's Bel Ami is not. Neither are Henry James's people. They are always, or nearly always, the bibelots. (19)

Pound's testimony is valuable but it would be more valuable if he also provided some explanation of how Flaubert sufficiently reconciled the two tendencies just described to create his "Everyman". What did he mean by his paradoxical idea of a Shakespeare who was one of those poets who "résument l'humanité" and yet of whom "on a peine à croire que c'ait été un homme"?

The way in which Flaubert uses the word "humanité" is clarified by a famous letter written to Louise Colet in 1852. He has been reading Uncle Tom's Cabin:

... l'Oncle Tom me paraît un livre étroit. Il est fait à un point de vue moral et religieux; il fallait le faire à un point de vue humain. (Corresp. III, p.60)

For Flaubert the "humain" is very different from Harriet Beecher Stowe's humanitarian zeal. This does not mean that he thinks Uncle Tom's story should be told without compassion but that a true compassion is only possible if we refuse to be swayed by the kind of pity that our morality, with its cult of the noble soul, creates in us. The reader can feel this compassion for himself if the writer appeals to his imagination, letting events speak for themselves so that they reveal their tragedy naturally, without its being forced from them:

Je n'ai pas besoin, pour m'attendrir sur un esclave que l'on torture, que cet esclave soit brave homme, bon père, bon époux et chante des hymnes et lise l'Evangile et pardonne à ses bourreaux, ce qui devient du sublime, de l'exception, et dès lors une chose spéciale, fausse. Les qualités de sentiment, et il y en a de grandes dans ce livre, eussent été mieux employées si le but eût été moins restreint. Quand il n'y aura plus d'esclaves en Amérique, ce roman ne sera pas plus vrai que toutes les anciennes histoires où l'on représentait invariablement les mahométans comme des monstres - pas de haine! pas de haine! et c'est là du reste ce qui fait le succès de ce livre, il est actuel. La vérité seule, l'éternel, le Beau pur ne passionne pas les masses à ce degré-là. Le parti pris de donner aux noirs le bon côté moral arrive à l'absurde, dans le personnage de Georges par exemple, lequel pense son meurtrier tandis qu'il devrait pétiner dessus, etc., et qui rêve une civilisation nègre, un empire africain, etc. La mort de la jeune Saint-Claire est celle d'une sainte. Pourquoi
True pathos is the fruit of detachment. To Flaubert life is essentially always the same, beyond actuality, and it elicits its own response from those who can accept it as it is. He objects to Mrs. Stowe because, for her, life is so much raw experience to be interpreted and defined with the aid of our moral categories. For him, the "humain" is understood through a timeless, ahistorical detachment; for her, it is evoked by engaging with a special contemporary problem seen in its historical context. The generality of Flaubert's view, its universalisation of man's place in his world, is more eighteenth century than Romantic, more reminiscent of Voltaire's *Candide* than Rousseau's *Confessions*. For Mrs. Stowe, a human understanding of the world discloses ways in which man can actively change his lot; for Flaubert, only man changes, his condition never, and a true human understanding of the world therefore ends in a resigned, receptive meditativeness. It is not that he dissents from her views as views but he does not conceive of a true response to the world as springing from the active self: it is already implicit in the nature of the world which the self inhabits. For this reason, such a response is better expressed through art than propaganda because art can transcend all responses to the world which originate in the self's enmeshment in its limited actuality.

20. Cf. "Le tempérament est pour beaucoup dans nos prédispositions littéraires. Or, j'aime le grand Voltaire autant que je déteste le grand Rousseau". *(Corresp. IV, p.364)* GF thought that the nineteenth century had gone fatally off-course by following on from Rousseau and not Voltaire.

21. In making this point I am not seeking to play down the realistic qualities of *Madame Bovary*, only to imply that its actuality is not just there for its own sake. Neither am I attributing to GF the apparently similar views which Gaultier attributes to him. The significance implicit in his world may be general but it is always clothed in a particular form, which can never be ignored. It is only by comparing particulars that the general is revealed.
When he prizes the eternal over the actual Flaubert is doing more than just stating a belief in the unchangingness of the world. If the world is always essentially the same then so is man: his common condition makes it possible to conceive of a general and unalterable human nature. Flaubert's criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* rests on the assumption of a solidarity of human feeling: "est-ce qu'on a besoin de faire des réflexions sur l'esclavage? Montrez-le, voilà tout". The paradox in his position is that a humanness grounded in a belief in an unchanging and essentially unchangeable world seems to deny all point to human effort. Seen from a "sommet de l'art" human nature is not a responsibility but a cross to be borne. It is precisely this idea of human nature, rather than any debilitating coldness in the man himself, which makes Flaubert vulnerable to accusations of inhumanity from critics who do not share his view of history. A compassion which rests on a denial of human progress has a close kinship to bitter irony. For Lukács, "the extraordinarily sensitive and highly moral Flaubert has against his will become the initiator of the inhuman in modern literature". 22

Flaubert's paradoxical idea of the human is at the root of the unique fusion of compassion and irony that distinguishes *Madame Bovary*. He himself was well aware of this:

> Ce sera, je crois, la première fois que l'on verra un livre qui se moque de sa jeune première et de son jeune premier. L'ironie n'enlève rien au pathétique; elle l'ouvre au contraire. Dans ma 3e partie, qui sera pleine de choses farces, je veux qu'on pleure. (Corresp. III, p.43)

The tragedy of *Madame Bovary* has to be articulated through a sense of comedy. It would otherwise have lapsed into the kind of cosmic pessimism which spoils *Swarth*. The comedy which Flaubert wanted would, like the Fool's in *Lear*, both intensify the tragic and make it possible not to be

This laughter is not a way of evading suffering but an intrinsic part of suffering which enables the sufferer to contemplate it:

Quand on est disposé à voir le grotesque partout, on ne le voit nulle part. Rien n'est triste comme la figure des gargouilles des cathédrales. Elles rient toujours, pourtant. Il y a des gens dont l'âme est de même. (Corresp. I, p.431)

It can be inferred from this that Flaubert's laughter in Madame Bovary was not simply a sadistic means of pressing his own "petrified feeling" on Emma but that it was directed at himself. It is more complex than ridicule.

When Louise Colet accused him of ridiculing her on one occasion he denied the charge by saying: "Sache donc une fois pour toutes que jamais je ne me suis moqué de toi (je ne me suis jamais moqué de personne si ce n'est de moi peut-être)..." (Corresp. II, p.25)

I think it can be argued that Flaubert's sense of the "grotesque" enabled him to climb to his "haute montagne" of artistic impersonality without forgetting that he remained rooted in the earth on which he tried to look down. The poetry of generality had to be undercut by a comic sense of the disparity between human aspirations and the physical reality of everyday living. Without comedy it would have evaporated into the thin air of mysticism, an air in which not only irony, but compassion too, could not have existed. The letter about Uncle Tom's Cabin ends with Flaubert seeing the artist as a kind of understudy for God, infinitely distant, hidden and set off from his audience:

L'auteur, dans son œuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part. L'art étant une seconde nature, le créateur de cette nature-là doit agir par des procédés analogues. Que l'on sente dans tous les atomes, à tous les aspects, une impassibilité cachée et infinie. L'effet, pour le spectateur, doit être une espèce d'ébahissement. (Corresp. III, pp.61-62)
This should not mislead us. Such transcendence was a dream which would have been undreamable if Flaubert had not also been immersed in the life which his dream sought to transcend:

Pas si rêveur encore que l'on pense, je sais voir et voir comme voient les myopes, jusque dans les pores des choses, parce qu'ils se fourrent le nez dessus. Il y a en moi, littérairement parlant, deux bonshommes distincts: un qui est épris de gueuledes, de lyrisme, de grands vols d'aigle, de toutes les sonorités de la phrase et des sommets de l'idée; un autre qui fouille et creuse le vrai tant qu'il peut, qui aime à accuser le petit fait aussi puissamment que le grand, qui voudrait vous faire sentir presque matériellement les choses qu'il reproduit; celui-là aime à rire et se plaît dans les animalités de l'homme. (Corresp. II, pp.343-344)

This is no more final as self-analysis than anything else in the Correspondance, for Flaubert is still wrestling with the same kind of paradox and contradiction that I have been trying to describe. He too is schematic and has to talk as if he is two people in one, "deux bonshommes distincts". But what is beginning to emerge from this enquiry is that the two elements in his nature are inseparable and inter-dependent. It is when they are seen as separable that his art seems most open to criticism like James's 1902 essay which begins, under the impetus of Faguet, from the assumption that Flaubert "was formed intellectually of two quite distinct compartments, a sense of the real and a sense of the romantic". 23

A reading of the essay is, therefore, the next step in this approach to Madame Bovary.

In her memoir of D.H. Lawrence, Jessie Chambers recalls a remark of his which takes us back to James's view that Flaubert's theory as a novelist was to "begin on the outside":

"You see, it was really George Eliot who started it all", Lawrence was saying in the deliberate way he had of speaking when he was trying to work something out in his own mind. "And how wild they all were with her for doing it. It was she who started putting all the action inside. Before, you know, with Fielding and the others, it had been outside. Now I wonder which is right?"

I always found myself most interested in what people thought and experienced within themselves, so I ventured the opinion that George Eliot had been right.

"I wonder if she was", Lawrence replied thoughtfully. "You know I can't help thinking there ought to be a bit of both". (24)

The question is put in a spirit of open-minded puzzlement. Could either of these two approaches be "right" and life be rendered in terms of this inside/outside dichotomy which the history of fiction seemed to suggest? Either approach is possible to Lawrence. The two co-exist, just as, I would add, the realist and the romantic co-exist in Flaubert. When James writes about Madame Bovary (and L'Education Sentimentale) he is a true disciple of George Eliot and he argues for "putting all the action on the inside". For him, the sense of life communicated by a novel is in a direct ratio to the relative richness or poorness of the individual consciousness through which the events of that novel are seen. 25 "Outside" events are not so much significant in themselves as invested with significance through an imaginative response to them from "inside". Life is therefore seen less


25. This is a constant theme in the prefaces, especially in those to What Maisie Knew, The Ambassadors and The Portrait of a Lady. The last-named preface is discussed in chapter VIII below and the discussion follows on from, and gives a reference for, what is said here about the 1902 essay. In general, I have tried to make my discussions of Madame Bovary and The Portrait inter-reflect so that they encourage comparison between the two novels, although I have also tried to spare the reader overt connections of a reductive sort. The inconvenience of this method is that all of what is being said about either novel only emerges from reading both discussions; its advantage is that it provides a way of suggesting the continual back and forth process of comparison which is always part of an admiration for two very different authors but which becomes wearing when spelt out.
as a prevailing condition common to all human existence than as a particular mind's way of conceiving its own existence. The distinction James makes is the antithesis of Pekuah's. In making it he makes the word "life" into a value and not just a description. Of course, the value of this "life" is determined by the extent of the individual's receptiveness to the "outside" but, even then, the quality of the receiving mind is its prior source. Although it would be a mistake to present James as an idealist and he was, as any novelist is, well aware of the inherent irony in idealism, as a book like The Sacred Fount shows, the tendency of his doctrine of the "central consciousness" was towards a kind of idealism. Life became significant as the romantic transmuted the real.²⁶

The typical problem of a James character is that the "outside" world has a habit of upsetting the brightest imaginings of the self. Superficially, it seems to be the same problem as Emma Bovary's. Its effect on its victim is, however, completely different. Strether's idea of Paris may be undercut by the actual Paris it is created out of but his éclaircissement at the end of The Ambassadors is not a mere come-down alone: something is salvaged, because the actual Paris has nonetheless vouchsafed him a vision which, true or not, has enlarged his sense of what it is to be alive. It is as if the actual is only ambiguously real. There is no immanent reality in the world outside the mind to which the mind must adapt itself if it is to see life truly. Strether is not bound by the actual relations of Chad and Madame de Vionnet in what he makes of them in the way Madame Bovary's life is bound by the real nature of Léon or Rodolphe. He is not chastened by what he learns as Jane Austen's Emma is when she finally discovers where Jane Fairfax's piano came from. In a way,

²⁶ HJ's thought about the relation between the "romantic" and the "real" is most fully expressed in the preface to The American, which is discussed in chapter VII below.
in despite of the irony of his situation, his sensibility over-balances the weight of the actual and he can still afford to renounce his chances in the "outside" world, Mrs. Newsome, Marie de Vionnet and Maria Costrey. There is a different version of the same romantic faith in the conclusion of The Spoils of Poynton, in Fleda Vetch's moral triumph which would, perhaps, be impossible if she did not deliberately allow Mona Brigstock to win Owen Gereth back from her. Again, renunciation is not resignation.

In Flaubert's work, the fate of the imaginative person is the opposite: the world fastens its fetters tighter and tighter around the struggling self whose desire for transcendence is thwarted and undermined by the world's almost material insistence on the transience of life. Milly Theale can have her triumph in death but in Emma Bovary's death it is the world which triumphs. Maggie Verver succeeds in bending her world to her idea of it and eventually triumphs over Charlotte Stant; St. Antoine's final aspiration is to become absorbed into matter. In James "consciousness is an illimitable power", in Flaubert its field of action is circumscribed by what lies outside it, by, to choose just one small example, the faded bridal bouquet of Charles Bovary's first wife, Madame Dubuc, which Emma discovers soon after her own wedding and which jolts her dreamy honeymoon mood.

This sketch of the differences between James and Flaubert is, obviously, too schematic to take us far but there is still enough truth in it to suggest the possibilities of misunderstanding Madame Bovary which were inherent in James's thought when he opened the novel. He in fact describes Emma's tragedy in terms which at first seem to evoke his own novels as well but which, on examination, imply their radical difference

27. See the letter to Grace Norton, 26th July, 1883, Lubbock, I, p.101. (This letter is quoted more fully and discussed in chapter IX below.)

28. HJ agreed to write the 1902 essay while working on The Ambassadors and it appeared while that novel was being serialized. The Wings of the Dove was also published in 1902, though it was begun in 1901.
from Madame Bovary:

M. Faguet has of course excellently noted this - that the fortune and felicity of the book were assured by the stroke that made the central figure an embodiment of helpless romanticism. Flaubert himself but narrowly escaped being such an embodiment after all, and he is thus able to express the romantic mind with extraordinary truth. As to the rest of the matter he had the luck of having been in possession from the first, having begun so early to nurse and work up his plan that, familiarity and the native air, the native soil, aiding, he had finally made out to the last lurking shade the small sordid sunny dusty village picture, its emptiness constituted and peopled. It is in the background and the accessories that the real, the real of his theme, abides; and the romantic, the romantic of his theme, occupies the front. Emma Bovary's poor adventures are a tragedy for the very reason that in a world unsuspecting, unassisting, unconsoling, she has herself to distil the rich and the rare. Ignorant, unguided, undiverted, ridden by the very nature and mixture of her consciousness, she makes of the business an inordinate failure, a failure which in its turn makes for Flaubert the most pointed, the most told of anecdotes. (AN, p.60)

What is there in this rich description of the novel which points to its being a Jamesian reading? James sees where the "real" of Flaubert's "theme" lies but he consigns it to "the background and the accessories". Can one think of Les Bertaux, the silent village, the bleak Norman plain, the forest where Emma goes riding with Rodolphe, the panorama of the medieval city of Rouen as she descends the hill to it - can one think of all these things as a "background"? Any more than Flaubert himself thought of the wind and rain of King Lear as "background"? And perhaps James is also allowing his special sense of Emma's pathos to lead him to forget that she herself is intensely "real"? For his feeling for Emma is one of unironical pity rather than the sharper understanding that Flaubert's prose makes us yield her. The characteristic Jamesian note of the phrase "to distil the rich and the rare" is such as to suggest the reveries of a Hyacinth Robinson rather than an Emma Bovary. Are Emma's dreams any rarer than her "poor adventures"? Surely half of their ability to evoke our own, any one's,
experience derives from their ordinariness? It is perhaps this general quality in them which James misses and, missing it, his pity turns into the almost contemptuous feeling that Emma's end marks an "inordinate failure". When I get to this last remark I want to ask why James felt no more compassion for Emma than that. Was it, I conjecture, because the "romantic" in Emma has been so routed by the "real" that it has salvaged nothing? Was James secretly disappointed with Emma because he had succumbed to the temptation of seeing her too much as she sees herself? Some such speculation is needed to explain the coldness (the word is deliberate) of his final description of her tragedy as "the most told of anecdotes". Given her story to translate into the world of his own novels he would, perhaps, have made Emma into a Henry James heroine, someone who, like Isabel Archer, can respond to a much richer world than Yonville l'Abbaye by turning it into a "background" for her own sufferings, so that Rome becomes a kind of Albany to her.  

One of James's own best critics, R.P. Blackmur, has a rather similar Jamesian reading of Madame Bovary:

Bovarysme is an habitual, an infatuated practice of regarding, not the self, but the world as other than it is; it is an attempt to find in the world what is not there. This is not an unworthy effort as is plain if we look not only at Emma but also at Charles. (31)

This definition of bovarysme is needed to counter-balance Gaultier's, which was quoted earlier, but it too relies on an over-precise distinction between the "self" and the "world". It is only really feasible if we dwell so much on Emma's dreams that we forget her physicality, that weight of

29. See, for example, MB, pp.56-57. Her dreams are like those of a Rasselas who has been vulgarised by the influence of modern journalism, literature and publicity but who has preserved much of his innocence.

30. See below, especially chapter IX.

flesh by which she is incorporated into her world. That world is not just inimical to her because of what is absent from it but because of what is present in it too, the premonition of death, the haunting rhythm of the passage of time. Emma is obliged to recognise these things in the world because she is obliged to recognise their existence within herself. The final irony of her life is that suicide becomes her only means of escaping the world and yet, at the same time, only plunges her more irrevocably into its oppressive materiality:

Le drap se creusait depuis ses seins jusqu'à ses genoux, se relevait ensuite à la pointe des orteils; et il semblait à Charles que des masses infinies, qu'un poids énorme pesait sur elle. (ME, p.454)

The reader has to attend, not just to her own "effort" or "inordinate failure", but, as she herself is forced to do, to what her "world" reveals in the quick of her self; her mortality. Hence, that despairing question which shows her discovering that her dreams are perishable:

D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait? (ME, p.392)

Does the decay begin with the things of the world touching her or with her own touch on them? Her question has a force which makes irrelevant the notion of her death as a "failure", which, in fact, makes the notion itself a prime case of bovarysme. It was, perhaps, by not attending enough to Emma's question, to the voice of Flaubert made articulate in it, that James came to miss the poetry which flows from it and to white of the novel as "the most told of anecdotes". An anecdote is a sequence of events limited by its own particularity but, if Madame Bovary is "pointed" as he says, its point is more that of a memento mori than a kind of moral
cautionary tale.\textsuperscript{32}

This idea must, however, be taken up later because at this point James's emphasis falls on the word "told". \textit{Madame Bovary} disturbed him—as it has often disturbed Anglo-Saxon readers—by its definiteness of outline. He suspected Flaubert of demarcating its meaning more precisely than the life in it allowed. Yet, seen in another way, this clarity was what he most admired in the novel too. It is this mixed response behind the word "told", then, which gives to his criticism of Flaubert its peculiarly dense ambiguousness:

"Madame Bovary" has a perfection that not only stamps it but that makes it stand almost alone; it holds itself with such a supreme unapproachable assurance as both excites and defies judgement. For it deals not in the least, as to unapproachability, with things exalted or refined; it only confers on its sufficiently vulgar elements of exhibition a final unsurpassable form. The form is in itself as interesting, as active, as much of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so close is its fit and so inseparable its life that we catch it at no moment on any errand of its own. That verily is to be interesting—all round; that is to be genuine and whole. The work is a classic because the thing, such as it is, is ideally done, and because it shows that in such doing eternal beauty may dwell. (\textit{NN}, pp.62-63)

This is a fine and subtle piece of praise but one wonders whether it is the kind of praise Flaubert really needs.\textsuperscript{33} And is real praise,

32. This anecdotal element in the novel has always been noticed and I shall discuss it further in the next two chapters, when making certain reservations about GF's success. It is related, I think, to GF's tendency to adopt an inquisitorial stance towards his characters at moments when he is tempted to press home the tragic point too literally, for instance, in the episode of the blind beggar referred to above. Arnold and Sainte-Beuve noticed it, so did Lemot in his famous caricature "Flaubert Autopsiant Emma Bovary", and Taine too when he made Graindorge, in a remark quoted more than once by HJ, call the novel "Les Suites de l'Inconduite". But GF is also dissecting himself and what happens is a consequence of more than misconduct, so that the word "anecdote" does not say much more than that the novel was based on a fait divers.

33. It is not the kind of praise GF needs—certainly not in England, and in France it is commonplace—because HJ's terms owe so much to GF's own thought, especially to a strand in it which is often taken for the whole and then used, as Murry uses it, as the basis of criticism. One is at times tempted to compare HJ's essay to M. Dambreuse's response to the political speech which he had encouraged Frédéric Moreau to write: "il en vante la forme, pour n'avoir pas à s'exprimer sur le fond". (\textit{ES}, p.431)
unrestrainedly given, ever this subtle? All through the passage phrases like "exalted and refined" or "sufficiently vulgar elements" drop hints which begin to erode the effect of that praise, allowing James to take away with his left hand what he has given with his right. **Madame Bovary** is "genuine and whole" and "such as it is, it is ideally done", but the way the word "done" deliberately withholds any intimation of the profoundly human thought in the novel gives the accolade of "final unsurpassable form" an ambiguous ring.

James did not see **Madame Bovary** - as its author himself sometimes tended to after it was published - as just a great tour de force: he wanted to do more than simply damn Flaubert with effusive praise. He sometimes seemed to do that because he experienced a real difficulty in making up his mind about the novel and this is partly what his essay is about. Its value lies as much in showing us the process of a great critic thinking out his own thoughts as in what gets said about Flaubert. The essay's tone of serene equivocation arises from the fact that James could not discuss Flaubert without defending his own idea of "the art of fiction".

The paragraph from which the above passage is taken begins like this:

> And yet it is not after all that the place the book has taken is so overwhelmingly explained by its inherent dignity; for here comes in the curiosity of the matter. Here comes in especially its fund of admonition for alien readers. The dignity of its substance is the dignity of Mme Bovary herself as a vessel of experience - a question as to which, unmistakeably, I judge, we can only depart from the consensus of French critical opinion. (**MW**, p.62)

James senses the book's "inherent dignity" but, finding no "dignity" in the vulgar sufferings of the wife of a country doctor, he remains bemused. The "dignity" must somehow inhere in the novel's "form" rather than in its

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34. GF is not a reliable judge of the novel after its publication because of his exasperation at being told that it was his best, as well as his first, book. "La Bovary m'embête. On me sèche avec ce livre-là. Car tout ce que j'ai fait depuis n'existe pas". (**Corresp.** VIII, p.207)
"substance". He does not ask himself whether what is, to him, the
narrowness of Emma's consciousness was necessary to the disciplining of
her story into a "final unsurpassable form". He never quite makes the
connection he implies between the novel's form and its being the "most
pointed, the most told of anecdotes":

The form is in itself as interesting, as active, as much
of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so
close is its fit and so inseparable its life that we catch
it at no moment on any errand of its own.

James is elusive because he is not sure whether or not "form" can be a
thing "in itself". Because he cannot see where "form" and "substance" have
fitted together he speaks as if somewhere, way back, they were separate
and that Flaubert has made of them a "close fit". The source of his
uncertainty is, I think, that he is torn between being scrupulously fair
to the impression Madame Bovary makes on him and at the same time intent
on making the best case he can for his own kind of novel.

The paragraph goes on, having said that the novel is "ideally done",
with another nuanced change of direction. Only long quotation can do
justice to the slippery evocativeness of James's perceptions as he tries
to convey the resonance that Flaubert gives to the "sufficiently vulgar
elements" of his picture of "moeurs de province":

A pretty young woman who lives, socially and morally speaking,
in a hole, and who is ignorant, foolish, flimsy, unhappy,
takes a pair of lovers by whom she is successively deserted; in
the midst of the bewilderment of which, giving up her husband
and her child, letting everything go, she sinks deeper into
duplicity, debt, despair, and arrives on the spot, on the small
scene itself of her poor depravities, at a pitiful tragic end.
In especial she does these things while remaining absorbed in
romantic intention and vision, and she remains absorbed in
romantic intention and vision while fairly rolling in the dust.
That is the triumph of the book as the triumph stands, that
Emma interests us by the nature of her consciousness and the
play of her mind, thanks to the reality and beauty with which
those sources are invested. It is not only that they represent
her state; they are so true, so observed and felt, and especially
so shown, that they represent the state, actual or potential, of
all persons like her, persons romantically determined. Then her
setting the medium in which she struggles, becomes in its way as important, becomes eminent with the eminence of art; the tiny world in which she revolves, the contracted cage in which she flutters, is hung out in space for her, and her companions in captivity there are as true as herself. (NN, p.63)

This is such a sensitive and faithful account of how it feels to read Madame Bovary that it may take several readings of it before we are ready to interrupt the train of James's fluency to take stock of the ways in which it is also slanted and, on one crucial point, vague. The prose is seductive because it succeeds in creating what is, I think, a picture of its own, based on Flaubert's picture, as well as in giving a vivid description of the novel. (In fact, I should admit that James's picture has almost become a part of the novel to me and that, in trying to dissent from parts of it, I can hardly tell if I am going too far or not far enough.)

The points to take up are again either points which, as it were, Jamesify the novel or where James's own sensibility gets in the way of Flaubert. It is slanted to describe Emma only as "pretty" and "ignorant, foolish, flimsy, unhappy", because there is more in her than that. There is more too than just "romantic intention and vision": there is anger, innocence, strong self-will, voluptuousness, ennui, and, perhaps above all, an intensity of desire which is profoundly sexual but also more than sexual. In other words, at the centre of the novel, there is a firey passionateness which James, with all his eloquence, never really comes near to suggesting. It is one mark of his missing it that he can devote so much of his essay to the novel's "unsurpassable form"; another such mark is that he seems to see the sordidness of Emma's career and situation rather from above than, as Flaubert himself learnt to do, from within. He is too pitying to share much in Flaubert's irony but not really involved enough in Emma's fate to escape from falling into a tone of condescension towards her, a tone which probably originates in a social feeling about her class. One can imagine him peering
after her with an aloof sympathy as she "sinks" down into "the small scene... of her poor depravities"; as she "sinks" while he admires her truth to life. He does not feel, as Flaubert surely wanted his reader to feel, that he is "fairly rolling in the dust" himself.

What I am trying to suggest is that James both wanted to sympathise with Emma too much and that he could not sympathise with her enough. It is because of this uncertainty that he arrived at his central criticism of Madame Bovary, which he introduces by constantly returning to Emma's own intrinsic lack of "dignity":

Our complaint is that Emma Bovary, in spite of the nature of her consciousness and in spite of her reflecting so much that of her creator, is really too small an affair. (N, p.64)

Before discussing this objection it is necessary to go back again to the long passage quoted just now and to explain why there is a crucial vagueness in it. The phrase in which this vagueness is most apparent is this:

...Emma interests us by the nature of her consciousness and the play of her mind, thanks to the reality and beauty with which those sources are invested.

Does the word "sources" refer to "her consciousness and the play of her mind"? If it does, then why is she "too small an affair" and what does James mean by their "reality and beauty"? It might seem that the "sources" are, instead, her situation and environment but, if that were so, what exactly would "beauty" mean and why does the passage go on later to refer, as if introducing a new topic, to "her setting, the medium in which she struggles"? The key word is, presumably, "invested" and it seems to refer us back several lines earlier to the statement that the novel is "ideally done, and... in such doing eternal beauty may dwell". This may seem a more plausible interpretation but it does not quite explain why it at first seems as if Emma's mind is "invested" with both "reality and beauty". It seems as if what James is saying is that we are convinced of the "reality"
of Emma because of the "beauty" of Flaubert's evocation of it, not that Emma's interest for us is the result of any "beauty" in her. The vagueness, which is a richly suggestive vagueness, derives from the way the grammatical difficulty embodies for us James's earlier uncertainty about the "close fit" of "form" and "substance" in the book. It is intriguing to see how near the author of The Ambassadors was to describing Madame Bovary as if it really were the fruition of Flaubert's dream (or temptation?) of writing "un livre sur rien".\(^35\) James goes on to suggest more of the real depth of the book when he writes of Emma's "contracted cage" being, as he so beautifully puts it, "hung out in space for her", but a doubt remains. Is he saying her "tiny world" takes on some representative largeness of meaning or just that she at last sees it whole? It is not quite certain that the novel in question is exactly Madame Bovary because James has moved from describing a kind of pure Art to describing something which sounds very like his own nouvelle In The Cage.\(^36\)

A full defense of Madame Bovary against all of James's criticisms must wait until the next two chapters but it is, at least, possible to define the nature of the confrontation between the two writers which the 1902 essay evokes. The crux of the matter is that James was seeking a degree of personal identification with Emma that it was part of Flaubert's purpose not to allow his reader to feel. To feel both the irony and the tragedy of bovarysme it is necessary to maintain a distance from her of the kind that Flaubert found in Shakespeare, not a distance characterised by coldness but one sufficiently human to understand why she is representative and, at the same time, why part of her representativeness depends on the fact that her view of the life she lives can never fully describe that life.

\(^35\) See the letter which talks about the "deux bonshommes": Corresp. II, pp.345-346.

\(^36\) In the Cage (1898) is discussed in chapter X below. It makes a fascinating comparison with MB in the light of the 1902 essay.
as the novel enables us to see it. To say this is not to agree with James that Emma is "really too small an affair" but that we are all, more or less, small affairs within a much vaster world. It was because James refused this thought, because he tried to make out that Emma's smallness could be put down just to her social position or to the limitations of her sensibility, that Flaubert was so puzzling a great novelist to him:

Why did Flaubert choose, as special conduits of the life he proposed to depict, such inferior and in the case of Frédéric such abject human specimens. I insist only in respect to the latter, the perfection of Madame Bovary scarce leaving one much warrant for wishing anything other... He wished in each case to make a picture of experience - middling experience, it is true - and of the world close to him; but if he imagined nothing better for his purpose than such a heroine and such a hero, both such limited reflectors and registers, we are forced to believe it to have been by a defect of his mind. (NN, p.64) (37)

It has already been suggested that there is more to Emma than James allows and this is not the place to pursue that point. The thing to focus doubt on in this passage is more basic; would Flaubert have wanted to channel all his poetry, all his sense of life through the "conduit" of one character? To do so he would, perhaps, have had to aspire, not to the Shakespearian art of "la généralisation et la création" but to an art more like the art of Byron and Musset, the idols of his youth. He did not want, artistically, to put all of his eggs in one basket, one "conduit". He was too aware of the dangers of being personal, and he could have said, with justice, that the compassion he calls forth from us and the sense of the tragic contradiction between our desires and what our world rewards them with are all the richer for being created through an Emma Bovary. One of his remarks on Uncle Tom's Cabin was that, "la mort de la jeune Saint-Claire est celle

37. HJ's critique of L'Education Sentimentale is discussed below, chapter X, where I try to say what I find positive and true in his idea of GF. The case for the view expressed in the above quotation has been well put by Leavis in his essay "James as Critic" which is printed as an introduction to Shapira's HJ: Selected Literary Criticism, pp.13-24.
d'une sainte. Pourquoi cela? je pleurerais plus si c'était une enfant ordinaire." Perhaps it needs less compassion to weep over the fate of a Milly Theale than an Emma Bovary? Our feeling for what is common in the human lot is deeper and more primary than our moral evaluations of individual people.

James would not accept this argument because he believed that the richness of a novelist's "special conduits" was an index of their representativeness. This leads him to differ from Faguet's estimate of Emma:

When I speak of the faith in Emma Bovary as proportionately wasted I reflect on M. Faguet's judgement that she is from the point of view of deep interest richly or at least roundedly representative. Representative of what? he makes us ask even while granting all the grounds of misery and tragedy involved. The plea for her is the plea made for all the figures that live without evaporation under the painter's hand - that they are not only particular persons but types of their kind, and as valid in one light as in the other. It is Emma's "kind" that I question for this responsibility... (NN, p.65)

There is a sharp and real question here but the loaded word "type" blunts it. Why should we look for Emma's representativeness solely in her particular personality? Why does the word "type", as James uses it, seem to preclude the sense in which no character can be typical without also representing something which we find in ourselves? For James divides types into a sort of class system:

The book is a picture of the middling... but does Emma attain even to that? Hers is a narrow middling even for a little imaginative person whose "social" significance is small. It is greater on the whole than her capacity of consciousness, taking this all round; and so, in a word, we feel her less illustrational than she might have been not only if the world had offered her more points of contact, but if she had had more of these to give it. (NN, p.66)

38. The more far-reaching ways in which D.H. Lawrence developed a similar criticism of GF are discussed in chapter V below. Briefly, it might be said here that HJ's thought on this point seems nearer in spirit to Shakespearian tragedy than GF's and that Lawrence contrasted Flaubert with Shakespeare. Before this analogy can convince, however, it has to be asked whether the Shakespearian type of hero was an appropriate vehicle for nineteenth century experience. And then it has to be asked whether the Jamesian word "consciousness" is large enough in scope to convey the imaginative and moral stature of a Macbeth.
There is a true perception about the novel here, as we can see if we read all those letters in which Flaubert himself curses the difficulty of feeling with his heroine, but James's "might have been" is also — and especially in response to Madame Bovary — an example of a noble and incurable bovarysme of his own. Ultimately, he lacks the courage, the humility and the compassion to see himself in Emma, to say, as Flaubert is supposed to have said, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi". This is why he can help us to understand better how Flaubert, detesting Emma more the more he became plunged in her consciousness, could continue to expend his self-lacerating ironies on her until he shared her suffering. To begin to see this is to begin to ask why James himself sought out such congenial vessels for his own sense of life as his charismatic Isabel and his refined and sensitive Strether.

It would be wrong to end an account of James's essay here without recalling briefly that its criticisms of Flaubert are always entwined with the highest praise for him as an inexhaustible fund of lessons for his successors, "the novelist's novelist". (NN, p.85) The most convincing testimony to the sincerity of this praise is that James can only express it by adopting Flaubert's own more extreme ideas about "style" and "form", ideas which were part of the thought behind the book even if they cannot explain its greatness as a picture of life. "Adopting" is perhaps the wrong word because these ideas come over as James's own too. Their effect in the essay is to suggest that there was always something in Madame Bovary which James could never quite account for to himself:

I spoke just now of the small field of the picture in the longest of them [Flaubert's novels], the small capacity, as I called it, of the vessel; yet the way the thing is done not only triumphs over the question of value but in respect to it fairly misleads and confounds us. Where else shall we find in anything proportionately so small such an air of dignity of size? (NN, p.72)

Either he cannot see any relation between the "form" and the "substance" of
Madame Bovary or Flaubert himself has failed to relate them - James can no longer tell. He is not simply paraphrasing Flaubert's views when he goes on to write this:

His own sense of all this, as I have already indicated, was that beauty comes with expression, that expression is creation, that it makes the reality, and only in the degree in which it is, exquisitely, expression; and that we move in literature through a world of different values and relations, a blest world in which we know nothing except by style, but in which also everything is saved by it, and in which the image is thus always superior to the thing itself. (NN, pp.78-79)

This is a position which the later James moved closer towards himself, a fact which helps to explain the greater sympathy for Flaubert in the 1902 essay than in French Poets and Novelists. He still dissents but his dissent is less radical than it would have been at the time when he wrote his essay on Baudelaire:

Style itself moreover, with all respect to Flaubert, never totally beguiles; since even when we are so queerly constituted as to be ninety-nine parts literary we are still a hundredth part something else. This hundredth part may, once we possess the book - or the book possesses us - make us imperfect as readers, and yet without it should we want or get the book at all? (NN, p.79)

The perception is just and, I think, Flaubert himself would have agreed with it - at least in the mood in which he wrote that "Ma pauvre Bovary, sans doute, souffre et pleure dans vingt villages de France à la fois, à cette heure même". But the perception rebounds on James because he is unable to give any coherent account of the "something else" in Madame Bovary.  

39. I am thinking especially of The Tragic Muse (1890); not, I should add, of the opinions of Gabriel Nash, but of what Nick Dorner's renunciation of politics portends and of what Peter Sherringham learns when he sees Miriam act in London. See, also, the story The Real Thing (1893).

40. It is interesting to compare BJ's essay with the lecture on GF given by Paul Bourget in Oxford in 1897, a lecture which BJ attended. The lecture was published as "A Lecture in Oxford: GF", trans. C. Heywood, The Westminster Review, LXXII, new series (1897), 152-164. Bourget also stresses GF's concern with form but he describes his own lecture as "somewhat too technical" (p.164) and one of his main points is that "Flaubert's soul was greater than his art, and it is that soul which, in spite of his own will, he breathed into his writings..." (p.161).
He concludes his essay by reiterating his admiration for the novel's "crowned classicism"—he never uses the word "classic" in the larger sense Pound gives it in that remark quoted earlier—with the same evasiveness with which he began it:

... I do not mean that "Madame Bovary" is a classic because the "thats", the "its" and the "tos" are made to march as Orpheus and his lute made the beasts, but because the element of order and harmony works as a symbol of everything else that is preserved for us by the history of the book. The history of the book remains the lesson and the important, the delightful thing, remains above all the drama that moves slowly to its climax. It is what we come back to for the sake of what it shows us. We see— from the present to the past indeed, never alas from the present to the future—how a classic almost inveterately grows. (NN, p.84)

Between the wit and the sentiment Flaubert's "drama" and "what it shows" get lost in a circular argument.

One or two quotations from Flaubert's letters to Louise Colet on the cult of personal emotion in the art of his romantic predecessors may give more of a context to what I have been saying. They show us not a Flaubert who was naturally "cold", but an artist determined to control his own fatal weakness for glowing. First of all, an exasperated reaction to Musset (who had also annoyed Flaubert by pestering Louise in the spare moments which he left her in plenty):

Musset n'a jamais séparé la poésie des sensations qu'elle complète. La musique, selon lui, a été faite pour les sérenades, la peinture pour le portrait et la poésie pour les consolations du cœur. Quand on veut ainsi mettre le soleil dans sa culotte, on brûle sa culotte et on pisse sur le soleil. C'est ce qui lui est arrivé. Les nerfs, le magnétisme, voilà la poésie. Non, elle a une base plus sereine. S'il suffisait d'avoir les nerfs sensibles pour être poète, je vaudrais mieux que Shakespeare et qu'Homère, lequel je me figure avoir été un homme peu nerveux. Cette confusion est impie. (Corresp. II, pp.460-461)

The continuation of the letter makes the difference of Flaubert's position from James's more clear. He is describing his own "nerfs sensibles" and gives Louise the analogy of the kind of child who is so exalted and agitated
by music, who writhe "de souffrance au son des nôtres", that he can never create music himself:

Ce ne sont point là les Mozarts de l'avenir. La vocaition a été déplacée; l'idée a passé dans la chair où elle reste stérile, et la chair pérît; il n'en résulte ni génie ni santé.

Même chose dans l'art. La passion ne fait pas les vers, et plus vous serez personnel, plus vous serez faible. J'ai toujours péché par là, moi; c'est que je me suis toujours mis dans tout ce que j'ai fait. A la place de saint Antoine, par exemple, c'est moi qui y suis; la Tentation a été pour moi et non pour le lecteur. Moins on sent une chose, plus on est apte à l'exprimer comme elle est, (comme elle est toujours en elle-même, dans sa généralité et dégagée de tous ses contingents éphémères). Mais il faut avoir la faculté de se faire sentir. Cette faculté n'est autre que le génie: voir, avoir le modèle devant soi, qui pose. (Corresp. II, pp. 451-462. GF's italics.)

Two years later Flaubert is still just as truculent on this subject:

Je ne veux pas considérer l'Art comme un déversoir à passion, comme un pot de chambre un peu plus propre qu'une simple causerie, qu'une confidence. Non! non! la Poesie ne doit pas être l'écum du cœur. (Corresp. IV, pp.61-62)

On the contrary: "Nous ne valons quelque chose que parce que Dieu souffle en nous". (Corresp. III, p.103) James probably owed enough to Flaubert to have agreed with him here, as the difficulties he had in extricating himself from his half-understood Flaubertian concept of Art testify. There is no question of dubbing him a later variant of Byron or Lamartine or Musset (with whom, in fact, the young Flaubert probably had more in common). 41 James, too, believed that the artist must transcend his personality in his art. The real question that Flaubert's letters about Musset raise is about James's relative success in realising this aim, although it is a question which cannot be fully explored until I come to discuss his own

One letter of Flaubert's, written while on holiday in Trouville, in 1853, is hard, in spite ofNick Dormer's "turned back", to imagine James ever writing. Trouville was then a Norman sea-side village, not yet become fashionable, where Flaubert's father had bought land and where his family had spent many summers in the past. It was redolent of Flaubert's childhood and adolescence, the scene of his first meeting with Mme Schlesinger, and thus an apt place from which to send Louise the following reflection:

"Je me suis ici beaucoup résumé et voilà la conclusion de ces quatre semaines fainéantes: adieu, c'est à dire adieu et pour toujours au personnel, à l'intime, au relatif. Le vieux projet que j'avais d'écrire plus tard mes mémoires m'a quitté. Rien de ce qui est de ma personne ne me tente. (Corresp. III, p.320)

Perhaps Flaubert never quite saw what we can now see in his novels, that to renounce personality and to try to surmount its relativity is only another way of expressing it. For, as the letter continues, he gives another version of the idea found in the letters about Musset: "Moins on sent une chose, plus on est apte à l'exprimer comme elle est". This time his mood is more that in which he wrote the final Tentation:

"Je suis dévorié maintenant par un besoin de métamorphoses. Je voudrais écrire tout ce que je vois, non tel qu'il est, mais transfiguré. La narration exacte du fait réel le plus magnifique me serait impossible. Il me faudrait le broder encore. (Corresp. III, p.320)

42. The question might be put in this way: when HJ began to react against things French at the end of his stay in Paris just before he left to settle in London (in 1876) something more complex was happening to his ideas about the novels he wanted to write than the simple renouncement of Balzac and GF for George Eliot which Leavis tries to imagine (Great Tradition, pp.21-24). Both the French and the English traditions had entered deeply into his creative mind and a feeling of disillusion with the French, which may well have had other, social causes, was hardly likely to have eliminated its influence on him for ever. The question is, therefore, how HJ reconciled these two traditions which had become two parts of his own mind? One of the answers that the 1902 essay on GF suggests is that he always found it a difficult question. It is ironic that, if Leavis's own account of the "major phase" is right, there are grounds for saying that it was never more difficult than in 1902 when The Ambassadors began to appear.
This seems to contradict the idea of having "le modèle devant soi, qui pose". Flaubert's letters do not provide any systematic theory of creation; they are explorations which have an air of being embarked on in the heat of the moment to try out his ideas. After writing this Flaubert could still go on to write *L'Education Sentimentale* and *Un Coeur Simple*. Perhaps what this letter shows is that for Flaubert reality was not only a fascinating torment, like the wound which the hero of *Novembre* loved to scratch, but also a terrible discipline. Reality circumscribed that self which longed, like Smarch, to fly up above the world and look back down on it. Only Flaubert's sense of comedy could reconcile him to what was tragic in it. Such comedy—the comedy of Homais or the speakers at the Comices Agricoles—was itself a way of embroidering the "fait réel": it was a way of transfiguring reality and even of inventing it. Few things gave Flaubert more pleasure than to find the words he had given to the speakers at the Comices Agricoles quoted afterwards in the paper from the speech of a Rouen dignitary at a similar function.

The idea of projecting the self into experiences one has never known, to "se la faire sentir", goes back at least to Jules in the first *L'Education Sentimentale*.\(^{43}\) It might at first sight appear to be Jamesian, although one wonders whether the experience of a Strether was so foreign to James. But in Flaubert the new, imagined experience is far more a reaction to the personal, a pursuit of "généralité" which not only lives itself into the imagined self but also sees it as "devant soi, qui pose".

\(^{43}\) The following passage comes just after Jules has been thinking about the greatness of Homer and Shakespeare: "Il conclut... que l'inspiration ne doit relever que d'elle seule, que les excitations extérieures trop souvent l'affaiblissent ou la dénaturent, qu'ainsi il faut être à jeun pour chanter la bouteille, et nullement en colère pour peindre les fureurs d'Ajax; il se rappelle le temps où il se battait les flancs pour se donner l'amour en vue de faire des sonnets". (*QI*, III, p.267) The whole contrast, around which the novel is built, between Jules the artist and Henry the lover is a record of the young GF's efforts to distinguish his creative self from his personal self.
It is a delicate problem to decide how far this represents Flaubert reacting against himself, how far it is a compensation for his sense of his own finitude, and how far it stems from a pride which is really the manifestation of insecurity. But it is more than mere impersonation.

There is behind it a deep and ambiguous compassion, a feeling that personal experience can only be seen imaginatively if it is seen as personal to someone else. The contemplation of one's own emotion distances oneself from it. I think this is why Flaubert's compassion can be general and not a disguised self-pity. He only feels for himself when he is feeling for someone else. It is through the ironic narration of Madame Bovary that he first succeeds in seeing experience both from inside and outside the self at the same time. Hence the "impassibilité" which represents the truly "humain". This quality, then, has a complexity which is far too rich for one to describe it in such clear-cut terms as "contradiction" or by James's idea of "a strong man who has not been able completely to express himself". 44

Before going on to look at how this "impassibilité" works in the novel, I want to end by quoting Flaubert's own way of thinking of it as a natural preparation for understanding life:

Personne plus que moi n'a, au contraire, aspiré les autres. J'ai été humer des fumiers inconnus, j'ai eu compassion de bien des choses où ne s'attendrissaient pas les gens

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44 This paragraph arrives at ideas similar to some of Sartre's, though by a very different route. See his fascinating comparison of how an actor would play Hamlet with how the young GF sees his experience from the point of view of Another (i.e. Dr. Flaubert). "Tel est Gustave: réceptacle de sentences déposées par Autrui, apprises par cœur, éprouvées comme alienation donc crues, il se trouve en un monde où la Vérité est l'Autre". L'Idiot de la Famille, I, p.170. The whole analogy of the actor playing Hamlet can be picked up at p.166 and goes on to p.175. It is a nugget which gives a good idea of the richness of what Sartre has to say, the fertility of his methods and the élan with which he writes. It is, of course, a kind of fringe benefit to the main argument.
sensibles. Si la Bovary vaut quelque chose, ce livre ne manquera pas de coeur. L'ironie pourtant me semble dominer la vie. D'où vient que, quand je pleurais, j'ai été souvent me regarder dans la glace pour me voir? Cette disposition à planer sur soi-même est peut-être la source de toute vertu. Elle vous enlève à la personnalité, loin de vous y retenir. Le comique arrivé à l'extrême, le comique qui ne fait pas rire, le lyrisme dans la blague, est pour moi tout ce qui me fait le plus envie comme écrivain. Les deux éléments humains sont là. Le Malade Imaginaire descend plus loin dans les mondes intérieurs que tous les Agamemnons. Le "N'y aurait-il pas du danger à parler de toutes ces maladies?" vaut le "Qu'il mourût!" (Corresp. II, p. 407)

This splendid passage will, I hope, help the reader to see why it is that I need to use the words *tragedy* and *comedy* almost interchangeably to describe Flaubert's art. In doing this, in the next chapter, I shall begin by discussing some passages which were omitted from the final version of Madame Bovary, because they show how Flaubert's personal feeling for Emma tended to freeze the channel through which both his comic and his tragic feelings flowed.
CHAPTER FOUR

Emma Bovary in her World

Why does Flaubert prevent our sympathy for Emma's fate from disarming the ironic view of her character? It seems to me that his irony keeps clear that difficult distinction between fate and character just enough to stop his reader from confusing the pity he has for Emma as a person with the more general compassion (general because it includes ourselves) that her weakness and mortality evoke. Any general human truth can only be embodied through the experience of a particular individual but it does not become clear to us unless it is made clear that that experience is not unique in the same way as the individual who has it is unique. Hence Flaubert's irony, as a complement to his sympathy for Emma. We can always see her both from the "inside" and from the "outside" at any given moment. What the irony does is to circumvent the danger inherent in rendering life from a particular "point-of-view": the danger of the reader's identifying with the main character to the extent of imagining him or her to be just an extension of himself, a continuation of his own relation to himself, so that the emotions called up by that character's experience remain on a personal plane. Flaubert's irony thwarts the disguised self-pity which such identifying depends on and, at the same time, it averts any false, abstract generalising about life by reminding us - especially at moments of pathos - that Emma is only a particular individual, like ourselves and, therefore, different from us too. When we are seduced into identifying with a character we are robbed of the chance of understanding better either what it means to be a self or what one self has in common with another. Character, then, is both necessary and, sometimes, to be forgotten; it can clarify life but it can simplify it too.
The end of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* shows how pity excited on behalf of an individual, because of the kind of individual he is, can become a pleasurable emotion. We pity Goriot without for a moment forgetting how different he is from ourselves. How could his tragedy really be ours, though we may be parents too, when so much of our sense of it is created by the knowledge that, in him, parental love has taken an extreme and obsessive form. Balzac's emphasis on his particular character becomes an emotional subterfuge which lets us wriggle out of the full purport of Goriot's tragedy. We cannot wriggle out of the tragedy in *Madame Bovary* in this way. By using irony to remind us that Emma is a particular individual Flaubert refuses to gratify that slightly complacent pity which makes us want to imagine ourselves in another person's skin without really being forced to acknowledge our common humanity with that person. The irony makes that sort of pity rebound on the pitier by forcing him to do more than simply feel for Emma's personal plight. It creates a distance from which compassion can be born. We have to imagine that Emma Bovary is ourselves and not just that we are, for the duration of the novel, Emma Bovary. The fact that the irony often centres on what is unattractive and unintelligent and ridiculous in Emma does not mean that Flaubert is preventing us from sympathising with her, or from seeing her other, more positive qualities, as James or Arnold thought it did: it means that we are asked for a more strenuous response than pity, asked that is to recognise another human being and not just Emma Bovary, née Rouault.

This distinction between what I call *pity* and *compassion* cannot become clear until I have discussed *Madame Bovary* in a more detailed way but it needs to be made here because it is at the core of what this thesis has to say about the difference between Flaubert and James as novelists. This difference might be described, for the moment, by saying that although
James learnt much from Madame Bovary and was, in a way, trying, in a novel like The Portrait of a Lady, to do something similar to what I have just described Flaubert as doing, he failed to do so because he could not detach himself from his own personal stake in Isabel Archer's experience and, therefore, kept his reader's response to her sufferings on too personal a plane. In chapters VIII and IX I shall suggest that James's irony, unlike Flaubert's, has precisely the effect of protecting Isabel from criticism so that our response to her is always too personal. For the moment, though, I want to turn briefly to some of the early drafts of Madame Bovary, because it was in reading them that my view of the novel began to take shape.\(^1\) These drafts help us to follow the process of the novel's composition and, by showing us all the passages which Flaubert finally cut from it, they reveal a great deal about what he was trying to do.

One of the most striking things about the Nouvelle Version is that it should so often show Flaubert giving in to the temptation to feel sorry for Emma in the way that James, Arnold and Sainte-Beuve wanted him to. The number of revisions which such passages underwent show how near to the surface Flaubert's pity for Emma really was and how difficult he found it to sacrifice the glow of emotional identification with her. Comparison with the final version nearly always suggests that, with deep reluctance, he tried to omit any evidence of his pity for Emma - though not, of course, to reject the pity itself. The most sympathetic passages tend to become, in revision, the most terse and bald. I will quote a representative example which was only omitted from the novel at the stage of the final proofs.

It is from chapter 7 of the Première Partie. In the final version the passage is reduced to a description of the pettiness and monotony of Emma's

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\(^1\) Madame Bovary: Nouvelle Version Précédée des Scénarios Inédits (Textes établis sur les manuscrits de Rouen avec une introduction et des notes), ed. Jean Pommier et Gabrielle Leleu (1949).
domestic round; in the *Nouvelle Version* it includes a long description of her going out into the garden after a summer storm for some fresh air.

Flaubert shows her giving way to frustration and unhappiness:

> Elle se renversa la tête contre le dossier du banc, et humait l'air dans une aspiration à faire craquer son corsage; un sanglot alors la prit. Une tristesse liquide lui monta du cœur aux lèvres sans pouvoir couler, puis redescendit en elle et se figea dans tous ses membres en accablement. Elle entendit dans sa tête des roulements qui passaient ou comme les bruits d'un grand vent qui sifflé la nuit dans une galerie. Les mains humides, les genoux déliés, le cœur battant, elle ne pensait plus, voyait à peine et, dans des immensités intérieures, sentait seulement défaillir son âme, comme un nageur épuisé qui agonise sur la mer.
> Quelque chose remua parmi les feuilles. Elle se leva d'un bond en rougissant. C'était une vache dans le clos voisin, qui, la tête passée par-dessus la haie, regardait là, tranquillement, de ses gros yeux ronds.
> Charles ne rentra le soir qu'à onze heures, n'ayant pas mangé depuis le matin. (2)

The fluency of the prose, the absence of the laconic terseness of the final version, the free rein Flaubert gives his feelings, almost lulling us with a sense of Emma's sadness— all this shows that, had he wanted, pity would have come all too easily to him. We are button-holed by the sense of Emma's "accablement". The emotive romantic prose ushers in those "immensités intérieures" which James sought in vain in the finished novel. The most authentic moment in the passage, to the reader of that finished novel, is when Emma is aroused from her revery by the cow, staring at her with quiet indifference. The sudden intrusion of the external world into her thoughts tells us far more than the passage before it, whose content we might have been left to divine for ourselves. Yet Flaubert has so obviously enjoyed writing the passage that it is worth exploring further why he left it out. Was he afraid as an artist of the emotion he welcomed

2. *Nouvelle Version*, p.197. (All words and phrases which are underlined in the quotations from the *Nouvelle Version* in this chapter are words and phrases which were retained in the final version of the novel. The underlinings are used by Pommier and Leleu.)
as a man?

In a later part of the *Nouvelle Version* Emma writes a love-letter to Léon. She tries to make it as emotional as possible:

... elle se forçait à l’émotion comme un romancier qui compose, puis les paroles tendres d’elles-mêmes attiraient la tendresse... (*Nouvelle Version*, p.568)

Emma succumbs to the novelist's temptation to fake an emotion because that emotion, like an *idée reçue*, seems to be in order.³ Because she supposes herself to be in love with Léon she evokes a feeling of love in herself, although immediately before she has been thinking of Léon as "un autre Bovary, tout aussi nul, incolore, insipide" (*Nouvelle Version*, p.568). The fact that Flaubert is himself a novelist who is satirising this faking of emotion suggests that he is self-critically aware of his own temptation to fake a stereotyped emotion for Emma. His irony is a warning to himself not to spell out the first feelings that she evokes in him. The phrase left out of the final version is more a part of the process of criticism which brought forth the work of art than of full creation. It represents one of the many thoughts an artist can dispense with when they have done their work, just as the umbilical cord is cut when the child has been born.

I imagine this interpretation on the basis of many passages in the *Nouvelle Version* which show us what Flaubert the man is feeling for what Flaubert the artist is creating. For example, at the end of the *Première Partie*, comes this description of Emma's frustration, where the cadence of Flaubert's prose supplies an approving echo to her own self-pity:

³. The analogy of Emma to a novelist may seem odd coming from a novelist but GF's irony is often self-punishing, especially at moments when it seems in excess of the facts: it is sometimes as though he blames Emma for being invented by himself. The faking of emotion was something CF was very aware of in Romantic literature and in his own early work. Cf. The last meeting between Frédéric Moreau and Madame Arnoux: "Frédéric, se grisant par ses paroles, arrivait à croire ce qu'il disait". (*ES*, p.604)
The final version brings out the shock of that last sentence much more by keeping us separate from Emma:

Elle avait vu des duchesses à la Vauyessard qui avaient la taille plus lourde et les façons plus communes, et elle exécrat l'injustice de Dieu; elle s'appuyait la tête aux murs pour pleurer... (MS, p.93)

Her tears are more real because now no audience is being assumed for them. Emma no longer has time for wistful poetic sentiments which entice the reader into a complicity with her own bovaryisme. The effect of Flaubert's pruning is not to belittle her feelings but to give them intensity. The hackneyed metaphor of the "pauvre diamant ignoré", which solicits a spurious and sentimental pity from us, becomes a dispassionate bluntness which moves us far more immediately. This reticent handling of Emma's own feelings about her suffering lets Flaubert include in her story more of the things, animate and inanimate, which lie outside her self. Her world comes to seem more solidly shaped with each such omission. This means, not that her response to her world is in danger of getting lost, but that she is seen more as a part of her world. Flaubert imagines her most clearly when he imagines her world most clearly. In the Nouvelle Version passage his irony is only working in third gear because you do not expect to find fishermen discovering diamonds in the middle of Normandy. In the final version her consciousness is not separable from the world which nourishes it.

This continuity between Emma and her world is made vivid in the final version of the passage which originally included the description of her "tristesse liquide". Flaubert restricts the narrative to an account of her housekeeping and the way it reflects credit on Charles:
Quand ils avaient, le dimanche, quelque voisin à dîner, elle trouvait moyen d’offrir un plat coquet, s’entendait à poser sur des feuilles de vigne les pyramides des reines-Claude, servait renversés les pots de confitures dans une assiette, et même elle parlait d’acheter des rince-bouche pour le dessert. Il rejaillissait de tout cela beaucoup de considération sur Bovary.

Charles finissait par s’estimer davantage de ce qu’il possédait une pareille femme. Il montrait avec orgueil, dans la salle, deux petits croquis d’elle à la mine de plomb, qu’il avait fait encadrer de cadres très larges et suspendu contre le papier de la muraille à de longs cordons verts. Au sortir de la messe, on le voyait sur sa porte avec de belles pantoufles en tapisserie.

Il rentrait tard, à dix heures, minuit quelquefois. Alors il demandait à manger, et comme la bonne était couchée, c’était Emma qui le servait. Il retirait sa redingote pour dîner plus à son aise. Il disait les uns après les autres tous les gens qu’il avait rencontrés, les villages où il avait été, les ordonnances qu’il avait écrites, et, satisfait de lui-même, il mangeait le reste du miroton, épluchait son fromage, croquait une pomme, vidait sa carafe, puis s’allait mettre au lit, se couchait sur le dos et ronflait. (MB. pp.58-59)

The fidelity of this passage to the smallest details of Emma’s life makes the passage of time in it almost substantial. With a blank catalogue of Charles’s eating habits Flaubert can make the trivial generate a subdued crescendo of misery which needs no poetical cliché like the word "accablement" to spell out its effect. The prose is great because it serves the reality of its subject, as the undertone of comic affection for Charles shows. The intimate sympathy which the corresponding account in the Nouvelle Version curries on Emma’s behalf would have distracted us from the familiar and un-romantic suffering she contends with here. There is no way of bolstering ourselves against the knowledge of her loneliness and loss by saying: "There, but for the grace of God, go I". Therefore, Flaubert has no need to put what she feels outside us in an analysis of her state of mind: our own humanity can fill in the blanks. His poetic discretion lets us see how Emma winces as Charles munches his apple without causing us to forget how much Charles is enjoying it himself. The tragic isolation of Emma is only glimpsed through its comic complement in Charles proudly sporting his slippers on the door-step and congratulating himself on his
wife: they are both equally alone. The passage is just one place where Flaubert's irony achieves vigour without becoming hostile to its objects. In retrospect, one may want to ask whether Flaubert does not always have a more ready sympathy for Charles than he ever has for Emma, whether we simplify in pointing out the degree to which he put himself into Emma if we forget how much of himself he put into Charles, but the impression we take from the passage is of being penetrated by the things amongst which Emma lives: the sketches in their over-large frames, the vine leaves, the prescriptions, the dinner menu. This is enough.

It may be that often when Flaubert tries to enter directly into Emma's feelings he is really looking for an outlet for his own, rather than trying to explore hers. Part of the Nouvelle Version description of Emma's first ride in the forest with Rodolphe suggests this:

Ce n'était pas la marche, ou le poids de son vêtement qui la faisait haleter, mais une étrange inquiétude, une angoisse de tout son être, comme si une attaque de nerfs lui allait venir. "Pourquoi cela? Pourquoi?" pensait-elle, et elle se sentait les pieds froids, la tête en feu, la gorge étroite. Son cœur battait dans son corsage à coups précipités. La cravache qu'elle tenait à la main, tremblait, entre les dentelles de ses manchettes. (Nouvelle Version, p.378)

With this left out the passage reads like this:

- Où allons-nous donc?
Il ne répondit rien. Elle respirait d'une façon saccadée. Rodolphe jetait les yeux autour de lui et il se mordait la moustache. (MB, p.221)

The Nouvelle Version passage has most to interest the psychoanalyst—who remembers Flaubert's own, much discussed "attaque de nerfs" when
driving along the road to Pont l'Evêque. What interests the critic is the suggestion of a tension beneath the laconic surface of the final version, which the omission brings out. For it is wrong to see Flaubert's distance from Emma as being created against her, without seeing how far it goes against the personal feelings of Flaubert himself. It is the hint of brutality beyond the curtness which implies that that curtness works in two directions and is more than just a mannered way of seeing Emma.

The unconvinced reader may, at this point, like to see what Flaubert himself thought of the kind of man who was coldly imperturbable and who looked on life, as James said he did himself, as a "spectacle" and an "entertainment for the eyes". One need look no further than the picture of Monsieur Canivet, the doctor who comes to amputate Hippolyte's leg:

Quand il fut entré comme un tourbillon sous le porche du Lion d'Or, le docteur, criant très haut, ordonna de dételer son cheval, puis il alla dans l'écurie voir s'il mangeait bien l'avoine; car, en arrivant chez ses malades, il s'occupait d'abord de sa jument et de son cabriolet. On disait même à ce propos: "Ah! M. Canivet, c'est un original!" Et on l'estimait davantage pour cet inébranlable aplomb. L'univers aurait pu crever jusqu'au dernier homme, qu'il n'eût failli à la moindre de ses habitudes. (p. 253)

Canivet soon gets into conversation with Homais:

... je ne suis point délicat comme vous, et il m'est aussi parfaitement égal de découper un chrétien que la première volaille venue. Après ça, direz-vous, l'habitude!... l'habitude!...

Alors, sans aucun égard pour Hippolyte, qui suait d'angoisse entre ses draps, ces messieurs engagèrent une

4. To be more precise, we should think of GF's impersonality as a self-effacement which has the effect of enlarging the range of things he can feel as if personally. This point is made more fully later in this chapter, with the aid of I.A. Richards. There is a letter which gives an account of GF's feelings when he wrote this scene in the forest: "Il n'importe, bien ou mal, c'est une délicieuse chose que d'écrire, que de ne plus être soi, mais de circuler dans toute la création dont on parle. Aujourd'hui par exemple, homme et femme tout ensemble, amant et maîtresse à la fois, je me suis promené à cheval dans une forêt, par un après-midi d'automne, sous des feuilles jaunes, et j'étais les chevaux, les feuilles, le vent, les paroles qu'ils se disaient et le soleil rouge qui faisait a'entrefermer leurs paupières moyées d'amour. Est-ce orgueil ou piété, est-ce le débordement mais d'une satisfaction de soi-même exagérée? ou bien un vague et noble instinct de religion?" (Corresp. III, p.405)
conversation où l'apothicaire compara le sang-froid d'un chirurgien à celui d'un général; et ce rapprochement fut agréable à Canivet, qui se répondit en paroles sur les exigences de son art. Il le considérerait comme un sacerdce, bien que les officiers de santé le déshonorassent. (MB, p.254)

Flaubert's comedy places such toughness in the most devastating way. It should stop us from thinking of him as someone who looks down on Emma with lofty detachment and pulls the strings as if she were a marionette. Perhaps the word "detachment" should be dropped and non-attachment used instead?

Many things in Madame Bovary suggest that in writing about bovarysme Flaubert was trying to talk about a common human condition and not just the emotional idiosyncrasies of one individual. This is clear from the outset.

Take the description of the retirement of Charles's father, which is almost a parody of Flaubert's own reclusion at Croisset:

... chagrin, rongé de regrets, accusant le ciel, jaloux contre tout le monde, il s'enferma, dès l'âge de quarante-cinq ans, dégoûté des hommes, dissit-il, et décidé à vivre en paix. (MB, p.6)

His wife dreams about the future of her son in the same way that Emma dreams about, say, Lagardy at the opera:

Dans l'isolement de sa vie, elle reporta sur cette tête d'enfant toutes ses vanités éparpées, brisées. Elle rêvait de hautes positions, elle le voyait déjà grand, beau, spirituel, établi, dans les ponts et chaussées ou dans la magistrature. Elle lui apprit à lire, et même lui enseigna, sur un vieux piano qu'elle avait, à chanter deux ou trois petites romances. (MB, pp.7-8)

(The unerring irony, as in the placing of the word "établi", is there for Mme. Bovary mère as it is for Emma.) Charles romanticises in the same way as his mother: as a student we catch a glimpse of him gazing out of his

5. It is true that GF would perhaps have liked to see himself in this way. In one letter he says: "Je fais de la littérature pour moi comme un bourgeois tourne des ronds de serviette dans son grenier". (Corresp. VI, p.276) We only need look at the absurd aloofness of Binet, the tax collector in Madame Bovary, to see that there is an element of self-parody in this, as there is in the studies of Bouvard and Pécuchet.
Like Emma he imagines that life must be better somewhere other than where he actually is: "au-delà des toits". The same feeling is also found in Justin, the ill-used poor relation of Monsieur Homais. Justin's helpless love for Emma, his desire to polish her "bottines" and help iron her clothes in order to be nearer her, reminds us of Emma herself keeping the vicomte's cigar-case as a fetishistic link with the inaccessible dream-world of La Vaubyessard.

Flaubert is careful to prevent us from imagining that any one person's experiences are unique. This is one reason why he often draws our attention away from Emma at the crucial moments in her life. Several times he uses her father as an agent for making her predicament into something more broadly human. When she marries Charles, Flaubert prefers to stay with père Rouault as he sees the couple off to Tostes rather than go with them. Their trap recedes into the distance:

The disappearance of Charles and Emma over the horizon marks the passage...
of time which they are to experience and which père Rouault has
experienced before them. Flaubert may seem to permit us to identify more
with père Rouault's regret for his dead son than he ever does with Emma,
but this helps us think about marriage in its context of generations and
not simply about Emma Bovary's marriage. His voice here is the same voice
which gives us that chilling account of Emma's day to day domestic tasks.

At the end of the novel Flaubert can make us think about death, and
not just about Emma Bovary's death. One way in which he does so is
through a comic description of Homais and Bournisien trying to keep awake
by arguing as they watch over Emma's corpse. It is part of the comedy, or
tragedy if one prefers, that when the pair of them drop off to sleep it is
clear that it is not simply Emma's death that is in question but their own
death and ours too:

Des aboiements continus se trainaient au loin, quelque part.
- Entendez-vous un chien qui hurle? dit le pharmacien.
- On prétend qu'ils sentent les morts, répondit l'écclesiastique.
C'est comme les abeilles; elles s'envolent de la ruche au décès des personnes.

Homais ne releva pas ces préjugés, car il s'était rendormi.
M. Bournisien, plus robuste, continua quelque temps à remuer tout bas les lèvres, puis, insensiblement, il baissa le
menton, lâcha son gros livre noir et se mit à ronfler.

Ils étaient en face l'un de l'autre, le ventre en avant, la
figure bouffie, l'air renfrogné, après tant de désaccord se
rencontrant enfin dans la même faiblesse humaine; et ils ne
bougeaient pas plus que le cadavre à côté d'eux qui avait l'air
de dormir. (MB, p.456)

Poetry like this is rare in novels. One reason for its rarity is, I
think, that most novelists tend to do what James thought Flaubert should
have done: they convey their sense of life through the "special conduit"
of an exceptional individual. What Flaubert does is not easy to describe -
in a way, it has to seem plain and ordinary because it expresses an
inwardness with ordinary emotions - but it seems clear that it can exist
because of his distance from Emma, his non-attachment. At its best, this
distance, which is caught by the "impassibilité" of the prose, is simply
a lucid medium for an "impassibilité" in life itself. There is no feeling of the author's will being behind it. This is why our sense of the smallness of the room and the fatigue of Hœnais and Bourbonien is included in a sense of the silent village outside the room and the barking of the dog.

Before I discuss the way in which Flaubert conveys a sense of death at the end of the novel I want to explain more clearly how it is that his extraordinary sensitiveness to the world outside his characters can have this general resonance. Now is it that the more Norman in atmosphere the novel becomes the less likely we are to think just of Normandy? For there are moments when the novel almost seems to echo the famous Pascalian cry: "Le silence éternel de ces vastes espaces m'effraie".6

At the opening of Madame Bovary, Charles enters a class-room where the boys are half-asleep. His arrival surprises them into life and soon there is a hubbub as they chant his name: "Charbovari! Charbovari!" (KB, p.4) In the excitement his cap - "une de ses pauvres choses... dont la laideur muette a des profondeurs d'expression comme le visage d'un imbécile" (MB, pp.2-3) - is spirited away. The master quells a second storm "d'une voix furieuse" (MB, p.4) Then the inhabitual noise dies away:

Puis, d’une voix plus douce:
- Eh! vous la retrouverez, votre casquette; on ne vous l'a pas volé!
Tout reprit son calme. (MB, p.4)

Such silences, which both precede and succeed human emotions, and almost seem to swallow them up, are characteristic of Madame Bovary. Earlier, Charles's Latin lessons from the village priest had been snatched from the

6. Some of GF's best letters are reminiscent of Pascal's way of describing the "misère de l'homme"; for example, the one to Mlle de Chantepie on May 18th, 1857. (Corresp. IV, pp.180-186) The similarity becomes clearer if we remember that when GF talks about Art he often means something like what Pascal means by God.
silent vagabondage of his childhood "aux moments perdus... dans la sacristie, debout, à la hâte, entre un baptême et un enterrement". (MB, p.8)
The narrator, who has also sat on the benches of the Collège de Rouen, says of Charles that: "Il serait maintenant impossible à aucun de nous de se rien rappeler de lui". (MB, p.9) Such silence may be human or larger than that; it is always vast and nearly tangible, and it seems to absorb the small human dramas of the novel into its own indifference. At home, when it is all over, after Emma's funeral: "Minuit sonna. Le village, comme d'habitude, était silencieux, et Charles, éveillé, pensait toujours à elle". (MB, p.469) Rodolphe and Léon, like the village, are sleeping quietly. Whether this silence emanates from the unconsoling Norman plain and sky, or whether it is a property of the medium created by the dryness of Flaubert's impassive prose, is hard to tell. Perhaps it is too essential to the impression Madame Bovary makes on us for any one to be able to say?

Often, the silence is only broken by non-human sounds, as when Emma has said goodbye to Charles after one of his visits to Les Bertaux to treat père Rouault:

On s'était dit adieu, on ne parlait plus; le grand air l'entourait, levant pêle-mêle les petits cheveux follets de sa nuque, ou secoignant sur sa hanche les cordons de son tablier, qui setortillaient comme des banderoles. Une fois, par un temps de dégel, l'écorce des arbres suintait dans la cour, la neige sur les couvertures des bâtiments se fondait. Elle était sur le seuil; elle alla chercher son ombrelle, elle l'ouvrit. L'ombrelle, de soie gorge-de-pigeon, que traversait le soleil, éclairait de reflets mobiles la peau blanche de sa figure. Elle sourit la-dessous à la chaleur tiède; et on entendait les gouttes d'eau, une à une, tomber sur la moire tendue. (MB, pp.22-23)

Sounds so quiet - "les gouttes d'eau, une à une" - are only this distinct because of the silence they punctuate. The same goes for Emma's feelings too. As we look on, beyond the range of her thoughts, near enough to imagine them but further off than a James or a George Eliot would dare to
take us, she becomes part of her landscape. Any lack of intimacy with her consciousness is made up for by the delicate sense of her physical presence: we grasp her feelings through the combined effect of her immobility and her smile. If we lost this range Emma's world would seem too humanised for her own condition to be a fully human one. As it is, she cannot be extricated from the wind, the melting snow and the sun. When anything comes to ruffle the dead calm of Emma's life, it seems to come from outside her, from a country silence broken only by gusts of wind and rustling leaves:

Il arrivait parfois des rafales de vent, brises de la mer qui, roulant d'un bond sur tout le plateau du pays de Caux, apportaient, jusqu'au loin dans les champs, une fraîcheur salée. Les joncs bruissaient à ras de terre, et les feuilles des hêtres bruissaient en un frisson rapide, tandis que les cimes, se balançant toujours, continuaient leur grand murmure. Emma serrait son châle contre ses épaules et se levait.

Dans l'avenue, un jour vert rabattu par le feuillage éclairait la mousse rase qui craquait doucement sous ses pieds. Le soleil se couchait; le ciel était rouge entre les branches, et les troncs pareils des arbres plantés en ligne droite semblaient une colonnade brune se détachant sur un fond d'or; une peur la prendait, elle appelait Djali, s'en retournait vite à Tastes par la grande route, s'affaisait dans un fauteuil, et de toute la soirée ne parlait pas.

Mais, vers la fin de septembre, quelque chose d'extraordinaire tomba dans sa vie; elle fut invitée à la Vaubyessard, chez le marquis d'Andervilliers. (MF, p.63)

7. It might be argued that GF's sense of landscape as an independent thing is more profound than the rather different idea of landscape found in Baudelaire. For Baudelaire, the true landscape artist is concerned to express landscape through the expression of his own response to it. But the issue is a complex one and all that can be done here is to quote a subtle passage from Baudelaire's *Salon de 1852*: "Si tel assemblage d'arbres, de montagnes, d'eaux et de maisons, que nous appelons un paysage, est beau, ce n'est pas par lui-même, mais par moi, par ma grâce propre, par l'idée ou le sentiment que j'y attache. C'est dire suffisamment, je pense, que tout paysagiste qui ne sait pas traduire un sentiment par un assemblage de matière végétale ou minérale n'est pas un artiste. Je sais bien que l'imagination humaine peut, par un effort singulier, concevoir un instant la nature sans l'homme, et toute la masse suggestive éparséllée dans l'espace sous un contemplateur pour en extraire la comparaison, la métaphore et l'allégorie. Il est certain que tout cet ordre et toute cette harmonie n'en gardent pas moins la qualité inspiratrice qui y est providentiellement déposée; mais, dans ce cas, faute d'une intelligence qu'elle pût inspirer, cette qualité serait comme si elle n'était pas. Les artistes qui veulent exprimer la nature, moins les sentiments qu'elle inspire, se soumettant à une opération bizarre qui consiste à tuer en eux l'homme pensant et sentant..." *Curiosités Esthétiques* (op.cit.), pp.322-323.
Her sense of the world outside her, with its movements of its own, induces a feeling of insecurity and fright in Emma. Somehow, even its beauty exerts a kind of pressure on her nerves. Though it is quiet it is never a backdrop to her emotions; the very sense of its silence seems to humble her and make her want to retreat into herself, into her own silence. Yet it is almost as if the rare events in her life seem to come to her from this outside world. Her invitation to la Vaubyessard stems from the fact that the Bovarys have a fine cherry tree in their garden:

Or, les cerisiers poussaient mal à la Vaubyessard. M. le Marquis demanda quelques boutures à Bovary, se fit un devoir de l'en remercier lui-même, apercut Emma, trouva qu'elle avait une jolie taille et qu'elle ne saluait point en paysenne; si bien qu'on ne crut pas au château outrepasser les bornes de la condescendance, ni d'autre part commettre une maladresse, en invitant le jeune ménage. (MB, p.64)

Everything connects back to Emma's surroundings, her physical prison; even her brief escapes from it. Thus, the crucial moment when she gets engaged to Charles is seen by the reader in the frame of her landscape. Her father promises Charles that he will speak to Emma and that, if she is willing to have him, he will push one of the farm's shutters wide open as a sign to Charles of her acceptance:

... vous pourrez le voir par derrière, en vous penchant sur la haie.
Et il s'éloigna.
Charles attacha son cheval à un arbre. Il courut se mettre dans le sentier; il attendit. Une demi-heure se passa, puis il compta dix-neuf minutes à sa montre. Tout à coup un bruit se fit contre le mur; l'auvent s'était rabattu, la cliquette tremblait encore.
Le lendemain, dès neuf heures, il était à la ferme. Emma rougit quand il entra, tout en s'efforçant de rire un peu, par contenance. (MB, pp.33-34)

The momentous decision becomes a small, passing movement on the face of the tranquil landscape. It is hardly surprising if human emotion sometimes seems hardly to have been created from within. This is the effect of that sudden change of direction in the passage where Emma hears about the ball:

"Le soleil se couchait... se détachant sur un fond d'or; une peur la prenait..."
The syntax makes it seem as if the fear takes hold of her from outside. It leaves her passive, like the phrase "tomba dans sa vie". As this passiveness and silence become more familiar and our sense of Emma's place deepens, so we sense time pressing on, like the "gouttes d'eau, une à une". It is not fanciful to compare Emma's own agitations, as we feel them, to the regular ticking of a clock in a silent room. That is the impression made by the scene where Léon comes to bid her goodbye before leaving for Paris, or by the silent meal she has to endure after her first suicide attempt. Often, in pictures of Yonville, Flaubert uses the sound of Binet's lathe to make this effect.

The novel takes place in the past and its rhythm, underneath the frenzied rhythm of Emma's passions, is the infinitely slow rhythm of time bringing such imperceptible changes that Yonville itself seems hardly to register them:

Depuis les événements que l'on va raconter, rien, en effet, n'a changé à Yonville. Le drapeau tricolore de fer-blanc tourne toujours au haut du clocher de l'église; la boutique du marchand de nouveautés agite encore au vent ses deux benderoles d'indienne; les foetus du pharmacien, comme des paquets d'amadou blanc, se pourrissent de plus en plus dans leur alcool bourbeux, et, au-dessus de la grande porte de l'auberge, le vieux lion d'or, détaint par les pluies, montre toujours aux passants sa frisure de caniche. (MB, p.100)

Perhaps the rather loaded image of the foetus suggests that Flaubert's imagination is so gripped by the quietly subversive rhythm of time passing, and as it passes of human suffering being buried in silence, that he is able to imagine only the past and not the future? We can hear time passing as the sudden strident sound of Hippolyte crying out as his leg is amputated breaks the silence and is finally re-absorbed back into it:

8. Cf. A remark already quoted from Par les Champs et par les Grèves: "L'histoire est, comme la mer, belle parce qu'elle efface: le flot qui vient enlève sur le sable la trace du flot qui est venu, on se dit seulement qu'il y en a eu, qu'il y en aura encore; c'est là toute sa poésie et sa moralité peut-être?"
Au milieu du silence qui emplissait le village, un cri déchirant traversa l'air. Bovary devint pâle à s'évanouir. Elle fronça les sourcils d'un geste nerveux, puis continua. C'était pour lui cependant, pour cet être, pour cet homme qui ne comprenait rien, qui ne sentait rien! car il était là, tout tranquille, et sans même se douter que le ridicule de son nom allait désormais la salir comme lui. Elle avait fait des efforts pour l'aimer, et elle s'était repentie en pleurant d'avoir échappé à un autre.

- Mais c'était peut-être un valgus? exclama soudain Bovary, qui méditait.

Au choc imprévu de cette phrase, tombant sur sa pensée comme une balle de plomb dans un plat d'argent, Emma tressaillant leva la tête pour deviner ce qu'il voulait dire; et ils se regardèrent silencieusement, presque ébahis de se voir, tant ils étaient par leur conscience éloignés d'un de l'autre. Charles la considérerait avec le regard trouble d'un homme ivre, tout en écoutant, immobile, les derniers cris de l'amputé qui se suivaient en modulations trainantes, coupées de saccades aiguës, comme le hurlement lointain de quelque bête qu'on égorge. (ME, p.256)

Without the context of the "silence qui emplissait le village" the emotions of Emma and Charles would seem conventionally and cursorily rendered and Hippolyte's screams would not grate on our ears as they do. The subsiding * of the "hurlement lointain" recalls the subsiding of the hubbub in the classroom at the start of the novel: "Tout reprit son calme". What is this calmness which seems to envelop Emma's continuing agitation and almost to provoke it? Is it, perhaps, bound up with Flaubert's ability to invest his sense of human powerlessness and solitude with beauty? There is a carefulness in the phrasing of that last sentence which suggests that in some way he is pleased enough with his picture to be content to stop short of any more metaphysical sense of his character's loneliness - such as Dickens or Dostoievski might have communicated here - and to leave their feelings seeming rather conjectural. This doubt is felt most when the imagery seems, as it sometimes does in Flaubert, to be superimposed on the thing it describes.9 Is Hippolyte, for instance, no more than "quelque bête qu'on égorge.

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9. This is a common complaint against GF's prose: cf. the Goncourt's Journal entry for January 16th, 1884; Murry's essay on GF (op.cit.); Proust's essay "A propos du 'style' de F", which is reprinted in Contre Sainte-Beuve, etc. (op.cit.), pp.586-600.
"gorge"? If he is, why is he made the occasion of an important statement about one of the novel's main preoccupations? Or are his cries there to round off the period? I am not making this point simply in criticism because it is more a way of suggesting the kind of dangers Flaubert faced in trying to articulate his sense of the general, non-human vastness - the larger silence - within which his characters act and speak. To shut his ears to this silence would have been to retreat into a merely local psychological drama, but listening to it, yet unable to ascribe any religious meaning to it, was only possible at a cost to his art. The tone of tragedy is seldom quite safe from being interrupted by the tone which, mixing the aesthetic with toughness, interrupts it here.

Flaubert's tragic sense is caught in a dilemma. He begins from a conviction of there being something general and unalterable in human experience without being able to substantiate that conviction with any conviction that "the world", or "life", has either the meaningfulness or the structure to allow him to make positive generalisations about its nature. This is why he needs comedy and irony, as a way of afflicting his characters with his own doubts. Emma's failure to understand her world is partly a kind of screen for his own similar failure. When, for example, she is seen praying in Rouen cathedral just before she yields to Léon in the fiacre she is said to "prêtaït son oreille au silence de l'église, qui ne faisait qu'accroître le tumulte de son coeur". (Me, p.332) This "tumulte" is not very precisely linked to her being in a church and Flaubert gets out of considering how far it is religious by satirising the vulgarity of Emma's feeling for religion. But if the cathedral is not just the "boudoir gigantesque" (Me, p.331) it seems to her we are given little against which to set her view of it. Its silence is unfathomed and all Flaubert can do is to mimic it in the scene which follows, when Emma and Léon make love in
the *fiancé* and his narrative is equally silent about what they are feeling behind the drawn blinds. By the end of the chapter, *Emma* is seen so much as a part of her world that she becomes just an image:

Puis, vers six heures, la voiture s'arrêta dans une ruelle du quartier Beauvoisine, et une femme en descendit qui marchait le voile baissé, sans détourner la tête. (*ME*, p.336)

The narrative only remains unruffled because *Emma* is unaware of how small and futile her passions seem when they are seen as lost in the silence they momentarily perturb. Had she been more aware here or in the cathedral Flaubert would have had to probe further into what that silence meant to himself. In focussing on an *Emma Bovary* he is, perhaps, making the only compromise available for salvaging his sense of tragedy. And, even so, he can only convey her terrible frailty by feigning a stern indifference to it.

The scene is certainly gripping but a hostile account of it would have to point out that at some points style seems Flaubert's only refuge from relapsing into the philosophy of Smarh, the temptation to identify himself with a maleficent force in Nature which had been revealed to him by Sade rather than reality:

Une fois, au milieu du jour, en pleine campagne, au moment où le soleil dardeit le plus fort contre les vieilles lanterres argentées, une main nue passa sous les petits rideaux de toile jaune et jeta des déchirures de papier qui se dispersèrent au vent et s'abattirent plus loin, comme des papillons blancs, sur un champ de trèfle rouge tout en fleur. (*ME*, p.338)

Only the slightly otiose image of the "papillons blancs" softens the determined effort to keep *Emma* at arm's length. If there is sadism infiltrating the "impassibilité" here, it comes, I think, more from a sense of *Emma*'s helplessness than from any deliberate cruelty of Flaubert's. The pathos becomes oppressive rather than cathartic because it depends for its effect, not on any spiritual consonance between the author and his character, but on each of them refusing to recognise what the other
presumably sees; Emma will not look beyond her own passions and Flaubert will not look into them. This is a point at which we have only his irony with which to fill in the blanks and irony is not enough.

One hesitates to use just one passage to generalise from because *Madame Bovary* is a less even novel than it is sometimes thought of as being. What I have tried to suggest is that its poetry can vary, that sometimes it benefits from Flaubert's compassionate reticence about Emma's feelings and that sometimes, as in the last quotation, it is only made possible by a reticence which is negative, willed and evasive. In neither case, however, do the accounts which Arnold and Sainte-Beuve give of his art seem adequate; neither kind of poetry could be created from "petrified feeling". What we can speak of is basic inability to imagine any fruitful connection between man and his world. It is as a result of this inability that he is better at communicating the presence of death than the presence of life in what he describes. Any reader could point to passages where only the command of a marmoreal phrase saves Flaubert's art from becoming the expression of an incoherent fear of the universe. The best way I can think of to convey the characteristic malady of Emma and his other heroes and heroines is to apply to them the following passage from *Women in Love*, in which Lawrence diagnoses the similar malady of Gerald Crich:

... life was a hollow shell all round him, roaring and clattering like the sound of the sea, a noise in which he participated externally, and inside this hollow shell was all the darkness and fearful space of death, he knew he would have to find reinforcements, otherwise he would collapse inwards upon the great dark void which circled at the centre of his soul. His will held his outer life, his outer mind, his outer being unbroken and unchanged. But the pressure was too great. He would have to find something to make good the equilibrium. Something must come with him into the hollow void of death in his soul, fill it up, and so equalise the pressure within to the pressure without. For day by day he felt more and more like a bubble filled with darkness, round which whirled the iridescence of his consciousness, and upon which the pressure of the outer world, the outer life, roared vastly. (10)

Emma too is unable to "equalise the pressure within to the pressure without". Flaubert is concerned with a disintegration of personality which concerned Lawrence as well. Where he differs from the later writer is in the much more physical, sensuous way in which he imagines Emma's suffering. Things are too tangible and people's senses too alert in Flaubert for him to deal in psychic abstractions like "life was a hollow shell all round him" and "the hollow void of death in his soul". (In the history of the novel Dostoievski comes between Flaubert and Lawrence.) This means that things always seem more real to Emma in her break-down than they do to Gerald.

If Flaubert is a less probing and speculative psychologist than Lawrence he does have an extraordinary gift for rendering emotion through physical imagery and, as a result, for making us see that emotion is physical as well as mental experience. This is how he gives us Emma's melancholy feelings after Léon's departure for Paris:

Le lendemain fut, pour Emma, une journée funèbre. Tout lui parut enveloppé par une atmosphère noire qui flottait confusément sur l'extérieur des choses, et le chagrin s'engouffrait dans son âme avec des hurlements doux, comme fait le vent d'hiver dans les châteaux abandonnés. C'était cette rêverie que l'on a sur ce qui ne reviendra plus, la lassitude qui vous prend après chaque fait accompli, cette douleur, enfin, que vous apportent l'interruption de tout mouvement accoutumé, la cessation brusque d'une vibration prolongée. (ME, p.171)

Time and memory are not just constituents of Emma's consciousness, they are always conceived in terms of her physical setting. 11 Her consciousness is steeped in the things which lie outside it, so much so that there are even moments when those things seem to make up her consciousness to such an extent that we wonder if she has any separate principle of being in herself. This raises a doubt about the depth in which Flaubert can see her and I shall take up that doubt in the next chapter. For the moment, it

11. This is even more true of L'Education Sentimentale where the Parisian town-scape is less likely to be decorated with such romantic trappings as the "châteaux abandonnés" which are found in the above passage. In the later novel GF's style was further from Châteaubriand's.
is best to concentrate on giving a clearer idea of the novel's poetry and the extent to which it can afford to dispense with psychological analysis.

At the Comices Agricoles there is a beautiful moment when Emma is reminded by the scent of Rodolphe's hair of the vicomte with whom she had danced at la Vaubyessard:

Alors une mollesse la saisit, elle se rappela ce vicomte qui l'avait fait valser à la Vaubyessard, et dont la barbe exhalaît, comme ces cheveux-là, cette odeur de vanille et de citron; et, machinalement, elle entreferma les paupières pour la mieux respirer. Mais, dans ce geste qu'elle fit en se cambrant sur sa chaise, elle aperçut au loin, tout au fond de l'horizon, la vieille diligence l'Hirondelle, qui descendait lentement la côte des Leux, en trainant après soi un long panache de poussière. C'était dans cette voiture jaune que Léon, si souvent, était revenu vers elle; et par cette route là-bas qu'il était parti pour toujours! (ME, pp.203-204)

A critic cannot describe the effect of that re-appearance of the familiar, battered Hirondelle which has become a part of Emma's innermost thoughts. Its prosaic poetry - a realistic detail so caught that it becomes more than a thing though less than an image - is shared by so much of Yonville and Tostes and the land around them. Even by the inhabitants, who become parts of the place. Binet is more monotonously punctual at the Lion d'Or than the Hirondelle and seems like a fixture in its dining room.¹² And there is the wig-maker who lives opposite Emma in Tostes:

Lui aussi, le perruquier, il se lamentait de sa vocation arrêtée, de son avenir perdu, et, rêvant quelque boutique dans une grande ville, comme à Rouen, par exemple, sur le port, près du théâtre, il restait toute la journée à se promener en long, depuis la mairie jusqu'à l'église, sombre et attendant la clientèle. Lorsque Mme Bovary levait les yeux, elle le voyait toujours là, comme une sentinelle en faction, avec son bonnet grec sur l'oreille et sa veste de lasting. (ME, pp.89-90)

¹². See Léon Bopp, Commentaire sur "Madame Bovary" (1951): "... il y a, dans ce roman de F., des objets qui semblent aspirer à devenir des personnes, cependant que certaines gens y marqueraient plutôt une tendance à devenir automatiques, à devenir des choses..." (p.344).
The beauty of such things, most of all in the first part of the novel, the less strained part, is that by embedding people so deeply in their place they create a sense of common experience between them, even though they are all isolated. Much of what Emma is feeling is conveyed simply by what the "perruquier" feels. A few pages before, she hears the songs of the "mareyeurs" as they pass under her window at night, on the road to the Paris she dreams about, and, like the "perruquier", she sees her own future as "un corridor tout noir, et qui avait au fond sa porte bien fermée" (ME, p.87). Any reader can go on recalling countless touches like these as he thinks about the muted yet utterly present poetry of the novel.

It is the density of such images which makes the sense of death which the end of the novel communicates so real. The unresponsive silence of the things which surround Emma, the "atmosphère noire qui flottait confusément sur l'extérieur des choses", seals her life just as it had sealed the cries of Hippolyte. So we progress to the night when Charles visits the dead Emma for the last time, taking care not to wake the sleeping Homais and Bourmisien:

C'était la dernière fois. Il venait lui faire ses adieux.
Les herbes aromatiques fumaient encore, et des tourbillons de vapeur bleuâtre se confondaient au bord de la croisée avec le brouillard qui entrait.
Il y avait quelques étoiles, et la nuit était douce.
Le cire des cierges tombait par grosses larmes sur les draps du lit. Charles les regardait brûler, fatiguant ses yeux contre le rayonnement de leur flamme jaune.
Des moires frissonnaient sur la robe de satin, blanche comme un clair de lune. Emma disparaissait dessous; et il lui semblait que, s'épandant au dehors d'elle-même, elle se perdait confusément dans l'entourage des choses, dans le silence, dans la nuit, dans le vent qui passait, dans les senteurs humides qui montaient. (ME, pp.458-459)

In a way, the whole novel has been a foretaste of the "entourage des choses" in which Emma is lost. The final sentence makes us cast our mind back to all those earlier passages in the book - among them some of these I have quoted - where the silence and the wind and so on have already
figured: it is not just a piece of fine writing. Flaubert begins with the world outside the room where Emma is lying, with the calm of the night, and gradually comes closer to Charles himself. The first tears we see come from the candle-grease dropping on the bed-linen.

When Emma is buried (the procession of her cortège reminding us of the other procession at her wedding) the sounds heard across the fields have an effect like silence, for they have nothing to do with her at all:

Toutes sortes de bruits joyeux emplissaient l'horizon: le claquement d'une charrette roulant au loin dans les ornières, le cri d'un coq qui se répétait ou la galopade d'un poulain que l'on voyait s'enfuir sous les pommiers...

Le drap noir, semé de larmes blanches, se levait de temps à autre en découvrant la bière. Les porteurs fatigués se ralentissaient, et elle avançait par saccades continues, comme une chaloupe qui tanguait à chaque flot.

On arriva.

Les hommes continuèrent jusqu'en bas, à une place dans le gazon où la fosse était creusée.

On se rangea tout autour; et, tandis que le prêtre parlait, la terre rouge, rejettée sur les bords, coulait par les coins, sans bruit, continuellement.

Puis, quand les quatre cordes furent disposées, on poussa la bière dessus. Il la regarda descendre. Elle descendait toujours.

Enfin, on entendit un choc; les cordes en grinçant remontèrent. Alors Bournisien prit la bêche que lui tendait Lestiboudois; de sa main gauche, tout en aspergeant de la droite, il poussa vigoureusement une large pelleteée; et le bois du cercueil, heurté par les cailloux, fit ce bruit formidable qui nous semble être le retentissement de l'éternité.

(MR, pp.466-467)

Perhaps the last image is too lugubrious to be as profound as it wants to be? It is the farmyard sounds from the distance and the precisely physical sounds, like the thud of the coffin or the noiseless running away of the earth, which have the most tragic effect because they are most independent of Emma, who returns to an earth which has always, and not just at this moment, seemed so much more permanent than she is. At his best - and the end of this passage suggests that his best is also his least literary - Flaubert never flinches at this distance between Emma and her world or tries to bridge it. This is worth stressing because modern critics
sometimes see tragedy as an insidious bridging operation. For example, Alain Robbe-Grillet sees tragedy as:

... une tentative de récupération de la distance, qui existe entre l'homme et les choses, en tant que valeur nouvelle; ce serait en somme une épreuve, où la victoire consisterait à être vaincu. La tragédie apparaît donc comme la dernière invention de l'humanisme pour ne rien laisser échapper: puisque l'accord entre l'homme et les choses a fini par être dénoncé, l'humaniste sauve son empire en instaurant aussitôt une nouvelle forme de solidarité, le divorce lui-même devenant une voie majeure pour la rédemption. (13)

It is precisely because Flaubert does not succumb to the illusion of such a victory, and that Emma's only possible victory is that she ceases to believe in such "rédemption", that Madame Bovary can attain the unevasive clarity of tragic art.

We are prepared to see Emma going into the silence by Flaubert's use of the style indirect libre. For it takes her voice away from her. We guess her words and thoughts without actually hearing them. They are unechoed. So the silence is found inside Emma too. Flaubert can both suggest her inner life and draw over it the kind of veil which hides any person's inner life from observation. It is in this way that she is kept in relation to her surroundings and never seems to dominate them through her consciousness. Without a voice, she seems always a little beyond our capacity to assimilate our own thoughts to hers in imaginative and emotional projection. She is always out there in the world and other. One indication of this feeling of her otherness is that we are already plunged deep into the novel before we hear her speak. Apart from a passing remark on page 21 the first thing she says, on page 62, is: "Pourquoi, mon Dieu! me suis-je mariée?". The sudden sound of her voice reverberates in the silence created by the narrator. Usually her words are of the most banal -

as in her conversation with Léon at the Lion d'Or - but how could she say what it is that afflicts her? Inarticulacy is not a symptom but an integral part of her condition. A famous passage of style indirect libre shows her dreaming of the romance of foreign travel and trying to forget that she is in Tostess:

Peut-être aurait-elle souhaité faire à quelqu'un la confidence de toutes ces choses. Mais comment dire un insaisissable malaise, qui change d'aspect comme les nuées, qui tourbillonne comme le vent? Les mots lui manquaient, donc, l'occasion, la hardiesse. (MB. p.57)

The only words she does find are the commonplaces of passion which she utters to the bored Rodolphe, to whom they reveal only:

"... l'éternelle monotonie de la passion, qui a toujours les mêmes formes et le même langage. Il ne distinguait pas, cet homme si plein de pratique, la dissemblance des sentiments sous la parité des expressions. Parce que des lèvres libertines ou vénales lui avaient murmuré des phrases pareilles, il ne croyait que faiblement à la candeur de celles-là; on en devait rabattre, pensait-il, les discours exagérés cachant les affections médiocres, comme si la plénitude de l'âme ne déborde pas quelquefois par les métaphores les plus vides, puisque personne, jamais, ne peut donner l'exacte mesure de ses besoins, ni de ses conceptions, ni de ses douleurs, et que la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fâché où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles. (MB. p.265) (14)

Style indirect libre, in Flaubert, always has this feeling behind it - a feeling far deeper than the technique it is often taken to be could be supposed to give. The only person who can find words - and what does he have to find them for? - is Homais. Even his silences are articulate:

when Emma faints as she sees Rodolphe's tilbury leaving Yonville, "le pharmacien... gardait ce silence méditatif qu'il est convenable d'avoir

14. For GF the mot juste is so hard to find because human communication is so difficult; his interest in idées reçues is tragic as well as comic. See the following passage, which concerns Frédéric Moreau and Rosanette: "... au milieu des confidences les plus intimes, il y a toujours des restrictions, par fausse honte, délicatesse, pitié. On découvre chez l'autre ou dans soi-même des précipices ou des fanges qui empêchent de poursuivre; on sent, d'ailleurs, que l'on ne serait pas compris; il est difficile d'exprimer exactement quoi que ce soit; aussi les unions complètes sont rares". (ES, pp.474-475)
dans les occasions sérieuses de la vie". (MB, p.288) Not even poses are available to Emma. It may therefore seem as if death is no abrupt end for her but her authentic destination from far back. When she is lost "dans l'entourage des choses, dans le silence" it is almost as though, for Flaubert, she has attained being for the first time.¹⁵

The impassive prose, it seems, corroborates the impression made by the silent landscape which swallows Emma up: Flaubert's voice, like the landscape, absorbs, without echoing, what she says and feels. One can indicate briefly how these two distances between which Emma exists combine, by a quotation which shows Flaubert in the process of standing back from Emma:

Il fallait qu'elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur, - étant de tempérament plus sentimentale qu'artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages. (MB, p.50)

This makes clear what it is that Flaubert himself is seeking to do in his descriptions of Emma's world. One might add a note of speculation: were critics like James, Arnold and Sainte-Beuve also "cherchant des émotions et non des paysages" when they read Madame Bovary? Some suggestive remarks from I.A. Richards will clinch the direction I want this speculation to take.

He is discussing tragedy:

... [tragedy] can take anything into its organisation, modifying it so that it finds a place. It is invulnerable; there is nothing which does not present to the tragic attitude when fully developed a fitting aspect and only a fitting aspect. (16)

He takes this thought further when discussing "impersonality" a few pages later:

... the less any one particular interest is indispensable, the more detached our attitude becomes. And to say that we are impersonal is merely a curious way of saying that our personality is more completely involved. (Richards, p.251)

¹⁵. The reader is referred back to the discussion of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse Inédites at the start of chapter II above.

Flaubert says much the same thing in a letter already quoted:

L'idéal n'est fécond que lorsqu'on y fait tout entrer.
C'est un travail d'amour et non d'exclusion. (Corresp. IV, p.15)

Hence the passages omitted from the final version of the novel. Their dwelling on the pathos of Emma's situation had constituted "one particular interest" which had prevented the reader from being "more completely involved". 17

It is things like the extremely personalised death of Ralph Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady which help one to recognise the rarity of Flaubert's inclusive contemplation of death at the end of Madame Bovary; by implication, Emma's death includes the sense that death is common to us all in a way that Ralph's death (carefully staged at a crucial point in Isabel's story) does not. For me, the whole novel conducts to the moment when this fact begins to sink in, even behind Homais' façade of egoism and self-importance. Emma's death, like all deaths, takes the breath away:

Il y a toujours, après la mort de quelqu'un, comme une stupéfaction qui se dégage, tant il est difficile de comprendre cette survenue du néant et de se résigner à y croire. Mais quand il s'aperçoit pourtant de son immobilité, Charles se jeta sur elle en criant:
- Adieu! adieu!
- Homais et Canivet l'entraînèrent hors de la chambre.
- Modérez-vous!
- Oui, disait-il en s'ébattant, je serai raisonnable, je ne ferai pas de mal. Mais laissez-moi je veux la voir! c'est ma femme!
Et il pleurait.
- Pleurez, reprit le pharmacien, donnez cours à la nature, cela vous soulagera! (MB, p.450)

It is "la mort de quelqu'un" - anybody's death - but Flaubert is delicate enough to dispel any suspicion that he is being pompously general about it. It is the comical readiness of Homais' idée reçue - "donnez cours à la nature, cela vous soulagera!" - which makes us feel this is about the "condition humaine".

17. I return to this idea in chapters VIII and IX below, where I suggest that The Portrait of a Lady is, among other things, "un travail... d'exclusion".
Perhaps it will seem strange that Flaubert's sense of our common humanity is most strong when he is writing about death? In my second chapter I hinted at something negative and passive in him when I used the following (very un-Balzacian) remarks to illustrate his idea of the "grandeur of generality":

... cette faculté à s'assimiler à toutes les misères et de se supposer les ayant est peut-être la vraie charité humaine. Se faire ainsi le centre de l'humanité, tâcher enfin d'être son cœur général où toutes les veines éparse se réunissent, ce serait à la fois l'effort du plus grand homme et du meilleur homme?

Flaubert is better at imagining the sufferings of humanity than the ways man has of reacting against those sufferings. Suffering therefore tends to become abstract and cosmic, imposed from without as it seems to be with Emma. This parti pris makes the object of Flaubert's empathy ambiguous: is it man or only that which makes man suffer? Is "le centre de l'humanité" really outside humanity? These questions arise in looking at Emma and realising that, unlike the Shakespearian tragic figures, she does not transcend her suffering: her suffering transcends her. Flaubert does not spare her the humiliation of begging from Tuvache nor the prostitution which her last visit to Rodolphe amounts to. As she returns from La Ruchette for the last time, the unresponsive Norman landscape seems to annihilate her self so that we almost literally see her body decomposing back into it:

Elle sortit. Les murs tremblaient, le plafond l'écrasait; et elle repassa par la longue allée, en trébuchant contre les tas de feuilles mortes que le vent dispersait. Enfin elle arriva au saut-de-loup devant la grille; elle se cassa les ongles contre la serrure, tant elle se dépêchait pour l'ouvrir. Puis, cent pas plus loin, essoufflée, près de tomber, elle s'arrêta. Et alors, se détournant, elle aperçut encore une fois l'impassible château, avec le parc, les jardins, les trois cours, et toutes les fenêtres de la façade.

Elle resta perdue de stupeur, et n'ayant plus conscience

16. He himself had the resource of Art as a reaction against life but this is not a resource which he gives to Emma, whom he makes a type of the bad, over-personal artist. (See the end of this chapter.)
The pulsing of her arteries becomes part of the landscape. In Flaubert the destruction of the personality is always pure loss. Her extinction may be felt by her here as an almost voluptuous relief but it has no meaning for us, nothing to affirm. There is nothing like Horatio, with his "Good night, sweet Prince,/ And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest", to supply a less bleak coda. I suggested this earlier, when I used Robbe-Grillet to define the way in which Madame Bovary can be seen as a tragic novel, but that claim must now be looked at more closely.

It is interesting that the chill which goes through Emma as she looks back at La Huchette should be conveyed through the word "impassible". The "centre de l'humanité" found its expression, for Flaubert, in "impassibilité": does the word denote the omniscient novelist punishing Emma with his own sense of resignation? There are moments in Madame Bovary - not always, but especially towards the end - when one cannot be sure whether the force which destroys Emma is simply a force in life which Flaubert has understood, and lets speak for itself through his prose, or whether Flaubert is himself controlling this force and making it an expression of his will. The fact that one is tempted to use that word "force" is itself a sign that Flaubert may sometimes be subjecting Emma to his sense of death with an over-systematic rigour. For example, at the moment when he introduces the blind beggar's song at Emma's death-bed the self-consciousness of the irony makes one doubt whether her death is

19. This aspect of GF's novels is well described by Paul Bourget in "GF", Etudes et Portraits, 3 vols. (1905), vol. 1, chapter XI.

20. The word is used to similar effect in the description of Fontainebleau in ES: "... l'ensemble du palais, couleur de rouille comme une vieille armure, avait quelque chose de royalement impassible, une sorte de grandeur militaire et triste." (p.459)
really taking his breath away. I do not have this doubt at all in the
description of Rodolphe's "impassible château" but sometimes the novel
does have a note of forced melodrama which Flaubert seems to enjoy too
much. This tendency is noted by Jean-Pierre Richard:

... l'option déterministe est un aspect de la tentation que
subit à certains moments Flaubert de réduire l'informé en
lui imposant du dehors une discipline arbitraire. (21)

This "discipline arbitraire" is perhaps the inevitable result of
generalising about the human condition from a point of view as agnostic
and nihilistic as Flaubert's. If he tries to see Emma's fate under the
auspices of eternity his only reference for such a viewpoint lies in himself,
in his rôle as an Artist. In older tragedies the tragic hero is up against
the gods or fate but Yonville is plainly a community unvisited by any gods:
it is just surrounded by the blank Norman landscape. In a world without
gods Flaubert is tempted to play God himself and when he does so his sense
of tragedy comes over as an over-bearing determinism. The danger is that
the final meaning of the novel sometimes comes too near to being summed-up
by the half-comic words of Charles's "seul grand mot": "C'est la faute
de la Fatalité!" (22, p.480) Again, it is Flaubert's sense of comedy which
averts the danger, and Flaubert just manages, at this point at least, to
relegate determinism to the position of being the last illusion of the
long-suffering Charles.

The presence of some determinism in Flaubert's vision of Emma's life
is, I think, undeniable. Many readers have felt (as James and Arnold and
Sainte-Beuve did) that there is something in Emma's world which prevents
her from ever bringing herself into true being, some vaguely cosmic
malediction which subverts all her dreams too unremittingly. Since there
seems to be no God in her world, and since her tragedy affects us too

deeply for it to seem merely the story of her own "bad luck", it is easy to assume that Flaubert himself has promulgated this malediction, that he hems Emma in with his own sense of life as the bitter defeat of human aspiration, and that he also imposes this feeling of defeat on the reader through his irony so that it becomes difficult to imagine Emma as having a real responsibility for her own life. Yet when this has been said one immediately counters it by pointing back to the novel, to the overwhelming feeling it gives us that life is like this, that our lives like Emma's are bounded by death and that death is something pre-determined. What happens to Emma is told with too much compassion and involves the reader too completely for it to strike him simply as a thesis which illustrates the truth of the author's a priori pessimism. Moreover, Madame Bovary gives us too intensely real a sense of how each link fits into the next link in a chain of circumstances for Emma's life to seem simply an exemplum of a deterministic mechanism which Flaubert attributes generally to any human destiny. The novel is too rooted in the particular for that to be true.

How is it, then, that Emma's tragedy can affect us both as the utterly unique product of particular combinations of chance and also as the inevitable culmination of her attempt to come into being? The world of the novel seems to be ruled by chance when Emma has the misfortune to find such sorry specimens as Rodolphe and Léon for her lovers and by fate when the blind beggar makes his timely re-appearance just as she is dying. Is it that, in a world without gods, where chance is omnipotent, death replaces the idea of God as an absolute? We may all live in different ways but the cardinal fact about our condition, the fact which enables Flaubert both to write generally about a common human lot and, sometimes, to see that lot deterministically, is that we are all doomed to die. If he could not give Emma a chance to find herself freely it was perhaps because
he never shook off his adolescent fixation on death. This is the truth that Emma is eventually to discover but, because Flaubert implants it in our minds long before she does discover it, the reader is prevented from seeing Emma's spiritual life as an exploration of the world; he sees, instead, a world which gradually inculcates the pre-established truth of death into a helplessly passive woman who tries to resist it for as long as she possibly can.

Before going on to discuss Emma's passivity, I want to describe some of the ways in which Flaubert makes us think of her tragedy as inevitable. In Madame Bovary the word "fatalité" is only used in the context of a comedy which mocks the romantic idea that human beings have some supernatural force to blame their misfortunes on. In this way Flaubert introduces the thought of "fatalité" without actually seeming to subscribe to it. Thus, we find Rodolphe using the word in the letter in which he breaks off with Emma:

"Oubliez-moi! Pourquoi faut-il que je vous aie connue? Pourquoi étiez-vous si belle? Est-ce ma faute? Ô mon Dieu! non, non, n'en accusez que la fatalité!" - Voilà un mot qui fait toujours de l'effet, se dit-il. (MB, p.281)

When Charles tells Rodolphe at the end of the book that Emma's death is "la faute de la fatalité" Flaubert quickly undercuts him:

Rodolphe, qui avait conduit cette fatalité, le trouva bien débonnaire pour un homme dans sa situation, comique même et un peu vil. (MB, p.480)

The comedy is saying that there is no superhuman force which ordains things in this world; what happens is the effect of human agency. Yet one wonders if any reader of the novel can, at this point, see the situation so rationally. Flaubert surely does give us the feeling that, life having

22. E.g. A remark already quoted from Quidquid Volueris: "Oh! une tête de mort! ses yeux cèves et fixes, la teinte jaune de sa surface, sa mâchoire ébréchée, serait-ce donc là la réalité, et le vrai serait-il le néant?"
proved so terrible, Charles is in a sense right; the wheel has come full circle, *Madame Bovary* is not just a chapter of accidents as Rodolphe thinks. This feeling is due to a complicity between Flaubert's "impassibilité", which is the expression of his desire to see life from a position which allows him to give it a meaningful artistic form, and the "impassibilité" he attributes to Emma's world. That is, although Flaubert constantly suggests to us that the world is indifferent to Emma's fate and has no hand in it, her world constantly throws up events which seem to predict what is about to happen. Flaubert tells us, when Emma and Rodolphe make love for the first time, that "Rien autour d'eux n'avait changé" (*MB*, p.224) but at other moments he makes it seem as if the external world is indirectly commenting on what happens in the human world. When Charles arrives at Les Bertaux for the first time, just before he meets Emma, we learn that "son cheval eut peur et fit un grand écart" (*MB*, p.17). Flaubert makes the horse warn Charles (or rather, the reader) of the danger ahead. At the start of chapter 6 of the *Première Partie*, which describes Emma's adolescence, Flaubert slips in the isolated fact that when she was thirteen she had eaten with her father, in an inn, off "des assiettes peintes qui représentaient l'histoire de mademoiselle de La Vallière" (*MB*, p.48), the mistress of Louis XIV. It is almost as if the world of objects is giving ironic hints of what is going to happen to her later. Similarly, Flaubert's graphic description of the "liquide noir" which exudes from Hippolyte's gangrenous leg (*MB*, p.248) anticipates the "flot de liquides noirs" which streams from Emma's mouth and nearly soils her white shroud when she is dead (*MB*, p.457). Flaubert's imagery sometimes works rather like the clamp which Charles puts Hippolyte's leg into.

It is towards the end of the novel that Flaubert's covert inclusion of his knowledge of what is going to happen becomes most insistent. For
example, in the first chapter of the Troisième Partie, Emma is telling Léon about her sufferings during his absence in Paris:

Léon tout de suite envia le calme du tombeau, et même, un soir, il avait écrit son testament en recommandant qu'on l'ensevelît dans ce beau couvre-pied, à bandes de velours, qu'il tenait d'elle... (MB, p.324)

The irony of this becomes much more pointed and ominous a few pages later, when they meet in Rouen cathedral and are given a guided tour by the beadle. The beadle’s tastes tend towards the lugubrious and he delights in directing their attention to the funeral monuments:

... au-dessous, cet homme prêt à descendre au tombeau vous figure exactement le même. Il n'est point possible, n'est-ce pas, de voir une plus parfaite représentation du néant?

Mme Bovary prit son lorgnon. Léon, immobile, la regardait, n'essayant même plus de dire un seul mot, de faire un seul geste, tant il se sentait découragé devant ce double parti pris de bavardage et d'indifférence.

L'éternel guide continue:
- Près de lui, cette femme à genoux qui pleure est son épouse, Diane de Poitiers, comtesse de Brézé, duchesse de Valentinois, née en 1499, morte en 1566... (MB, p.334)

The fact that the long-dead Diane de Poitiers was the mistress of kings, as Emma would have liked to be, and that Emma is about to commit adultery, tells us that Emma will soon die as her dreams are dying. This is rubbed in by the parting words of the beadle:

- Sortez du moins par le portail du nord! leur cria le suisse, qui était resté sur le seuil, pour voir la Résurrection, le Jugement dernier, le Paradis, le Roi David, et les Réprouvés dans les flammes d'enfer. (MB, p.336)

This sense of doom, created by a kind of hostile comedy, gets reinforced on Emma’s return to Yonville where she hears the news of the death of Charles’s father. The news must have arrived at the same time at which Emma was leaving the cathedral and getting into the fiacre (itself “plus close qu’un tombeau”) with Léon (MB, p.338). The news of the death, coming after all these references to death, is so well managed that it has the surprisingness of chance and we do not realise at the time that

Emma will eventually kill herself with the arsenic which she discovers in Homais' shop as a result of going there to have the news broken to her. But looking back the whole series of chance happenings and remarks I have been describing begins to seem too logically ordered to be convincingly arbitrary. Flaubert has a way of inventing the real which makes it seem not just naked life with no significance beyond itself, but a kind of system of predictive signs which corroborates his sense of life as a foregone conclusion. Their mechanism evokes a feeling of forboding that takes away the feeling of expectancy which, I think, the earlier part of the novel gives us.

Ostensibly the world of Madame Bovary is governed by chance and not fate. One of the key words in Emma's own view of her situation is "le hasard":

Elle se demandait s'il n'y aurait pas eu moyen, par d'autres combinaisons du hasard, de rencontrer un autre homme; et elle cherchait à imaginer quels eussent été ces événements non survenus, cette vie différente, ce mari qu'elle ne connaissait pas. Tous, en effet, ne ressemblaient pas à celui-là. Il aurait pu être beau, spirituel, distingué, attirant, tels qu'ils étaient sans doute, ceux qu'avaient épousés ses anciennes camarades du couvent. (MB, p.62)

This is curiously ambiguous. Flaubert is emphasising Emma's bad luck but at the same time his ironical view of her naïveté seems to suggest that she is deceiving herself in imagining that her life might have been otherwise. Her self-pity is exposed so sharply that the idea which feeds it - that life can sometimes be good - is shot down with it. A passage slightly later on, in which Emma imagines life in Paris, has a similar effect:

C'était une existence au-dessus des autres, entre ciel et terre, dans les orages, quelque chose de sublime. Quant au reste du monde, il était perdu, sans place précise, et comme n'existant pas. Plus les choses, d'ailleurs, étaient voisines, plus sa pensée s'en détournait. Tout ce qui l'entouraient immédiatement, campagne ennuyeuse, petits bourgeois imbéciles, médiocrité de l'existence, lui semblait une exception dans le monde, un hasard particulier où elle se trouvait prise, tandis qu'au delà s'étendait à perte de vue l'immense pays des félicités et des passions. (MB, p.82)
Emma's romantic vagueness allows Flaubert to insinuate the idea that her belief in her own bad luck is really just another of her illusions. Chance may have placed her in the provinces but her life would have been essentially the same had it placed her in Paris. When the dice are thought of as always falling in the wrong way they cease to be symbols of chance and we suspect the narrator of loading them. In this case it is the pathos which emerges through the irony which loads them: we are moved by the fact that Emma's illusions are still green enough for her not to see that life is always disheartening like this. The reader is enlisted on the side of the sadder but wiser narrator: "si jeunesse savait..." There is therefore something peculiarly passive in the response Flaubert engenders in us, because, in Madame Bovary, the sense of tragedy precedes the actual tragedy itself. To some extent we feel that Flaubert makes Emma's fate what he assumes it is bound to be. Her fate does not quite make itself. The references to "le hasard" only remind us that by choosing the "hasard particulier où elle se trouvait prise" Flaubert has given Emma a fate.

No novel is more pervaded by an agnostic awareness of mortality than is Madame Bovary and it is its constant premonitions of death which account for the sense of "fatalité" it leaves us with. There are some interesting examples in the scene of the ball at la Vaubyessard. Emma arrives at the chateau trembling with excitement at the thought that, for the first time, circumstances have given her the chance of entering the kind of world she dreams about. The first thing she sees is the tomb of the marquis' ancestors. This sombre note dissociates us from her expectations: we know already that this will not be like the scenes in Balzac where the young and penniless heroine succeeds in breaking into high society. The introduction of the tomb at such a moment tells us that Flaubert can imagine

23. Brombert discusses this characteristic of the tragic feeling in the novel in The Novels of GF (op.cit.), passim.
only the expectation of joy and not its fruition. At dinner the stuff of Emma's dreams for once takes a concrete shape: she sees the old duc de Laverdière "qui avait été, disait-on, l'amant de la reine Marie-Antoinette, entre MM. de Coigny et de Lauzun":

... au haut bout de la table, seul parmi toutes ces femmes, courbé sur son assiette remplie, et la serviette nouée dans le dos comme un enfant, un vieillard mangeait, laissant tomber de sa bouche des gouttes de sauce. Il avait les yeux éraillés et portait une petite queue enroulée d'un ruban noir. C'était le beau-père du marquis... Il avait mené une vie bruyante de débauches, pleine de duels, de paris, de femmes enlevées, avait dévoré sa fortune et effrayé toute sa famille. Un domestique, derrière sa chaise, lui nommait tout haut, dans l'oreille, les plats qu'il désignait du doigt en bégayant; et sans cesse les yeux d'Emma revenaient d'eux-mêmes sur ce vieil homme à lèvres pendantes, comme sur quelque chose d'extraordinaire et d'auguste. Il avait récu à la Cour et couché dans le lit des reines! (MB, p.68)

Life and passion and *joie de vivre* appear as a survival from a "belle époque" gone forever. The life-loving old duke has been transformed into a *memento mori*. What makes this passage so chilling is that its sense of death has the effect of diminishing the depth we can attribute to Emma's instinctive desire to live: it is so clearly a desire which is too shallow to see what lies in store for itself. The sense that Emma is alive gets included in the sense that she is going to die.

*Madame Bovary* is full of small things which contribute to making this sense of decay pervasive enough to give its life a pattern. The foetus in Homais' window rots a little more each year, the *Hirondelle* gets more and more dilapidated, even Lestiboufois' potato patch is gradually reduced in size as parts of it are taken away to make room for the expansion of the graveyard. Imperceptibly, the novel is plunged more and more into an atmosphere of death as it progresses, just as Hippolyte's leg gets more and more gangrenous with the advance of the "invincible pourriture" (MB, p.251).

This pattern of decay, which helps to unify the novel, may not be perceived by Emma but it does help to explain why Flaubert tends to see Emma as being
the passive spectator of her own fate, as what Harry Levin called an "agonist" rather than a "protagonist". It even crosses one's mind that what Emma herself really wants, from the moment she begins to feel that the material world is clogging her wings, is not to live but to die, and that it is death which her life consists in trying to discover. This speculation, which rests on the view that there is a direct connection between the novel's formal unity and the limits which Flaubert sets to Emma's experience, turns up a crucial question about Madame Bovary: Is there a certain lugubriousness in its sense of tragedy which tends to reduce the element of shock which we usually find in a tragedy, that shock which throws us off balance and takes our breath away, which stops us from moralising about life and death and leaves us simply stupefied by what they are? Does our sense of Emma's being doomed to death tempt us to moralise over her?

It might be argued that Flaubert's strategy in searching for artistic "impassibilité" is precisely to create a perspective from which he can moralise over Emma's fate. By moralising, I mean the kind of reflection about experience in which the reflector feels that his reflection absolves and liberates him from the experience. There are statements in the Correspondance which suggest that Flaubert did find this kind of therapeutic value in art. In 1845 he told Le Poittevin that: "La lassitude de l'existence ne nous pèse pas aux épaules quand nous composons." (Corresp. I, p.191) His advice to Mlle de Chantepie, when she asks him how he managed to overcome the kind of nervous illness she still suffers from, duplicates his aims as an impersonal artist: "Tâchez-donc de ne plus vivre en vous." (Corresp. IV, p.161) He criticises Michelet's Révolution because its style is too influenced by the turbulence of its subject: "Ce n'est pas clair,

c'est encore moins calme, et le calme est le caractère de la beauté, comme la sérénité l'est de l'innocence, de la vertu. Le repos est attitude de Dieu." (Corresp. III, p.340) The calmness which belongs to the attitude of God may well evoke visions of the detached moraliser. This Flaubert who aspires to Godhead has definite affinities with the Flaubert who wrote: "Il doit y avoir de délirants orgueils à sentir qu'on pèse sur l'humanité de tout le poids de son idée." (Corresp. II, p.329) One consequence of these "délirants orgueils" was perhaps a moralised feeling of déterminism which the Flaubert who weighed on Emma by taking the point of view of death on her life could not help sometimes falling into. That a writer as concerned as Flaubert is to bring home to us the fact of our mortality should compare the artist's attitude to the "repos" which characterise the "attitude de Dieu" is rather disturbing. It is as if Madame Bovary might have been written to de-realise Flaubert's own sense of "la lassitude de l'existence" by transferring it onto his readers.  

Going back to the Correspondance at this point, I may seem to be contradicting myself by suggesting an account of Flaubert's attitude to Emma which is suspiciously like Matthew Arnold's. I do not think this is so and I should emphasise that Flaubert's "option déterministe" is only one element in the novel. I refer to it so as to describe better the depth of Flaubert's sympathy for Emma. Far from being aloof from Emma, he understood her dreams in a more actively personal way than is often admitted. What I want to argue is that "impassibilité" is really a higher form of bovarysme and that Emma's experience over the course of the novel can be imagined as being also the experience of Gustave Flaubert out of which the idea of "impassibilité" and, thus, Madame Bovary itself, were conceived. In arguing this I hope to go some way towards explaining that undercurrent of tension.

25. Cf. The famous description quoted earlier of the effect "impassibilité" should have: "L'effet, pour le spectateur, doit être une espèce d'ébahissement. Comment tout cela s'est-il fait? doit-on dire, et qu'on se sente écrasé sans savoir pourquoi".
in the novel's prose which has often been taken as a sign that Flaubert persecutes Emma out of disdain for her. Here is an example of the kind of prose I mean, taken from the description of Emma's schooldays at the convent. Tension may not be quite the right word for prose which resolves the different facets of a complex sensibility as successfully as this does:

It is remarkable how many different responses to Emma the beautifully slow, steady rhythm of this can include in its movement. The fact that the irony so sharply implies that Emma is wilfully romanticising the close, dreary round of convent life in no way prevents us from seeing how perfectly understandable her false sentiment is in a girl of her age. The comedy of her sentimentalisation of religion incorporates a sense of the stifled energy in her which is groping for an outlet in the "tiède atmosphère des classes": "Elle cherchait dans sa tête quelque vœu à accomplir". That curt "dans sa tête" does not preclude sympathy with her mysticism although it satirises it.

One of the most revealing self-definitions in the Correspondance is the famous epigram: "Je suis mystique au fond et je ne crois à rien". (Corresp. II, p.412) It should be an agonised cri de coeur - for it surely is agonising to have a religious temperament and yet to believe in nothing - but the statement is not free from that feeling of self-satisfaction which often underlies a neat paradox. If Flaubert gives the impression of having
understood or resolved his dilemma it is the expedient of his idea of art which has given him the confidence to do so:

Ne nous lamentois sur rien; se plaindre de tout ce qui nous afflige ou nous irrite, c'est se plaindre de la constitution même de l'existence. Nous sommes faits pour la peindre, nous autres, et rien de plus. Soyons religieux. Moi, tout ce qui m'arrive de fâcheux, en grand ou en petit, fait que je me resserre de plus en plus à mon éternel souci. Je m'y cramponne à deux mains et je ferme les deux yeux. A force d'appeler la Grâce, elle vient. Dieu a pitié des simples et le soleil brille toujours pour les cœurs vigoureux qui se place au-dessus des montagnes.

Je tourne à une espèce de mysticisme esthétique (si les deux mots peuvent aller ensemble), et je voudrais qu'il fût plus fort. Quand aucun encouragement ne nous vient des autres, quand le monde extérieur vous dégoûte, vous alanguiyt, vous corrompt, vous abrutit, les gens honnêtes et délicats sont forcés de chercher en eux-mêmes quelque part un lieu plus propre pour y vivre. Si la société continue comme elle va, nous reverrons, je crois, des mystiques comme il y en a eu à toutes les époques sombres. Ne pouvant s'épancher, l'âme se concentrera. (Corresp. III, p.16)

There is no need to detail the many resemblances between this and Emma's own experience: they will be clear to the reader who turns back to the description just quoted of Emma at the convent. Two brief quotations will serve to clinch the point for the moment. The first is from a letter Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet in 1853: "Le fait se distille dans la Forme et monte en haut, comme un pur encens de l'Esprit vers l'Eternel, L'Immutable, l'Absolu, l'Idéal. (Corresp. III, p.407) The second quotation is from the Nouvelle Version. Rodolphe is expatiating to Emma, at the Comices Agricoles, on the higher duties of romantic passion; she is drinking in his words:

"Ainsi la Vérité, la Passion, l'éternel Beau, l'Amour, planent en haut, au-dessus des conventions sociales et des intérêts éphémères de la société. (Nouvelle Version, p.357) Substitute the word "Forme" for Rodolphe's "Passion" and you get the same idea. The only difference is that Emma's

26. At first, Madame Bovary was conceived as a "roman flamand de la jeune fille qui meurt vierge et mystique, entre son père et sa mère, dans une petite ville de province". (Corresp. II, p.253) This heroine was a development from Marie in Novembre as well as a precursor of Salammbo: "mon héroïne crève d'exaltation religieuse après avoir connu l'exaltation des sens". (Corresp. II, p.254)
transcendence is conceived in terms of human relations whereas Flaubert's is achieved through art.

This takes us to the root of the feeling of "fatalité" in Madame Bovary. In one sense Flaubert has lived through Emma's experience in advance, by deciding to create a work of art like Madame Bovary; in another sense, the disgust with "le monde extérieur" which makes him become an artist leads him to disbelieve in Emma's desire for some transcendence within life. These are not premises which can encourage him to show Emma exploring life to the full, trying to make her own fate freely, like one of Stendhal's heroes. If power, resilience and resistance to fate are qualities we expect to find in a tragic character then it looks as though the word "tragic" can only be applied to Madame Bovary in a limited sense. Perhaps Flaubert himself had such qualities but if they only found expression in the act of writing, and not as an essential part of the significance of what he wrote, then they cannot be said to have found a true artistic form. In fact, an art concerned just to constate the tragic nature of life might, in one way, seem a means of protecting the artist from too full a realisation of the kind of conflict between man and his world which is at the heart of tragedy. For there is, I think, something un-dynamic and even calming in the effect which the end of Madame Bovary makes on us: when Emma dies we feel as much relieved as emotionally drained. There is a passiveness in her which makes it seem as much fulfillment as loss when her self is absorbed back into "l'entourage des choses, le silence".

In the next chapter, I want to explore further this description of the kind of tragedy which Madame Bovary gives us. I shall suggest that its limits are not simply due to Flaubert's having chosen for his heroine the inferior creature seen by James in the 1902 essay. My point has been that the novel can only be tragic at all because Emma is as she is. Her fate may seem less tragic as a result of the way Flaubert's agnosticism
tempts him to be deterministic but it should be clear that this weakness (if it is one) involves more than Flaubert's own particular sensibility. In Shakespeare the tragic hero usually reaches a point of lucidity in his sufferings at which he can reflect on life in general; the same thing is true of the chorus in a Greek tragedy. But where, in a nineteenth century novel, is the language for such utterance to come from in common speech? We may not find it in Emma Bovary's mouth (Flaubert being wise enough not to try to put it there) but do we really find it in Arthur Clennam's or Lydgate's or Pierre Bezukhov's either?27

27. Perhaps the nearest we come in the nineteenth century to characters of tragic stature who are both heroic and profound about life is in the novels of Dostoievski, but Dostoievski's people are all soul and this makes it hard to see them as humanity writ large rather than as sublime freaks. A case could be made for Ibsen but, to my taste, there is always an aura of melodrama around figures like Borkman and Solness and Brand and much of the power of the dramas in which they appear comes from their superbly incorrigible obstinacy rather than from any courage they find to look reality in the face. Where we do find a nineteenth century hero who seems to comprehend the tragic side of life, a hero like Pip in Great Expectations, his perception is accompanied by an un-tragic weariness with life. It may be possible to generalise by saying that whereas earlier tragedy has the effect of illuminating life with wonder as well as pain, in the nineteenth century the tragic sense often has the effect of making life seem a smaller affair than we would like. Two exceptions to this occur to me, Balzac and Wagner, and there is a case for saying that they both need to abandon their art to heroic melodramas for long periods before they can get through to a purely tragic feeling. Perhaps the question which ends the chapter should be left an open one, and not simply because of my own incompetence to speak about the dignity of utterance of the characters of Norwegian or Russian authors!
CHAPTER FIVE

Emma Bovary's "Commonplace Soul": Through Lawrence to Flaubert

You can't put a great soul into a commonplace person. Commonplace persons have commonplace souls. (1)

The word "tragic" may be as helpful as a touchstone for the kind of artistic experience which Madame Bovary just fails to give us as it is for describing the profound, but limited, experience which it at times communicates with such power. To make this statement clearer I need to begin by reconsidering the points just made at the end of the last chapter. They may have seemed to show me coming round to agreeing with Henry James's criticisms of the smallness of Emma's consciousness, in spite of my previous attempt to dissent from his views. To show that this was not the case I shall need to go on to discuss Lawrence's criticism of Flaubert's novel. It is a criticism which has important affinities with James's: for Lawrence, Madame Bovary is a tragic novel without tragic actors. Lawrence, therefore, will help me to amplify the opening remark of this chapter into a more precise description of the experience the novel leaves us with when we put it down.

My complaint was that Flaubert is unwilling to trust Emma enough to give her the opportunity of acting in a situation which might have demanded of her the kind of spiritual development which we expect of a tragic character. The obvious opportunity of this kind which she could have been given would have simply been for her to have found no arsenic in Homais' medicine store when she had decided to commit suicide. As it is, with Flaubert carefully reminding her that there is arsenic there, by

making her overhear Homais' tirade against Justin (pp. 340-345), we can never know whether she would have found enough strength in herself to face her life as the guilty wife of the bankrupt, but forgiving, Charles. My own hunch, for what it is worth, is that Flaubert himself suspected that she would have found that strength to live through tragedy but that he had his own reasons for wanting her to choose death instead. I base this hunch on the feeling that he found the thought of her death easier to take than the thought of her having to continue to live, that he carefully planned her death scene in order not to have to imagine what would otherwise have been her agonising struggle to accept the responsibility for her own life in a tragic world. In other words, Flaubert chose the obvious kind of "tragic" dénouement to his novel in order to evade its most essential implication of tragedy. He was, perhaps, unwilling to subject either himself or his readers to the sort of situation with which he was later to end L'Education Sentimentale.  

To say that Flaubert never quite allows Emma's thoughts about her sufferings to get beyond the realm of personal feeling towards any reflection on the general meaning of life is to suggest, as James did, that her story gives us a case, an "anecdote". What happens to her at the end of the novel confirms a hypothesis about the fruitlessness of human effort which Flaubert's ironic account of Emma's naïveté has all along been intent on proving. James quarrelled with Faguet's description of her as representative because, in not letting her grow from innocence to experience through suffering, Flaubert is allowing her only a reductive kind of representativeness. He takes a part of human nature — the part

2. Cf. a remark of T.S. Eliot's in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca", an essay in which he also analyses the bovarysme of the dying Othello: "Stoicism is the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him— it is the permanent substratum of a number of versions of cheering oneself up". Selected Essays, 3rd enlarged edition (1951), pp. 131-132. Perhaps GF dislikes Emma for not sharing his own stoicism?
which Gaultier called bovarysme - and makes it stand for the whole. He sometimes seems to be deliberately preventing her from participating in his own, and his readers', criticism of bovarysme: her intensity of is always emotional and spiritually corrupt, it never rises to clear-sighted thought about her predicament. The farthest her perceptions will take her is to seeing through other people - Guillemin, say, or Rodolphe - but she never really sufficiently conquers her pride to see herself as others see her. Although it is a main point of the novel that bovarysme is common to everyone - to Charles and Homais, Léon and Justin and père Rouault - and not just a special characteristic of Emma, she herself never sees this. Flaubert condemns her to a protracted adolescence and allows her to choose suicide as an alternative to growing up. In the Troisième Partie it often seems as if he is trying through Emma to inflict on his readers a crushing sense of his own inability to conceive of the will to live as anything other than an illusion. If tragedy is concerned to vindicate the authenticity of that human will in the face of all that life can do to wear it down we could say that Flaubert was finally afraid of tragedy and that his fear ("j'ai eu peur de la vie") pushed him into the softer option of nihilism. Was his own impassibilité as an artist only sustainable on the condition that Emma should never expose it as a retreat from life by herself battling for

3. One of the ironies of the last part of the novel is that Emma and Charles become more and more estranged as each plunges deeper into bovarysme: Charles' idealistic love for Emma is what prevents him so utterly from understanding her and the same may be said of Emma's love for Léon. Homais' dreams centre on "la croix d'honneur": "il fit dessiner dans son jardin un gazon figurant l'étoile de l'honneur, avec deux petits tordillons d'herbe qui partaient du sommet pour imiter le ruban". (MB, p. 478) It is perhaps disingenuous of GF to allow his dream to come true although there is an acid joke in his inanity's being rewarded with a medal. One can forgive GF for being unable to resist it. Homais' triumph should perhaps be read as part of a general strategy for defeating the reader's own expectations: it has a similar effect, in reverse, to the story of Berthe whom GF is constantly tempting us with as a figure of pathos only to squeeze a last drop of gloom from her depressing end.
life in the face of all that life could do to her? Could Flaubert's art have coped with a more resilient spirit than Emma's? I do not mean by this that Emma has no resilience when pressed but that Flaubert was perhaps too eager to have her capitulate to suffering. After all, worse things can happen to a person than to be surrounded by petty and pusillanimous people and to have the bailiffs in.\(^4\)

These doubts about Emma's stature are not quite the same as James's. James wished that Flaubert had found a nobler heroine than Emma because he felt an untragic need to be consoled by the contemplation of human dignity even in situations, like death, where any human being - noble or ignoble - is helpless in the presence of something stronger than he or she can ever be. For him, the "finer consciousness" was not an instrument for searching out a tragic mystery at the heart of life but an insurance and a protection against the thought of tragedy. He had too deep a need to clutch at the thought that man could be nobler than his fate to be able to confront that fate without blinking. In other words, if Flaubert could have made Emma a nobler heroine without making her any less self-deceiving I doubt if James would have complained about her. For, although, unlike Emma, Isabel Archer lives on through her sufferings she too gives in to them and allows her future to be determined by what they have done to her.

Nevertheless, despite these reservations about his attitude to Emma, it has to be said that James had a point in suggesting that the result of her smallness is that it makes it difficult for a reader to ascribe any final meaning to her tragedy. Her failure to understand what

4. Cf. an acute remark of Thibaudet's: "Il n'y a roman de la fatalité, de la destine, que l'on y a absence de volonté. Et c'est le cas d'Emma." \textit{CF} (1922), p. 107. Although, at the end of the novel, Emma is as much conniving at her own destruction as acquiescing in it and there is no question of her resigning herself to death since she has come to yearn for it.
is happening to her can easily leave us feeling that what the novel is finally showing us is merely a blank world of pure contingency to which we can only relate aesthetically. James might well have quoted his own account of George Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth in order to explain what it was that he found absent from Flaubert's conception of Emma Bovary:

Gwendolen's history is admirably typical — as most things are with George Eliot: it is the very stuff that human life is made of. What is it made of but the discovery by each of us that we are at the best but a rather ridiculous fifth wheel to the coach, after we have sat cracking our whip and believing that we are at least the coachman in person? We think we are the main hoop to the barrel, and we turn out to be but a very incidental splinter in one of the staves. The universe forcing itself with a slow, inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind, and making it ache with the pain of the process — that is Gwendolen's story. And it becomes completely characteristic in that her supreme perception of the fact that the world is whirring past her is in the disappointment not of a base but of an exalted passion. (5)

Gwendolen can be tragic because she has felt an "exalted passion" sensitively enough to have a "supreme perception" of how ironical it is that that passion should be frustrated. James goes on to say, as I have been saying of Emma, that Gwendolen "is not allowed a chance to expand" but, unlike Emma, she does know what it is she has missed in life and so do we. What is it that Emma has missed in life: something that Flaubert wants us to believe was never there in the first place?

The oldest and simplest idea of tragedy is of a fall from prosperity to misery. Tragedy occurs when someone loses something of real value in his life, something that he probably still wants. It is

5. "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation", Partial Portraits, p. 89. (Constantius is speaking. Pulcheria has just argued that Gwendolen is "too light, too flimsy; tragedy has no hold on such a girl". (p. 88) Theodora has countered that "... she is extremely intelligent and clever, and therefore tragedy can have a hold upon her. Her conscience doesn't make the tragedy... it is the tragedy that makes her conscience, which then reacts upon it..." (p. 89).
not just about thwarted desires which have never been shown to be realisable but about desires which, although we can imagine them being realised or have in fact seen them realised at the start of the tragedy, are thwarted irrevocably in a particular case. For us to feel that such frustration could happen to any one - that it is a perennial possibility in life - we need to believe that the desire that is frustrated is a real and not an illusory one. Thus, in Othello, we may feel that Othello's love for Desdemona is in many ways illusory and false but we are not led by this feeling into believing that love itself is an illusion. Othello helps me to express a doubt I have about Madame Bovary's claims to be considered tragic: the novel too often leaves me feeling that no matter whom Emma had married or fallen in love with her desires would have been doomed to frustration because frustration is part of the inevitable nature of things. That is, Flaubert makes me feel sometimes that it was just folly which made her want anything from life. Nothing she wants is worth the energy of desire which she expends on it - how could it be? I do not think this feeling which the novel gives is a tragic feeling, because if there is essentially nothing to be gained in life then there is essentially nothing that can be lost through death. Does Madame Bovary leave us feeling stunned by the possibility of disaster or resigned to the futile, repetitive mechanism by which life is always defeating all our aspirations, submerging them in the monotonous ebbing of time? As Emma reaches the end of her tether we feel, in the words of a character in Le Candidat, that "les mois s'écoulent, la médiocrité ambiante vous pénètre, et on arrive doucement à la résignation, cette forme tranquille du désespoir". And this inert feeling is only made tense by

6. Théâtre de GF (Conard, 1927), p. 90. (Although it is invariably dismissed as "sentimentality", I have always thought the Dickensian "happy ending" revealed an intense and unflagging need to believe in joy which, while seeming to contradict the darker parts of his novels, in fact helps to explain their power. At least in his earlier novels - before the Pips and the Clennams - suffering is never routine, unsurprising and, hence, no longer an agony.)
the bitter comedy of the ending where we learn that Homais "vient de recevoir la croix d'honneur". (MB, p. 481) It is, in fact, the comedy which is hardest to bear but then, it has to be said that Emma is spared its final sting and has anyway never really understood how dreadful Homais is.  

I put these criticisms as bluntly as possible because I think that only by refuting them can one show that *Madame Bovary* is a wholly successful novel which lives up to the potential it promises us in the *Première Partie*. If the end of the novel leaves Emma no wiser than she was at the end of the *Première Partie*, then I think it has to be concluded that, for all its greatness, what follows on from there is in a way otiose. The rest of this chapter will not be able to resolve the questions posed here at its beginning but it will try to discuss the novel in enough detail to show why they have to be asked.

If we usually think of tragedy as being able to exhilarate as well as to appal us, we may begin to wonder whether Flaubert's object, in *Madame Bovary* was to create a tragedy which would simply leave us feeling appalled. It is worth asking whether, although Emma's fate seems tragic, her response to it is merely pitiable. In some ways she may, as I have already tried to show, be representative, but to be representative in a tragic way she would also need to be exemplary. An Oedipus has sufficient spiritual strength to gather up into his own passionate outcry against fate all those less articulate protests which stay submerged in the breasts of the people he lives amongst. Does Emma come to represent the people of Yonville by being the only one of them able to voice the

7. There is an odd vagueness in the novel about Emma's opinion of Homais and one suspects that Emma might have shared more of GF's feelings towards him than he cared to give her. We certainly know enough about both of them to see that Faguet's slick witticism on the subject reveals more vulgarity in Faguet himself than in Emma: "Le malheur de Mme Bovary, c'est de n'avoir pas épousée M. Homais". Flaubert (1899), p. 90.
prevalent dissatisfaction with provincial life or is she merely a typically ordinary example of what they all suffer? She herself feels sorry for herself because she thinks her own feelings so much finer than those of her neighbours and she resents the fact that, as she sees it, she is made to suffer so much more than they do. Her pride prevents her from understanding how much she has in common with Charles, who is deceived about her feelings for him just as she is deceived about Rodolphe's or Léon's feelings for her. Although, for the reader, she can stand for the way her kind of idealism is doomed in her kind of world she can only see her malady as a private one which is bound up with her own bad luck. If her world seems tragic she herself does not. Like Oedipus, she is a kind of scapegoat but she only sees herself as a victim.

It is, in fact, a part of her malady that she is unable to see that suffering creates a bond between her and other people and in this she is a true romantic, a descendant of Byron and Vigny's Chatterton. It is this self-consciousness in her, this inability to get beyond self, which makes it difficult for a reader to see any humanity in her with which he can feel real solidarity. Flaubert uses her to point out to us our weaknesses much more systematically than he uses her to show that we may have strengths too: he is reluctant to use her as a conductor of that tragic exhilaration we feel when great defeat reveals in man a greatness which, without defeat, we would never have seen. In King Lear it is only when Lear is reduced to the level of the "poor naked wretches" on the heath that we can see a justification for his describing himself as "every inch a king". He can express the true kinglyness which every man has.

8. Emma always compounds the bitterness of her own ennui by imagining how much happier other people must be. One of Northrop Frye's definitions may be worth applying to her: "Tragedy is intelligible because its catastrophe is plausibly related to its situation. Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be". Anatomy of Criticism (NY, 1969), p. 41.
inside him when he has seen through the particular, outer trappings of kingship which tie him to self. 9 Wordsworth was seeking to express something similar, through the less terrifying avenue of a communion with nature, when he recognised how the awareness of "high objects, with enduring things, / With life and nature" had purified his own self:

... sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (10)

Flaubert's novel is certainly about "enduring things", especially death, but is its picture of a tragic world ever mediated through the awakening in Emma of a spirit which speaks, as Lear comes to speak, from beyond the confines of her own limited self? Does she help us to "recognise / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart"? It is these questions which Lawrence will help us to explore.

Lawrence thought of tragedy as exhilarating, although he put more stress on its misery and dwelt less on Wordsworthian acceptances:

I hate England and its hopelessness. I hate Bennett's resignation. Tragedy ought really to be a great kick at misery. But Anna of the Five Towns seems like an acceptance - so does all the modern stuff since Flaubert. I hate it. I want to wash again quickly, wash off England, the oldness and grubbiness and despair. (11)

A "kick at misery" may seem a petulant and wilful response to the tragic terror and no nearer to really confronting it than is weak submission.

Lawrence often tried to wish the tragic away by pretending that it only existed in the minds of the sorrowful and dejected, as we see when Ursula becomes impatient with her melancholy friend Maggie Schofield in The Rainbow. Nevertheless, one takes his point that some affirmation of the human is an essential part of the tragic experience. It is perhaps

9. One recalls that when GF talks about King Lear he is more struck by what is going on outside Lear than by what is going on inside him.

10. The Prelude (Text of 1805), Book I, lines 436-441.

only through such affirmation that a true resignation to the non-human becomes possible. For the human is affirmed, as it is in Wordsworth, when the self forgets itself in its awe and wonder at the world. It is this awe which can make tragedy an exhilarating and not a depressing experience and without it "resignation" easily becomes a dramatic posture to disguise a mere disbelief in man. There is no true resignation where there is nothing to be resigned. This, then, is the crucial question which Lawrence prompts us to ask about Madame Bovary: do we find in Emma the kind of will to live which can bring home to us the meaning of death in the most forceful and tragic way? Or is her life no more than the "suite de morts partielles" which Flaubert once described his own life as being?

Lawrence did not deny the tragic sense to Flaubert but he did deny it to Flaubert's characters and he thought that, as a result of this discrepancy, the pathos of Madame Bovary was overdone. He develops this criticism in a brilliant passage in his introduction to Verga's Mastro-don Gesualdo where he is attacking I Malavoglia for "wallowing in tragedy":

... it is rather overdone on the pitiful side. Like the wobegone pictures by Bastien Lepage. Nevertheless, it is essentially a true picture, and different from anything else in literature. In most books of the period - even in Madame Bovary, to say nothing of Balzac's earlier Lys dans la Vallée - one has to take off about twenty per cent of the tragedy. One does it in Dickens, one does it in Hawthorne, one does it all the time, with all the great writers...

The trouble with realism - and Verga was a realist - is that the writer, when he is a truly exceptional man like Flaubert or like Verga, tries to read his own sense of tragedy into people much smaller than himself. I think it is a final criticism against Madame Bovary that people such as Emma Bovary and her husband Charles simply are too insignificant to carry the full weight of Gustave Flaubert's sense of tragedy. Emma and Charles Bovary are a couple of little people. Gustave Flaubert is not a little person. But, because he is a realist and does not believe in "heroes", Flaubert insists on pouring his own deep and bitter tragic consciousness into the little skins of the country doctor and his uneasy wife. The result is a discrepancy. Madame Bovary is a great book and a very wonderful picture of life. But we cannot help resenting the
fact that the great tragic soul of Gustave Flaubert is, so to speak, given only the rather commonplace bodies of Emma and Charles Bovary. There's a misfit. And to get over the misfit, you have to let in all sorts of seams of pity. Seams of pity, which won't be hidden.

The great tragic soul of Shakespeare borrows the bodies of kings and princes - not out of snobbism, but out of natural affinity. You can't put a great soul into a commonplace person. Commonplace persons have commonplace souls. (12)

This is none the less suggestive for being, as far as I can see, wrong. It helps me to say two things about Flaubert which I have been leading up to for some time. The "discrepancy" in Madame Bovary comes not from Flaubert's trying to pour his own "tragic consciousness" into Emma but from withholding it from her. It follows from this that the kind of tragedy he is best at depicting is precisely the tragedy of "commonplace people", people only averagely conscious of their fates. In other words, he is putting essentially comic characters into tragic situations.

Lawrence does not describe his "great tragic soul" very clearly but it seems unlikely that he could have been referring to Flaubert's taste for "le grotesque triste". Had he been he would surely have seen that Flaubert spends at least as much energy on keeping "commonplace persons" little as he spends on trying to make them great. But the most interesting question he raises is whether or not the presence of these "commonplace persons" lets in "seams of pity" at the places where we should be feeling either compassion or an exhilarating sense of

12. Phoenix, pp. 225-6. It is interesting to find Leslie Stephen wryly making a similar point about the way Le Père Goriot is "overdone on the pitiful side": "Goriot is not only dragged through the mud of Paris, but he grovels in it with a will. In short, Balzac wants that highest power which shows itself by moderation, and commits a fault like that of an orator who emphasises every sentence. With less expenditure of horrors, he would excite our compassion more powerfully. But after all, Goriot is, perhaps, more really affecting than King Lear." "Balzac's Novels", Hours in a Library, 3 vols. (1892), vol. I, p. 224.

Stephen goes on to suggest that Balzac allows his reader to luxuriate in a taste for misery: "If Balzac's readers could be consulted during the last few pages of a novel, I feel sure that most thumbs would be turned upwards, and the lions allowed to have their will of the Christians". (ibid. pp. 231-232.) I would argue that the end of Madame Bovary denies us this corrupt kind of gratification. (cf. my remarks on Balzac at the start of chapter IV.)
solidarity with characters who do make their "great kick at misery". If Emma brings no creative understanding of her fate to help her to face it then the reader's only way of relating to that fate is through "pity". In other words, one could say that Lawrence's criticism of the finished novel has quite a lot in common with my own criticisms of the Nouvelle Version. This is why his remarks have to be taken separately from those of Arnold, Sainte-Beuve and Henry James.

One cannot convincingly defend Flaubert against Lawrence by saying that Lawrence is being wishfully un-historical when he contrasts the anti-heroic realism of Madame Bovary with the "kings and princes" of Shakespearean tragedy. No doubt, had Flaubert chosen to depict a king instead of Emma Bovary, he would have modelled him on Louis Philippe and been as merciless to him as Tolstoi was to Napoleon in War and Peace, but this obvious point hardly answers Lawrence at all. Lawrence is not asking for a version of Corneille or Carlyle, he is not really interested in the externals of the rôle of the hero. What concerns him is the kingly spirit potential in any man, something beyond class, more essential and impersonal than heroics. In the Study of Thomas Hardy he sees this spirit in man's ability to wrest from tragedy and destruction an inner assurance of his own creativeness. The following passage may give a clearer idea of what he missed in Madame Bovary than his notion of tragedy as a "great kick at misery":

That is the whole point: something is which was not. And I wish it were true of us. I wish we were all like kindled bonfires on the edge of space, marking out the advance-posts. What is the aim of self-preservation, but to carry us right out to the firing line; there, what is is in contact with what is not. If many lives be lost by the way, it cannot be helped, nor if much suffering be entailed. I do not go out to war in the intention of avoiding all danger or discomfort: I go to fight for myself. Every step I move forward into being brings a newer, juster proportion into the world, gives me less need of storehouse and barn, allows me to leave all,
and to take what I want by the way, sure that it will always be there; allows me in the end to fly the flag of myself, at the extreme tip of life.

He who would save his life must lose it. (13)

This is not something heroes do, unless they are religious heroes like Alyosha Karamazov. There is more to do than just "kick at misery" too: misery is accepted and almost welcomed as a crucible in which the self is tested but, in itself, misery is a side-issue. The impulse to dwell on it - as Lawrence thought Flaubert did - is the mark of those who draw back from going to the "extreme tip of life" in themselves:

But like a poppy that has come to bud, when he [i.e. "he who would save his life"] reaches the shore, when he has traversed his known and come to the beach to meet the unknown, he must strip himself naked and plunge in, and pass out: if he dare. And the rest of his life he will be stirring at the unknown, cast out upon the waters. But if he dare not plunge in, if he dare not take off his clothes and give himself naked to the flood, then let him prowl in rotten safety, weeping for pity of those he imagines worse off than himself. He dare not weep aloud for his own cowardice. And weep he must. So he will find him objects of pity. (14)

For Lawrence we are in no position to pity the true tragic character because he exists beyond us, "at the extreme tip of life", and his creative exploration of his fate makes of him a beacon shining back to us from the other side of "misery". The tragic experience is not simply a destruction but a clarification of being and, in fact, the destruction is seen as a stepping-stone to the clarification. Some remarks from another of Lawrence's discussions of tragedy make this clearer:

In tragedy the man is more than his part. Hamlet is more than Prince of Denmark, Macbeth is more than murderer of Duncan. The man is caught in the wheels of his part, his fate, he may be torn asunder. He may be killed, but the resistant integral soul in him is not destroyed. He comes through though he dies. He goes through with his fate though death swallows him. And it is in this facing of fate, this going right through with it,

13. _Phoenix_, p. 409. "He who would save his life must lose it" was, of course, one of Dostoeievsky's favourite biblical quotations.

that tragedy lies. Tragedy is not disaster... Tragedy is
the working out of some immediate passional problem within
the soul of man. (15)

Tragedy is, with Hamlet and Macbeth, a stripping away of self through
which man discovers a new and more essential level of being; it is a
broadening of the limitedly personal into the generally human.

I would not want to use these thoughts from Lawrence to make
strained parallels with Madame Bovary or equally strained distinctions
about the nature of the tragic experience: it would be an odd work of
art which could be made to dovetail with any theory of what art is
supposed to be like. The point of this digression about Lawrence is
simply that it provokes some important questions which this study may
have obscured. In discussing Arnold, James and Sainte-Beuve as critics
of Flaubert it was possible to argue that his non-attachment, as I called
it, represented a positive quality in his work and a real alternative to
the ostensibly more human art for which they argued. This argument
depended on the fact that the art they desidefated centered on the figure
of the superior individual who could serve as a magnet to draw from them
a kind of pity which was essentially disguised self-pity. It is not,
therefore, an argument which can operate against Lawrence's view of
Flaubert for he shares its suspicion of the need to find ourselves "objects
of pity" and in fact detects that need in Flaubert.16 And by prompting us
to make the kind of distinction between self and being which, I shall argue
later, James failed to make in the case of Isabel Archer, Lawrence makes
non-attachment seem too negative a quality. Reticence need not be the
only way of transcending the personal. In this way, Lawrence is stating


16. Lawrence reduces the effect of this perception by bringing in class.
He argues that GF, whose real feelings about democracy had much in
common with his own, belonged to "the emotional-democratic, treasure-
of-the-humble period of the nineteenth century". (Phoenix, p. 226.)
One wonders what he made of Homais, whom he never mentions; the comedy
and satire of the novel seem to have impressed him no more than they
impressed Arnold or James.
the position of the James of French Poets and Novelists in a more challenging way: was Flaubert prepared to invest enough of his own spiritual endeavour in Emma or were his irony and aloofness a strategy to save himself from that endeavour, from taking off his clothes and giving himself "to the flood"? Lawrence would, unlike James, have hated Flaubert to "glow" but he would only have considered his divesting of the self, of personal feeling, as a beginning. Was he right in thinking that, for Flaubert, it was an end as well?

Out of exasperation with the banalité of his times Flaubert once protested that "Le XVIIIe siècle a nié l'âme, et le travail du XIXe sera peut-être de tuer l'homme." (Corresp. III, p. 397) Emma, in the end, might have agreed, just as she might also have felt, when confronted by the bailiffs, that "La hideur dans les sujets bourgeois doit remplacer le tragique qui leur est incompatible." (Corresp. III, p. 368) Even a tragic affirmation of the human lay outside the actual, for Emma in fantasy, for Flaubert in art:

Je veux faire deux ou trois longs bouquins épiques, des romans dans un milieu grandiose où l'action soit forcément fâchée et les détails riches d'eux-mêmes, luxueux et tragiques tout à la fois, des livres à grandes mursailles et peints du haut en bas. (Corresp. III, p. 337.)

In spite of his deep tragic instinct to face life as it really was Flaubert knew intimately how Emma felt when she tried to lose herself at the Opera. Just as she strives to resuscitate in herself the passions of the Romantics, so her creator longs to recapture the spontaneous lyricism that had come so freely to him during the writing of the first version of La Tentation de Saint Antoine. The "bouquins épiques" represent the dream of a short-cut to tragic exhilaration. In a more honest confession of why he wrote one of them, Salambô, Flaubert lets us see how much that dream was a flight from the tragic too:
It is a feeling which Emma Bovary would understand. One might say that Madame Bovary is a greater book than Salammbo mainly because such feelings are studied within their real context. Yonville was as much of a torment to Flaubert as to Emma and in frustrating her dreams he was frustrating his own. "La hideur dans les sujets bourgeois" served him as a salutary discipline. It could be argued that it was ultimately a creative discipline too because it enabled Flaubert to turn melancholy and disgust into comic rage, the "great kick at misery" of the satirist, and gave him what he always needed: something to write against. As such Yonville can be seen rather as the particular catalyst of a general anger at life than as "discipline" but I prefer to retain the notion of "discipline" because of its other suggestions. Flaubert was constricting and punishing himself in writing Madame Bovary, perhaps punishing himself for what he saw as the self-indulgence of the first Tentation. His scrutinising of Yonville is more than a simple fidelity to the real, it is also a self-victimising complicity in "le travail du XIXe... de tuer l'homme". It brings to mind a description of Emma's own masochistic streak in the Nouvelle Version:

... elle trainait son coeur comme une éponge sur toutes les parties de sa vie, elle le tordait avec acharnement, elle en faisait couler un continuuel ennui. (NV, p. 298).

The very choice of Emma as his heroine was part of the punishment. She served the purpose of making any attempt to transcend the actual seem illusory, of relegating spontaneity to a desire to escape out of the present into a world of the imagination. In using the reality of "la vie moderne" in Yonville as a yardstick with which to measure Emma's dreams Flaubert resigned his own; in thinking of that aspiration to
spiritual freedom which the lyricism of the first Tentation celebrates, which we still sense in his desire to write his "bouquins épiques", as mere self-gratification, Flaubert had already capitulated on Emma's behalf. To use Lawrentian language, he was representing "the extreme tip of life" not as beyond actual life but as outside it and to do this was to invite spiritual death. As I suggested earlier, the only way for Emma to "fly the flag" of herself is to fly it in the face of her creator; for her to discover, beyond "storehouse and barn", a "resistant integral soul" in herself would be to expose Flaubert himself as a nihilist.

To argue in this way is not necessarily to argue with Matthew Arnold against Madame Bovary or to agree with Lawrence that Flaubert could not express himself through Emma. In writing against her he also wrote against himself and therefore he put much of himself into her too. At the end of the last chapter, I pointed out how similar Emma's desire to transcend her world through Passion was to his own desire to transcend through Art, and the correspondence is worth elaborating. To do so I want to use a letter written to Louise Colet, in 1853, as a way of exploring the way Emma develops through the novel. It is a letter which shows Flaubert expecting as much from art as Emma expects from life:

N'en est-il pas de la vie d'artiste, ou plutôt d'une oeuvre d'Art à accomplir, comme d'une grande montagne à escalader? Dur voyage, et qui demande une volonté acharnée. D'abord on aperçoit d'en bas une haute cime. Dans les cieux, elle est étincelante de pureté, elle est effrayante de hauteur, et elle vous sollicite cependant à cause de cela même. On part. Mais à chaque plateau de la route, le sommet grandit, l'horizon se recule, on va par les précipices, les vertiges et les découragements. Il fait froid et l'éternel ouragan des haute régions vous enlève en passant jusqu'au dernier lambeau de votre vêtement. La terre est perdue pour toujours, et le but sans doute ne s'atteindra pas. C'est l'heure où l'on compte ses fatigues, où l'on regarde avec épouvante les gercures de sa peau. L'on n'a rien qu'une indomptable envie de monter plus haut, d'en finir, de mourir. Quelqu'fois, pourtant, un coup des vents du ciel arrive et dévoile à votre éblouissement des
perspectives, innombrables, infinies, merveilleuses. A vingt mille pieds sous soi on aperçoit les hommes, une brise olympienne emplit vos poumons géants, et l'on se considère comme un colosse ayant le monde entier pour piédestal. Puis, le brouillard retombe et l'on continue à tâtons, à tâtons, s'écorchant les ongles aux rochers et pleurant dans la solitude. N'importe. Mourons dans la neige, périssions dans la blanche douleur de notre désir, au murmure des torrents de l'Esprit, et la figure tournée vers le soleil. (Corresp. III, pp. 342-343.)

One should never forget that it was for this "énlissement", and not out of some sublime literary doggedness, that Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary*. The self-abandon of the emotion should not be taken as rhetoric for it is more profound: a prayer to his art for enabling him to wring a final joy from the contemplation of the insupportable reality of the nineteenth century. The expression of wonder is deeper than the hints of megalomania, which are really little more than exaggerations that testify to the strength of the wonder. What is the object of the wonder? It is, surely, the fact that desire and imagination can sometimes retrieve us, in spite of everything, from habitual frustration, that the mind can sometimes sustain conceptions through which it can transcend the world, that the tragicomic failures of *bovarysme* are not inevitable. In a way, Flaubert's "brise olympienne" is another version of the apparently discarded lyricism of the first *Tentation* in that it maintains him in an imaginary world with the real world "à vingt mille pieds sous soi". That this summit, when reached, seems to point nowhere but to death and nothingness - "la neige... la blanche douleur de notre désir" - is, I think, part of the paradox Lawrence describes in tragedy when he says of the tragic hero that "he comes through though he dies". Thomas Mann summed it up pithily in writing about a devotion to art similar to the devotion expressed in Flaubert's letter:

He whose preoccupation is with excellence longs fervently to find rest in perfection; and is not nothingness a form of perfection? (17)

The demands which Emma Bovary made of life led her to the same conclusion.

It could, of course, be argued that the experience described in Flaubert's letter is unattainable for Emma and that what the letter confirms is that it is only by condemning Emma's kind of imagination to perpetual frustration that Flaubert, the ironist underlining her folly, can look down on her and "se considère comme un colosse ayant le monde entier pour piédestal". There is partial truth in this view but it cannot explain either the way Flaubert sees himself as, like Emma, "à tâtons, s'écortchant les ongles aux rochers" or the fact that, in giving her so much of his own "dégout de la vie moderne" at the end of the novel, he gives her so many occasions for looking down on her world herself. In other words, there are moments - for instance, her final outburst at Rodolphe - when Emma almost escapes Flaubert's irony by adopting it herself. Is Emma a "commonplace person" or can she find through her sufferings just a small imaginative space in which to affirm her "resistant integral soul"? I want to suggest that the tension and complexity of the last part of Madame Bovary derive from the fact that Flaubert has made it possible for us to give two different answers to that question.

When Flaubert becomes a "colosse" and feels "a grandeur in the beatings of the heart" he is not, as Wordsworth was, making a response to life from within his own experience of it but affirming his own idea

18. This criticism, which is essentially the same as Arnold's, seems to me most cogent when it is conceived as the kind of objection to GF's preoccupation with form made by Lawrence. See his account of "that passionate desire for the mastery of the medium of narrative, that will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes, which is figured to the world in Gustave Flaubert." "German Books: Thomas Mann", Phoenix, p. 308 and passim. (See the end of this chapter for a fuller discussion of this question.)
against the world, by transfiguring the world through Art.\textsuperscript{19} By retreating from action into the contemplative life of the artist he can give to his conceptions an unassailable beauty and wholeness, making out of them something to set against the world. However different she is in other respects, Emma shares this passiveness with him: her constant tendency is to contemplate her own life rather than live it. She helps to explain why Flaubert needed Art enough to face all the trials it brought him. Emma's deepest affliction is that what she desires she can never realise in her life. There is always an unbridgeable gap for her between the life she conceives and the life she actually lives, between ideas and experience. It is the perception of this gap which makes her passive and causes her mind to turn inwards to pray upon its own conceptions. Hence her radical lack of spontaneity: she cannot see her world as offering her a sphere for real personal action. She can find no way of putting what is inside herself into life. Life does not lie all before her, where to choose, as it did for Milton's Adam and Eve, but as fixed and given and only permitting contemplation, as it was for Flaubert. In a sense, the mistake she makes is therefore that she tries to live; by a more thoroughgoing passiveness Flaubert was able, if only at times, to make it seem otiose to try to bridge the gap which she can never cross.\textsuperscript{20}

19. Thus, for GF, poetry is less something which the poet helps us to discover in the world, as it is for Wordsworth, than something which he takes out of it: "Autrefois on croyait que la canne à sucre seule donnait le sucre. On en tire à peu près de tout maintenant; il en est de même de la poésie. Extrayons-la de n'importe quoi, car elle gît en tout et partout: pas un atome de matière qui ne contienne la pensée; et habituons-nous à considérer le monde comme une œuvre d'art dont il faut reproduire les procédés dans nos œuvres." (Corresp. III, p. 138)

20. GF was, of course, well aware of the dangers of retreat from the world and he was hardly a quietist kind of hermit himself at Croisset. This paragraph should be taken together with what was said about his idea of the artist as "le centre de l'humanité" in chapter II. In \textit{La Tentation Hilarion} diagnoses Antoine's chastity as "une corruption plus subtile, et ce mépris du monde l'impuissance de ta haine contre lui" (Conard), p. 42.
In the early part of the novel there seems something static about Emma's life, as though she cannot resolve her feelings into appropriate behaviour:

... au milieu du calme où elle promenait ses yeux, son coeur était agité comme la voile d'un navire amarré et qui se gonflait de vent sans pouvoir le faire avancer. (NV, p. 191)

This helplessness is expressed by her being imagined as controlled from outside and devoid of any balancing resistance within herself. Action is not an expression of personality for her but an attempt to dissolve it. For example, this passage from the scene where she goes to seek help from Bournisien. The "lamentation pacifique" of the church-bell (MB, p. 153) has just brought back to her her schooldays in the convent:

Elle aurait voulu, comme autrefois, être encore confondue dans la longue ligne des voiles blanches, que marquaient de noir ça et là les capuchons raides des bonnes sœurs inclinées sur leur prié-Dieu; le dimanche à la messe, quand elle relevait sa tête, elle apercevait le doux visage de la Vierge, parmi les tourbillons bleutés de l'encens qui montait. Alors un attendrissement la saisit; elle se sentit malle et tout abandonnée, comme un duvet d'oiseau qui tournoie dans la tempête; et ce fut sans en avoir conscience qu'elle s'achemina vers l'église, disposée à n'importe quelle dévotion, pourvu qu'elle y absorât son âme et que l'existence entière y disparût. (MB, p. 154)

The pathos of this comes from Emma's radical lack of energy. She is so weighed down by the sense of her accumulated past that she can only sleep-walk her way through the present, as if she had no will. What she asks for from life is, in reality, death. In the context of the chapter as a whole Emma's plight seems tragic but in the context of her own feelings the prose acquires a lyrical, elegiac quality. 21

21. Emma is most pathetic in her moments of reflection and these moments usually centre on her past. For example, the scene where she reminisces with Léon just after his return from Paris: "Mme Bovary en écoutant, s'étonnait d'être si vieille; toutes ces choses qui réapparaissaient lui semblaient élargir son existence; cela faisait comme des immensités sentimentales où elle se reportait..." (MB, p. 325). Part of the charm which Léon holds for her is that he seems to take her present into her past. He makes a much more malleable image for her imagination than Rodolphe.
Emma's tendency to see her life as a whole through memory — there is a famous instance of it later in the novel when she sits down in despair on a bench outside her old convent (MB, pp. 392-393) — is a mark of her passive refusal to see it as a process in action. This is how mere contingency comes to seem like necessity to her. At the end of the Première Partie there is a rather elaborate description of this state, where the prose seems to take on something of her own stasis:

She cannot conceive of herself as creating this "événement", it will come from outside through "le hasard". The greatness of the passage lies in the way its poignancy includes us — we all feel like this sometimes — so that we can understand why she is "toujours plus triste" and looks forward to the day after. As Pascal says: "nous ne vivons jamais mais nous espérons de vivre". But Emma's sadness does not include us completely: it makes us feel that life is all outside her and not within her too. We wonder if she is capable of creating feeling or if she can only respond to the things that come to her from outside.

A consequence of this is that Emma thinks of any amelioration of her condition as lying in a transcending of the world and of the condition of other people rather than as a transcending of her self. She thinks this even as a girl grieving for the death of her mother:

"Emma fut intérieurement satisfaite de se sentir arrivée du premier coup à ce rare idéal des existences pâles, où ne parviennent jamais les coeurs médiocres." (MB, p. 53)
I think it is this kind of reaction which explains the way in which Emma does, later in the novel, express defiance at the bleakness of her fate. Her defiance always has the object of distinguishing herself from other people by acting in an opposite way to them which they find bizarre and imponderable:

Emma devenait difficile, capricieuse. Elle se commandait des plats pour elle, n'y touchait point, un jour ne buvait que du lait pur, et, le lendemain, des tasses de thé à la douzaine. Souvent, elle s'obstinait à ne pas sortir, puis elle suffoquait, ouvrait les fenêtres, s'habillait en robe légère. Lorsqu'elle avait bien rudoyé sa servante, elle lui faisait des cadeaux ou l'envoyait se promener chez les voisines, de même qu'elle jetait parfois aux pauvres toutes les pièces blanches de sa bourse, quoiqu'elle ne fût guère tendre cependant, ni facilement accessible à l'émotion d'autrui... (MB, p. 92)

The object of this strategy of caprice is to mislead others as to her true self and take refuge in a possessive guarding of the secret of her real feelings which gives her a feeling of superiority. This extends even to hiding her sexual feelings from Léon when she is in love with him:

Les bourgeois es admiraient son économie, les clients sa politesse, les pauvres sa charité.

Mais elle était pleine de convoitises, de rage, de haine. Cette robe aux plis droits cachait un cœur bouleversé, et ces lèvres si pudiques n'en racontaient pas la tourmente. Elle était amoureuse de Léon, et elle recherchait la solitude, afin de pouvoir plus à l'aise se délecter en son image. La vue de sa personne troublait la volupté de cette méditation. Emma palpitait au bruit de ses pas; puis, en sa présence, l'émotion sombrait, et il ne lui restait ensuite qu'un immense étonnement qui se finissait en tristesse. (MB, p. 149)

Léon evokes feelings in her which she is happiest in treating as ends in themselves. She becomes a kind of consumer of her own emotions as the object of those emotions dwindles into the mere occasion of them. 22

22. Like GF himself she becomes a devotee of the novels of the Marqués de Sade. (MB, p. 399) In the Nouvelle Version GF comments that "Léon se tenait en sa pensée, toujours plus immobile qu'une chose inerte..." (p. 297) Is it far-fetched to see an analogy between her way of loving and the way GF regarded his own use of the real world as a novelist? See, for example, this comment from a letter to Turgenev: "La Réalité, selon moi, ne doit être qu'un tremplin." (Corresp. VII, p. 359).
Her self-absorption explains the fact that Emma never feels her rage against life to be on behalf of a humanity which must suffer the same lot as herself; it is always rage against what life has done to her. As experience augments it she feels more and more alienated from others. This is how she feels about Charles, the person closest to her, after the fiasco of the operation on Hippolyte's club-foot:

This same proud indifference characterises those moments when defiance spurs Emma into trying to "fly the flag" of herself "at the extreme tip of life":

She hopes to become her own self by asserting herself against other people. ²³

It is in this defiance that Emma seems most independent of Flaubert's irony because she is most like him then. She looks down on poor Charles in the same way as Flaubert is often imagined as looking down on her, "ayant le monde entier pour piédestal". She too partakes of the kind of pride that motivates "impassibilité". She not only stands for the

²³. Cf. an aphorism of Thibaudet's: "S'il n'eût vécu contre quelqu'un, Flaubert eût-il vécu?" (op.cit., p. 325).
bourgeois values Flaubert hates, she shares his own contempt for them as well. Flaubert once asked Louise Colet:

Quand est-ce qu'on écrira les faits au point de vue d'une blague supérieure, c'est à dire comme le bon Dieu les voit, d'en haut? (Corresp. III, p. 37)

That is how Emma would like to see life, but unlike Flaubert, the artist, she is unable to achieve the god-like calm which is the goal of such disdain for more than a brief moment, as in her first ride with Rodolphe:

Quelquefois, dans un écartement des nuées, sous un rayon de soleil, on apercevait au loin les toits d'Yonville, avec les jardins au bord de l'eau, les cours, les murs, et le clocher de l'église. Emma fermait à demi les paupières pour reconnaître sa maison, et jamais ce pauvre village où elle vivait ne lui avait semblé si petit. De la hauteur où ils étaient, toute la vallée paraissait un immense lac pâle, s'évaporant à l'air. Les massifs d'arbres, de place en place, saillissaient comme des rochers noirs; et les hautes lignes des peupliers, qui dépassaient la brume, figuraient des grèves que le vent remuait. (ME, pp. 219-220)

Emma is permitted to share her creator's own detachment from Yonville.

At other moments the calmness of this distanced perspective would be more akin to Flaubert's feeling for her. For Emma's passivity brings out the savage comedy which is at the core of his tragic feeling for her plight.

One such moment is in the great scene when Emma tries to commit suicide after hearing from Rodolphe that he is going away. It combines more pregnantly than anywhere in the novel the twin movements of ascent and descent in which Flaubert expressed his spiritual experience and his idea of art: the pyramid passage in Souvenirs, the description of the telegraph operator in Par les Champs et par les Grèves, the account of the Shakespearian "sommets de l'idées", the letter about "deux bonshommes", the letter about the "brise olympienne", the apotheosis of St. Julien, and many other things. It is not too fanciful to think of Flaubert as the
unwavering Binet at his lathe in this passage. It is remarkable that
the description of a spiritual crisis finds such intense images of Emma's
physical suffering. How present her agony is in our minds!

Les ardoises laissaient tomber d'aplomb une chaleur lourde, qui
lui serrait les tempes et l'étouffait; elle se traina jusqu'à la mansarde close, dont elle tire le verrou, et la
lumière éblouissante jaillit d'un bond.

En face, par-dessus les toits, la pleine campagne s'étalait
à perte de vue. En bas, sous elle, la place du village était
vide; les cailloux du trottoir scintillaient, les girouettes
des maisons se tenaient immobiles; au coin de la rue, il
partit d'un étage inférieur une sorte de ronflement à
modulations stridentes. C'était Binet qui tournait.

Elle s'était appuyée contre l'embrasure de la mansarde et
elle relisait la lettre avec des ricanements de colère. Mais
plus elle y fixait d'attention, plus ses idées se confondaient.
Elle le revoyait, elle l'entendait, elle l'entourait de ses
deux bras; et des battements de cœur, qui la frappaient sous
la poitrine comme à grands coups de bélier, s'accéléraient l'un
après l'autre, à intermittences inégales. Elle jetait les yeux
tout autour d'elle avec l'envie que la terre croulât. Pourquoi
n'en pas finir? Qui la retenait donc? Elle était libre. Et elle
s'avança, elle regarda les pavés en se disant: "Allons! allons!"

Le rayon lumineux qui montait d'en bas directement tiraît vers
l'âme le poids de son corps. Il lui semblait que le sol de la
place oscillant s'élevait le long des murs, et que le plancher
s'inclinait par le bout, à la manière d'un vaisseau qui tangue.
Elle se tenait tout au bord, presque suspendue, entourée d'un
grand espace. Le bleu du ciel l'enveloppait, l'air circulait
dans sa tête creuse, elle n'avait qu'à céder, qu'à laisser
prendre; et le ronflement du tour ne disparaissait pas, comme une
voix furieuse qui l'appelait.

- Ma femme! ma femme! cria Charles.

Elle s'arrêta.
- Où es-tu donc? Arrive!
L'idée qu'elle venait d'échapper à la mort faillit la faire
s'avancer de terreur; elle ferma les yeux; puis elle tressaillit
au contact d'une main sur sa manche: c'était Félicité.
- Monsieur vous attend, Madame; la soupe est servie.
Et il fallut descendre! il fallut se mettre à table! (NB, pp.
284-285)

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24. When Emma visits Binet at the end of the novel to seek for help GF
presents him as a parodic version of the impassive artist coolly
finishing off his work. There is surely a private joke in the way he
is presented at this point? It is Emma's only visit to his attic: "Il
était seul, dans sa mansarde, en train d'imiter, avec du bois, une de
ces ioixeries indescriptibles, composées de croissants, de sphères
creusées les unes dans les autres, le tout droit comme un obélisque et
ne servant à rien; et il entamait la dernière pièce, il touchait au
but!. . . Binet souriait, le menton baissé, les narines ouvertes et
semblait enfin perdu dans un de ces bonheurs complets, n'appartenant
sans doute qu'aux occupations médiocres, qui amusent l'intelligence par
des difficultés faciles, et l'assouviennent en une réalisation au delà
de laquelle il n'y a pas à rêver." (NB, p. 422)
More than anything else, it is the savage irony of "la soupe est servie" which makes us feel Emma's imprisonment in the physical as utterly inexorable. Yet this tragic comedy, so linked, as the presence of Binet suggests, to the calm of "impassibilité", does not prevent our feeling a certain grandeur in Emma's resolution to commit suicide when she is at the end of her tether. She has, for once, the strength to recognise her own weak mortality. Thus, curiously, this moment when she is most trapped also represents her first real perception of her own freedom ("Pourquoi n'en pas finir? Qui la retenait donc? Elle était libre.") As with Mazza in Passion et Vertu and Djaliou in Quidquid Volueria her only way of transcending a predetermined death is to take her own life. Life offers her no other freedom. This is why she only feels free when "Le bleu du ciel l'envahissait, l'air circulait dans sa tête creuse, elle n'avait qu'à céder, qu'à se laisser prendre..." For a moment the thought of extinction offers her a release from imprisonment in the self, a kind of consummation rather than an obliteration. At the sound of Charles's voice and the touch of Félicité's hand she returns to the self as she returns to the physical.

It is in this state of being bound within the self, when she can no longer feel any "grandeur in the beatings of the heart", that Emma most resembles Flaubert, because then she represents what Flaubert sought to escape when he said "Tâchez-donc de ne plus vivre en vous."

She instinctively brings all her experience back to her idea of her self. When she returns home after making love with Rodolphe for the first time Flaubert tells us that:

... en s'apercevant dans la glace, elle s'étonna de son visage. Jamais elle n'avait eu les yeux si grands, si noirs, ni d'une telle profondeur. Quelque chose de subtil étendu sur sa personne la transfigurait.
Elle se répétait: "J'ai un amant! un amant! se délectant à cette idée comme à celle d'une autre puberté qui lui serait survenue. (MB, p. 225) (23)

Love has not liberated her from self, even though she goes on to imagine its future joys as "les sommets du sentiment étincelaient sous sa pensée, et l'existence ordinaire n'apparaissait qu'au loin, tout en bas, dans l'ombre, entre les intervalles de ces hauteurs." (MB, p. 225)

She is still struck with its being her, Emma Bovary, who has a lover; still driven by the romantic obsession with the self as seen by the lover. She suggests the self-indulgent egoism which Flaubert attacked in Lamartine and Musset, and in doing so prompts the thought that Flaubert could see no alternative between it and its opposite pole of "impassibilité", no third way of completing the self without escaping from it, nothing beyond either the ego or its extinction.

In reactions like this and in her preferring to imagine Léon to being in his presence Flaubert is giving his own feelings to Emma. The story of his strange affair with Louise Colet - which parallels the inception and composition of the first parts of Madame Bovary and which Flaubert sometimes drew on for his novel - is enough to suggest this. 26 Flaubert's brief and well spaced-out encounters with Louise in a hotel at Mantes-la-Jolie, the way he constantly deferred them at the last moment because of the pressure of his writing, make one suspect that he enjoyed love, not as an experience with another person, but as something to be imagined in his own head. Several passages in the Journal des Goncourts confirm this. In a famous one Flaubert describes the night he

25. The verb "se délecter" is used in a similar way to describe Emma's feelings in the passages quoted from p. 149 and pp. 256-257 earlier in this chapter.
26. Emma gives Rodolphe an amulet inscribed with the words amor nel cor (MB, p. 264) which corresponds exactly to one given by Louise to GF. The most obvious parallel between the novel and GF's affair with Louise is, of course, in Emma and Léon's orgiastic meetings at the Hôtel de Boulogne in Rouen.
spent with Kutchick Hanem, a courtesan of Upper Egypt:

Alors, avec cette femme qui reste immobile dans le plaisir, on éprouve, voyez-vous, des jouissances infinies, des jouissances... (27)

On another occasion the Goncourts give this account of the kind of discussion in the cénacle which James must have attended:

Puis on cause de l'état de l'âme après la satisfaction amoureuse. Les uns partent de tristesse, d'autres de soulagement. Flaubert déclare qu'il danserait devant sa glace. "Moï, c'est singulier, dit Turguëneff, après, seulement après, je rentre en rapport avec les choses qui m'entourent... les choses représentent la réalité qu'elles n'avaient point, un moment avant... Je me sens moi... et la table qui est là, redevient une table... Oui, les relations entre mon individu et la nature se renouent, se rétablissent, recommencent." (28)

Flaubert looks in a miroir like Emma. Turgenev feels himself going beyond the ego into the kind of rapport with the external world which Emma never experiences. She feels no harmony with that world because it threatens her ego and swallows it up.

I want to move now to another moment when Emma becomes aware of her own freedom, this time in a religious experience. This movement from sexual to religious experience is, of course, typical of Madame Bovary itself. During Emma's nervous illness after the defection of Rodolphe she becomes so ill that Bournisien administers the rites of extreme unction to her. The scene, which bears close comparison with the suicide scene which precedes it, needs quoting at length:


28. Journal des Goncourts, 28th January 1878, t. II, pp. 1221-1222. It is interesting to compare GF's remark with Emma's dream of Rodolphe in the Nouvelle Version in which she imagines love not as a completion of her being but as a cancelling-out of it: "Alors, il semblait à Emma, que toute échappée d'elle-même, elle circulait autour de lui comme un souffle impalpable et qu'elle n'existait plus, tant la conscience de son être se perdait sous cette contemplation". (NV, p. 384)
... Emma sentait quelque chose de fort passant sur elle, qui la débarrassait de ses douleurs, de toute perception, de tout sentiment. Sa chair allégée ne pensait plus, une autre vie commençait; il lui semblait que son être, montant vers Dieu, allait s'anéantir dans cet amour comme un encens allumé qui se dissipe en vapeur. On aspergea d'eau béni
tes le draps du lit; le prêtre retira du saint-Sacrement la blanche hostie; et ce fut en défailant d'une joie céleste qu'elle avança les lèvres pour accepter le corps du Sauveur qui se présenta. Les rideaux de son alcôve se gonflaient mollement, autour d'elle, en façon de nèves, et les rayons des deux cierges brûlant sur la commode lui parairent être des gloires éblouissantes. Alors elle laissa retomber sa tête, croyant entendre dans les espaces le chant des hampes séraphiques et apercevoir en un ciel d'azur, sur un trône d'or, au milieu des saints tenant des palmes vertes, Dieu le Père tout éclatant de majesté, et qui d'un signe faisait descendre sur la terre des anges aux ailes de flamme pour l'emporter dans leurs bras.

Cette vision splendide demeura dans sa mémoire comme la chose la plus belle qu'il fût possible de rêver; si bien qu'à présent elle s'efforçait d'en ressasser la sensation, qui continuait cependant, mais d'une manière moins exclusive et avec une douceur aussi profonde. Son âme, courbature d'orgueil, se reposait enfin dans l'humilité chrétienne; et, savourant le plaisir d'être faible, Emma contemplait en elle-même la destruction de sa volonté, qui devait faire aux envahissements de la grâce une large entrée. Il existait donc à la place du bonheur des félicités plus grandes, un autre amour au-dessus de tous les amours, sans intermittence ni fin, et qui s'accroîtrait éternellement! Elle entrevit, parmi les illusions de son espoir, un état de pureté flottant au-dessus de la terre; se confondant avec le ciel, et où elle aspira d'être. Elle voulut devenir une sainte. Elle acheta des chapelets, elle porta des amulettes; elle souhaitait avoir dans sa chambre, au chevet de sa couche, un reliquaire enchâssé d'émeraudes, pour le baiser tous les soirs. (MD. pp. 295-296)

This religious joy in contemplating her own annihilation, this partial foretaste of death, does not take Emma quite out of her self. The pleasure of feeling frail and the "destruction de sa volonté" may seem "la chose la plus belle qu'il fût possible de rêver" but part of Emma's pleasure still comes from selfconsciously watching them in herself, and, throughout the passage, we sense the lurking presence of Flaubert's irony, being held in abeyance but shedding a subtly lurid light on her ecstasy, ready to spring as she is confirmed in her egoism ("Elle voulut devenir une sainte") and returns to her possessive desire for material objects ("un reliquaire enchâssé d'émeraudes"). Soon there is the inevitable descent
back into the real and we find her reading Bournisien's catholic pamphlets, "quelque chose de fameux pour une personne du sexe, qui était pleine d'esprit". (MB, p. 297) She never really gets far enough out of her self to feel the kind of wonder which is the cause of Wordsworth's feeling a "grandeur in the beatings of the heart", the wonder Turgenev describes as the effect of making love.

Emma seeks in sex an experience of ascent such as she feels when she takes communion. She says to Rodolphe when they discuss eloping:

Il me semble qu'au moment où je sentirai la voiture s'élanter, ce sera comme si nous montions en ballon, comme si nous partions vers les nuages. (MB, p. 269)

This is not an ascent out of the self into a sense of wonder before the external world but, paradoxically, an escape through the body from the chains of physicality. Its object is a mystical state in which, being free from the world, Emma can feel that she dominates it and its inhabitants instead of feeling, as she usually does, that they dominate her. Flaubert is not simply concerned to expose this project as one of her illusions. When he describes its momentary realisation, as he does in this description of Emma looking down over Rouen on her way to see Léon, he is more concerned to convey the feeling of placid liberation that it seems to radiate:

Puis, d'un seul coup d'œil, la ville apparaissait.
Desendant tout en amphithéâtre et noyée dans le brouillard, elle s'élargissait au delà des ponts, confusément. La pleine campagne remontait ensuite d'un mouvement monotone, jusqu'à toucher au loin la base indécise du ciel pâle. Ainsi vu d'en haut, le paysage tout entier avait l'air immobile comme une peinture; les navires à l'ancre se tassaient dans un coin; le fleuve arrondissait sa course au pied des collines vertes, et les îles, de forme oblongue, semblaient sur l'eau de grands poissons noirs arrêtés. Les cheminées des usines poussaient d'immenses panaches bruns qui s'envolaient par le bout. On entendait le ronflement des fonderies avec le carillon clair des églises qui se dressaient dans la brume. Les arbres des boulevards, sans feuilles, faisaient des broussailles violettes au milieu des maisons, et les toits, tout reluisants de pluie,
miroitaient inégalement, selon la hauteur des quartiers, Parfois un coup de vent emportait les nuages vers la côte Sainte-Catherine, comme des flots aériens qui se brisaient en silence contre une falaise.

Quelque chose de vertigineux se dégageait pour elle de ces existences amassées, et son coeur s'en gonflait abondamment comme si les cent vingt mille âmes qui palpitaient là lui eussent envoyé toutes à la fois la vapeur des passions qu'elle leur supposait. Son amour s'agrandissait devant l'espace, et s'emplissait de tumulte aux bourdonnements vagues qui montaient. Elle le reversait au dehors, sur les places, sur les promenades, sur les rues, et la vieille cité normande s'étalait à ses yeux comme une capitale démesurée, comme une Babylone où elle entrait.

(MB, pp. 363-364)

The play of Emma's ego is perfectly caught as the slow, cadenced view of the landscape seen from above takes her effortlessly out of herself.

But Emma only feels this when things are seen from above and seem to become immobile, "comme une peinture", more than normally tractable to her imagination. Thus the beautiful calm in which she experiences a "rapport d'oeil" with the external world is succeeded by the more grandiose rhetoric of the second paragraph which gives us her feeling of vertigo. The sense she has of dominating Rouen and being succoured by its "cent vingt mille âmes" really measures the losing battle her will is fighting to hold onto this experience of calm. Her exaggerated and lurid comparison of Rouen with Babylon marks its transitoriness and her return to self-conscious posing. Perhaps Flaubert's grandiloquent irony here preserves for him the calm spiritual altitude from which Emma is descending? Does he find his own freedom from the material world by confirming Emma's enslavement to it? She drives into Rouen to her rendezvous at the hotel with Léon and, returning from it, encounters the blind beggar for the first time. On the way home in the Hirondelle:

Emma, ivre de tristesse, grelottait sous ses vêtements, et se sentait de plus en plus froid aux pieds, avec la mort dans l'âme. (MB, p. 371)

There is something of the authentic tragic terror in the comedy of that laconic "froid aux pieds, avec la mort dans l'âme". When she returns to
Yonville, Charles is waiting for her. Flaubert is still calm, like the landscapes through which Emma travels so frenetically.29

Emma's constant returns into the self prompt me to use Leavis's fine essay on tragedy in The Common Pursuit to try to understand what happens in her death. One can perhaps make this premise about tragedy: that through it the self goes beyond its own ego into a state of being in which it is aware of its common place in the world, both human and non-human. This state occurs in a tearing of the veil of selfhood which lets in a feeling of awe and wonder, rather like the feeling experienced by Turgenev after making love. Leavis gives as precise and sensitive an account of this experience as any that I know. He has just been arguing, in a very dense and subtle way, that an "indulgence in the dramatization of one's nobly-suffering self" is "incompatible with tragic experience."30

At any rate, it is anessential part of the definition of the tragic that it breaks down, or undermines and supersedes, such attitudes. It establishes below them a kind of profound impersonality in which experience matters, not because it is mine - because it is to me it belongs, or happens, or because it subserves or issues in purpose or will, but because it is what it is, the 'mine' mattering only in so far as the individual sentience is the indispensable focus of experience. (ibid., p. 130)

29. As usual, one of GF's letters to Louise Colet will make my argument clearer and further illuminate my quotations from the novel: "Ce qui me semble, à moi, le plus haut dans l'Art (et le plus difficile), ce n'est ni de faire rire, ni de faire pleurer, ni de vous mettre en rut ou enflure, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est à dire de faire rever. Aussi les très belles œuvres ont ce caractère. Elles sont sereines d'aspect et incompréhensibles. Quant au procédé, elles sont immobles comme des falaises, houleuses comme l'Océan, pleines de frondaisons, de verdures et de murmures comme des bois, tristes comme le désert, bleues comme le ciel. Homère, Rabelais, Michel-Ange, Shakespeare, Goethe m'apparaissent impitoyables. Cela est sans fond, infini, multiple. Par de petites ouvertures ou apertures des précipices: il y a du noir en bas, du vertige. Et cependant quelque chose de singulièrement doux plane sur l'ensemble: C'est l'éclat de la lumière, le sourire du soleil, et c'est calme, c'est calme, c'est fort, ça a des fanons comme le boeuf de Leconte." (Corresp. III, pp. 322-323)

The word "impitoyables" is not meant to evoke hostility: we should not immediately think of Arnold's GF any more than of Lawrence's version of him as being in search of "objects of pity". Elsewhere in the Correspondance pity is distinguished from sympathy: "Je ne veux avoir ni amour, ni haine, ni pitie, ni colere. Quant à la sympathie, c'est différent: Jamais on n'en a assez." (Corresp. V, p. 397)

Leavis goes on to relate this to the "sense of enhanced vitality" (ibid., p. 127) that tragedy gives us:

The sense of heightened life that goes with the tragic experience is conditioned by a transcending of the ego — an escape from all attitudes of self-assertion. 'Escape', perhaps, is not altogether a good word, since it might suggest something negative and irresponsible (just as 'Dionysiac' carries unacceptable suggestions of the Dark Gods). Actually the experience is constructive or creative and involves a recognising positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death. It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that significance lies, clearly and inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself. (ibid., pp. 131-132).

This account provides a good way of looking at the end of Madame Bovary which, in turn, is a good place to test out the truth of the account.

The reading of Madame Bovary makes one ask how Leavis can account for the experience of tragedy so much in the moral-rational terms of a valuation coming from the discriminating (and therefore self-possessed?) spectator. As in most accounts of tragedy, it is not completely clear at what point Leavis draws a distinction between the experience of the hero and the experience of the spectator of the tragedy but it seems as if his spectator is drawing a moral rather than being swept up in the hero's "willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself". (in the last sentence quoted it is not clear to whom the word "valuer" refers.) How can the "valuer" say where the "significance of life" resides at the same time as his mind is overwhelmed by the knowledge that the "valued" is so much greater than he is? Isn't it of the essence of such "significance" that it should be undefinable? 31 The "significance" of the

31. Tragedy is about something undefinable in life itself too: "On pourrait définir la tragédie comme un univers de questions angoissantes pour lesquelles l'homme n'a pas de réponse." Goldmann, Dieu Caché, p. 52n. To Leavis tragedy seems more concerned with answers than with questions.
hero's experience can only be understood in terms of what, through it, he is, not by what he means. A value-judgement, bypassing pity and fear, is hardly felt, in any sense of that nebulous word, as cathartic. To think of, say, the unresponsive tragic landscapes of Madame Bovary — of the passage, quoted in the last chapter, where Emma feels as if the pulsing of her blood is being resolved into the "assourdissante musique qui emplissait la campagne" — is to wonder whether Leavis, by narrowing down the tragic experience into ethical terms, is forgetting that what he calls the "valued" should also evoke some feeling of terror, such as Flaubert himself got from the sense of elemental vastness communicated by the storm scenes of King Lear. Leavis's idea of tragedy seems to leave little room for any notion of necessity and it presents great affliction, not as tragically irremediable but as a means to the end of that metaphysical consolation in the reunion of the self with its world which Robbe-Grillet regarded as so insidious and which I myself am tempted to describe as un-tragic. A phrase such as fearless resignation would, for example, better describe the mood of Hamlet or Macbeth at the moment of death than Leavis's expression "willing adhesion", which evaporates any sense of the presence of catastrophe and loss in the experience. Nevertheless, Leavis does convey a clear sense of the way the tragic experience marks the culmination of a life and not just its meaningless dissolution. It is this idea that the tragic hero is most intensely alive when on the brink of death that I want to take up in discussing Emma. Earlier, I pointed out that it is usually her passivity which prompts her to try to lose herself in experience (e.g. MB, p. 154) and that Flaubert describes such promptings, which bring out a weakness and moral inertia in her, in a tone of elegiac pathos. With Leavis's essay in mind, it is necessary to go on to ask whether suffering ever generates any more resilient response
from her. Or does her death leave us feeling a reduced rather than an "enhanced vitality", shocked by how little strength of mind she can muster to help her bear her misery, feeling utterly drained and demoralised?

This is a difficult question to pursue because it is possible to take two different answers from the novel, according to whether we accept Flaubert's version of Emma or whether we feel justified in reading between the lines to discover another Emma which, I think, the continuous roll of Flaubert's periods is designed to hide from view. This other Emma tries to break out of the vicious circle of expectation and disillusion within which Flaubert prefers to keep his Emma trapped, perhaps, as Lawrence suggests, in order to pity her. For, at rare intervals, we do catch glimpses of an Emma ready to give herself spontaneously to life, an Emma with too much vitality for us to pity her. At these moments we conjecture that Flaubert feels threatened by her because his "impassibilité" comes across more as a ruse to put a brake on our sympathy than as the true detachment with which sympathy is not incompatible but in harmony. These moments are concentrated in her meetings with Léon at the hotel. What is disingenuous in their presentation is the way Flaubert insinuates that their hotel room is a kind of imaginary world, like the world of Emma's fantasies of her elopement with Rodolphe, and not, despite all the descriptions of the furniture and the wall-paper, as indubitably a part of the real world as Yonville itself is. Thus we find Emma, back in Yonville just after the news of the death of Charles's father, looking back to her last encounter with Léon at the hotel:

Emma pensait qu'il y avait quarante-huit heures à peine, ils étaient ensemble, loin du monde, tout en ivresse, et n'ayant pas assez d'yeux pour se contempler. Elle tâchait de ressaisir les plus imperceptibles détails de cette journée disparue. Mais la présence de la belle-mère et du mari la gênait. Elle aurait
voulu ne rien entendre, ne rien voir, afin de ne pas déranger le recueillement de son amour qui allait se perdant, quoi qu'elle fit, sous les sensations extérieures. (MB, p. 348)

The words "loin du monde" make us overlook the fact that Emma has gone further towards turning desire into action than she did with Rodolphe. Why should the hotel seem outside the actual world instead of simply figuring as an inherent part of it which is richer in possibilities than the rest? Emma's experience of life there appears more intense, even through a vague and rather lurid word like "ivresse", than the gloom and monotony of her life in Yonville. In a later scene in the hotel Flaubert does, briefly, allow us to imagine Emma and Léon responding to each other with real joy and even an engagingly lively gaiety. What prevents us from fully participating in this gaiety are the terse flourishes of Flaubert's prose which seems relentlessly concerned with distracting us from what Emma and Léon are feeling by making us concentrate on little, wryly observed details both of the room and of their behaviour. Two short examples must suffice to give the flavour of the whole scene (MB, pp. 365-368):

Elle le suivait jusqu'à l'hôtel; il montait, il ouvrait la porte, il entrail... Quelle étendue!

Puis les paroles, après les baisers, se précipitaient. On se racontait les chagrins de la semaine, les pressentiments, les inquiétudes pour les lettres; mais à présent tout s'oubliait, et ils se regardaient face à face, avec des rires de volupté et des apppellations de tendresse.

Le lit était un grand lit d'acajou en forme de nacelle... etc. (MB, pp. 365-366).

The feeling of excitement which culminates with the phrase "ils se regardaient face à face" is let down by that dry reference to their "appellations de tendresse" which evokes no more of their feeling than its banality. In the following passage one can again see Flaubert falling a prey to his own gift for the mot juste which, like Shakespeare's gift for
punning, is also a temptation to him:

Comme ils aimaient cette bonne chambre pleine de gaieté, malgré sa splendeur un peu fanée! Ils retrouvaient toujours les meubles à leur place, et parfois des épingles à cheveux qu'elle avait oubliées, l'autre jeudi, sous le socle de la pendule. Ils déjaumaient au coin du feu, sur un petit guéridon incrusté de palissandre. Emma déculait, lui mettait les morceaux dans son assiette, en débitant toutes sortes de chatteries; et elle rit d'un rire sonore et libertin quand la mousse du vin de Champagne déborde du verre léger sur les bagues de ses doigts. Ils étaient si complètement perdus en la possession d'eux-mêmes, qu'ils se croyaient la dans leur maison particulière, et devant y vivre jusqu'à la mort, comme deux éternels jeunes époux. (MB, pp. 366-367)

Evocation modulates into a disguised comment on their naiveté. The prose is poetic as well as precise but its precision (e.g. the "rire sonore et libertin") is calculated to stop us from empathising too far with Emma. In other words, it is prose which tends to respond less to what it describes than to incorporate what it describes into its own undeviating momentum. At times its very cadences are so eloquent in their evocation of the sadness of Emma's lot that we feel them usurping her own freedom of feeling and becoming a substitute for it, another medium in which she is trapped. It is not a prose, like that of Stendhal, which is good at rendering vivacity and excitement; it sometimes seems to freeze Emma's feeling by its lapidary search for the melancholy:

Rien, d'ailleurs, ne valait la peine d'une recherche; tout mentait! Chaque sourire cachait un bâillement d'ennui, chaque joie une malédiction, tout plaisir son dégoût, et les meilleurs baisers ne vous laissaient sur la lèvre qu'une irréalisable envie d'une volupté plus haute. (NB, pp. 392-393).

32 Proust makes a similar point, perhaps in an over clear-cut way: "Dans le style de Flaubert, par exemple, toutes les parties de la réalité sont converties en une même substance, aux vastes surfaces, d'un miroir monotone. Aucune impureté n'est restée. Les surfaces sont devenues réfléchissantes. Toutes les choses s'y peignent, mais par reflet, sans en altérer la substance homogène. Tout ce qui était différent a été converti et absorbé." "Sainte-Beuve et Balzac," Contre Sainte-Beuve, p. 269. This need not mean that GF does not write in different styles but, in his own words, "La continuité fait le style, comme la constance fait la vertu". (Corresp. III, p. 401).
This is better at conveying her "ennui" than her desire: it is appropriate that the word "irréalisable" introduces the word "envie".

When Emma feels the beating of her arteries being taken up in the "assourdissante musique qui emplissait la campagne" she certainly goes out of the self but, this going out being against her will, can we say that she really goes beyond the self? The same question may be put about those moments at the end of the novel where she abandons herself to a kind of negative "kick at misery". This is the impression made by the full version of her increasingly passionate encounters with Léon at the hotel in Rouen. Her passion increases as her real human interest in Léon begins to decrease; she seems to be trying to lose herself in frenzy rather than finding a naturally intense expression of emotion which takes her outside her own ego:

Quel débordement, le jeudi après, à l'hôtel, dans leur chambre, avec Léon! Elle rit, pleura, chanta, dansa, fit monter des sorbets, voulut fumer des cigarettes, lui parut extravagante, mais adorable, superbe.

Il ne savait pas quelle fâcheuse action de tout son être la poussait davantage à se précipiter sur les jouissances de la vie. Elle devenait irritable, gourmande, et voluptueuse; et elle se promenait avec lui dans les rues, tête haute, dans peur, disait-elle, de se compromettre. Parfois, cependant, Emma tressaillit à l'idée soudaine de rencontrer Rodolphe; car il lui semblait, bien qu'ils fussent séparés pour toujours, qu'elle n'était pas complètement affranchie de sa dépendance. (MF, p. 381).

Flaubert implies that she makes a determined, willed attempt to be freely herself but the thought of Rodolphe can still check her in her calculated recklessness. Emma is no longer the passive creature she was with Rodolphe; she is now the dominating partner in the relationship with

33. It is true that just afterwards, on the way home, Emma's suffering gives her an access of courage which helps her to steal the poison but GF hardly dwells on the feeling and it is too late for there to be anything creative in it, it is the courage of extreme desperation: "Alors sa situation, telle qu'un abîme, se représente. Elle haletait à se rompre la poitrine. Puis, dans un transport d'héroïsme qui la rendait presque joyeuse, elle descendit la côte en courant..." (MF, p. 432). Perhaps her bravest moment is her tirade against Rodolphe on pages 430–431.
Léon: "... il devenait sa maîtresse plutôt qu'elle n'était la sienne." (MF, pp. 383-384). It is this domination which marks her failure even to lose herself: Léon becomes the mere vehicle of her passion, nothing in him can really confront her with the full force of coming from another identity, he is part of herself. Flaubert gives her a deliberate masculinity in these scenes as a way of creating a lurid feeling of unappeasable passion. The "débordement" is more desperation than pleasure and, for all her irate energy, Emma still seems to be writhing on a hook. She cannot hoist the flag of herself. All she can do she does in her last culminating fling when she goes to a "bal masqué". She has just been trying to write to Léon and has imagined him lifting her up in a final embrace:

Ensuite elle retombait à plat, brisée; car ces élans d'amour vague la fatiguaient plus que de grandes débauches.
Elle éprouvait maintenant une courbature incessante et universelle. Souvent même, Emma recevait des assignations, du papier timbré qu'elle regardait à peine. Elle aurait voulu ne plus vivre, ou continuellement dormir.
Le jour de la mi-carême, elle ne rentra pas à Yonville; elle alla le soir au bal masqué. Elle mit un pantalon de velours et des bas rouges, avec une perruque à catogan et un lampion sur l'oreille. Elle sauta toute la nuit, au son furieux des trombones; on faisait cercle autour d'elle; et elle se trouva le matin sur le péristyle du théâtre parmi cinq ou six masques, débardeuses et matelots, des camarades de Léon, qui parlaient d'aller souper.
Les cafés d'alentour étaient pleins. Ils avisaient sur le port un restaurant des plus médiocres, dont le maître leur ouvrit, au quatrième étage, une petite chambre.
Les hommes chuchotaient dans un coin, sans doute se consultant sur la dépense. Il y avait un clerc, deux carabin et un commis: quelle société pour elle! Quant aux femmes, Emma s'aperçut vite, au timbre de leurs voix, qu'elles devaient être, presque toutes, du dernier rang. Elle eut peur alors, recula sa chaise et baissa les yeux.
Les autres se mirent à manger. Elle ne mangea pas; elle avait le front en feu, des picotements aux paupières et un froid de glace à la peau. Elle sentait dans sa tête le plancher du bal rebondissant encore sous la pulsation rythmique des mille pieds qui dansaient. Puis l'odeur du punch avec la fumée des cigares l'étourdit. Elle s'évanouissait; on la porta devant la fenêtre.
Le jour commençait à se lever, et une grande tache de couleur pourpre s'élargissait dans le ciel pâle du côté de Sainte-Catherine. La rivière livide frissonnait au vent; il n'y avait personne sur les ponts; les réverbères s'éteignaient. (MB, pp. 402-403).

Emma cannot go through to the end of her "great kick at misery". Flaubert's instinct for the devastating physical detail - working here at its most natural and powerful - won't let her. Her surroundings are still bigger than she is and her frenzy is quenched by the poor, fourth floor room, the men whispering about the price in the corner, the accents of the women.

How far she is from la Vaubyessard! Even worse, she cannot make her "kick at misery" in Yonville itself, she only goes even this far in the company of faceless anonymity, "cinq ou six masques". By the end, it is true, she has ceased to pose but it is only through a terrifying destruction of her will, not because she has transcended it. She faints, and Flaubert directs the reader back to the poetry of the slowly brightening sky "du côté de Sainte-Catherine". The river which had shortly before seemed so static to her begins to shudder with the dawn wind. Through the whole scene we feel that the savage wind of tragedy is blowing but that there is nothing human to counter-balance it. Perhaps this is what we mean when we speak of the comedy of Madame Bovary?

In Madame Bovary, as in Flaubert's other novels, this reduction of the human seems to take the place of the old tragic purgation. When Emma's financial difficulties finally get on top of her she tries to persuade Léon to rob his "patron" but he tries to shuffle his way out of it: "Il serra sa main, mais il la sentit tout inerte. Emma n'avait plus la force d'aucun sentiment". (MB, p. 412) 34 It is in this mood that she capitulates to her surroundings and utters, in a very different spirit from Hamlet, her

34. At the end of Salammbo, when Mâtho is flayed, we are told that: "Il n'avait plus, sauf les yeux, d'apparence humaine..." (Conard), p. 412. The flayed Mâtho particularly disgusted Lawrence: Cf. "The Novel", Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine, Phoenix II, pp. 416-417.
equivalent of Hamlet's final acceptance that "the readiness is all":


And even then she is still capable of an illusory hope: "Et puis, qui sait? pourquoi, d'un moment à l'autre, ne surgirait-il pas un événement extraordinaire? L'heureux même pouvait mourir". (MB, p. 415) She is still capable of going off to Guillaumain to try to borrow money. It is when she leaves him after he has offered her money for sax that she comes closest to Flaubert himself. Leavis's word "self-assertion" comes to mind:

"Quel misérable! quel goujat!... quelle infamie!" se disait-elle, en fuyant d'un pied nerveux sous les trembles de la route. Le désappointement de l'insuccès renforçait l'indignation de sa pudeur outragée; il lui semblait que la Providence s'acharnait à la poursuivre, et, s'en rehaussant d'orgueil, jamais elle n'avait eu tant d'estime pour elle-même ni tant de mépris pour les autres. Quelque chose de belliqueux la transportait. Elle aurait voulu battre les hommes, leur cracher au visage, les broyer tous; elle continuait à marcher rapidement devant elle, pâle, frémissante, enragée, furetant d'un œil en pleurs l'horizon vide, et comme se délectant à la haine qui l'étouffait. (MB, p. 420)

It is in some such mood of helpless rage and looking at the same "horizon vide", that we can imagine Flaubert beginning to write Madame Bovary.

It is when Emma decides to kill herself that bovarysme may be said to aspire to become "impassibilité". Because Emma has failed to achieve her mystical desire to transcend her materiality in sex, as Flaubert transcended it in Art, she transfers that desire onto death. Hence, when Bournisien gives her her last communion:

... elle allongea le cou comme quelqu'un qui a soif, et, collant ses lèvres sur le corps de l'Homme-Dieu, elle y déposa de toute sa force expirante le plus grand baiser d'amour qu'elle eût jamais donné. (MB, p. 446)

Only death can take her out of her single self. Emma is not quite forced into the blind alley down which George Eliot forces Mrs. Transome in
Felix Holt, by a combination of the non-conformist conscience with the Greek idea of nemesis. Because Emma rejects the values of society, which Mrs. Transome accepts against herself, she creates for herself, if only in her desire for death, a small space beyond actual society in which her humanity can be indirectly affirmed. Her retreat from sexual mysticism into death is perhaps her last resort as a human being in an inhuman world. In a way, it is the only possible vindication of Emma's humanness, her defiant passionateness all of humanity that can be salvaged from her tragedy, just as indignation was all that could salvage Flaubert himself from despair. Emma's "great kick at misery", when she wants to spit in the face of the world, reminds us of Flaubert's as it is reported by the Goncourts:

- Flaubert disait aujourd'hui assez pittoresquement: "Non, c'est l'indignation seule qui me soutient... L'indignation pour moi, c'est la broche qu'ont dans le cul les poupées, la broche qui les fait tenir debout. Quand je ne serai plus indigné, je tomberai à plat!" Et il dessine du geste la silhouette d'un polichinelle échoué sur un parquet. (36)

It is a minimally redemptive triumph over a crushing and lurid fate, both for him and for Emma. Emma's defiance increases when the secrecy of her affairs, and her own cult of the lie, is slowly exposed by events, when she begins not to care if her secrecy is violated and, as she walks down the street with Léon, to invite its exposure. She has ceased caring about what people think, has gone beyond "storehouse and barn", as

35. "Je tourne à une espèce de mysticisme esthétique (si les deux mots peuvent aller ensemble), et je voudrais qu'il fût plus fort. Quand aucun encouragement ne nous vient des autres, quand le monde extérieur vous dégoûte, vous alanguit, vous corrompt, vous abrutit, les gens honnêtes et délicats sont forcés de chercher en eux-mêmes quelque part un lieu plus propre pour y vivre. Si la société continue comme elle va, nous reverrons, je crois, des mystiques comme il y en a eu à toutes les époques sombres. Ne pouvant s'épancher, l'âme se concentrera". (Corresp. III, p. 16)

Lawrence puts it. Perhaps then, in her extreme negative way, she does "fly the flag" of herself? And it may also be then that Flaubert feels her escaping from his clutches and has to invent things like the fiacre scene to nullify this negative space of her defiant liberty by seeing it from outside her own human feeling in the savage farce of a "blague supérieure".

Emma, then, does not ascend to the sky as she dreams of doing and as St Julian will: she descends into the earth, destroyed by the strength of emotions which were capable of demanding more of life — in her society — than it had to give her. She experiences the final bankruptcy of the Balzacian energy of the early nineteenth century. Beyond Rodolphe, beyond Léon, beyond even the ever-present Charles, is a death which is nothing but the physical decay figured by the dark poison which streams over her white shroud. Dead, she is stilled in a realm of not-being. She escapes the self and attains the mystic state of "impassibilité" to find rest with a God who does not exist. For, finally, "impassibilité" is nothingness, an escape from one's human condition. Contemplating her death Flaubert is exhilarated by the calm of Sirius, he is the artist surveying the tragedy of life as a surrogate for God who no longer exists. The secret freedom of Emma is mirrored already in the devotion to Art of the recluse of Croisset: she is his creature and his responsibility.

We have the kind of tragedy that is possible in a world where man can

37. It is true that GF stresses the way she is trapped in economic terms — e.g. "elle ne se rappelait point la cause de son horrible état, c'est à dire la question d'argent." (MB, p. 432) — but this does not mean that she takes her own life because she is in debt. In fact, I am not entirely sure why it is that Emma is so overcome by the prospect of being sold up — I suspect GF of exaggerating. The most plausible reason would be her horror at the invasion of her private life, which resembles Frédéric Moreau's horror at seeing Madame Arnoux's possessions put up for auction, but how far is Emma concerned about her privacy at the end?

38. Emma's passion and its satisfaction get represented in this scene by the "fureur de la locomotion" (MB, p. 338) of the fiacre itself, which is described as a "lourde machine." (MB, p. 336) One could argue that it is precisely when Emma is most human that GF tries to make her seem inhuman.
still conceive of God when God is absent. It is as tragic in its way as anything in the nineteenth century novel and its limitations are further to seek than in the neuroses of Gustave Flaubert himself. A tragedy which almost circumvents the tragic conflict by making the odds against man too great was perhaps fitting for the world of the 1850s?

How far does Flaubert allow us to feel that something more largely human than her single self is at stake in Emma's sufferings? My doubts about her begin with the feeling that she is more representative when Flaubert focusses on the world around her than when he is preoccupied with her self. It is partly a greater purity and freedom in his prose which gives me this impression when I compare, say, the description of Rouen itself with the description of Emma's feelings on seeing it. It is as if the tragic feeling is waiting to be born from the poetic vision of the Norman landscape into an equally poetic vision of human emotion. Emma does not necessarily seem untragic because of her passivity: Hamlet is passive too. The difference between them is that Hamlet's passivity springs from the kind of awe of death which Flaubert, though always sensitive to in his poetic sense of the non-self, can never invest Emma with. His failure to allow Emma to share his own sense of death is perhaps what Lawrence's criticisms finally come down to. I can express this

39. In many other tragedies of the period there is an admixture of authorial will with genuine tragic feeling. When thinking of, say, GF's blind beggar we should also think of the railway worker tapping the wheels of the train in Anna Karenina, the playing of the danse macabre in John Gabriel Borkman, the premonitory voice of the narrator of Middlemarch hinting at Lydgate's future and the way Henry James invents a heroine with an incurable disease for The Wings of the Dove.

40. There is a fascinating passage of the 1845 Education Sentimentale in which Emilie begins to cry when she and Henry pass by a cemetery: "Les femmes n'aient pas la mort; cet amour profond du néant que les poètes de notre âge portent dans leurs entrailles, elles s'en effraient; l'être qui donne la vie se courrouce de ce que la vie n'est pas éternelle. Ne leur dites pas que vous aimez les orbites creux des crânes jaunis et les parois verdâtres de tombeaux; ne leur dites pas qu'il y a en vous une aspiration énorme de retourner à l'inconnu, à l'infini, comme la goutte d'eau qui s'évapore pour tomber dans l'océan; ne leur dites pas, â penseurs au front pâle, de vous accompagner dans votre voyage ni de gravir la montagne avec vous, car elles n'ont pas l'œil assez sûr pour contempler les précipices de la pensée, ni la poitrine assez large pour respirer l'air des hautes régions". (OJI, III, p. 151).
point most simply by saying that Flaubert himself looks at life in the
spirit of Silenus in the following story which Nietzsche tells in

The Birth of Tragedy (1871):

An old legend has it that King Midas hunted a long time in
the woods for the wise Silenus, companion of Dionysos,
without being able to catch him. When he had finally caught
him, the king asked him what he considered man's greatest
good. The daemon remained sullen and uncommunicative until
finally, forced by the king, he broke into a shrill laugh
and spoke: "Ephemeral wretch begotten by accident and toil,
why do you force me to tell you what it would be your
greatest boon not to hear? What would be best for you is quite
beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to be, to be
nothing. But the second best is to die soon."

What is the relation of the Olympian gods to this popular
wisdom? It is that of the entranced vision of the martyr
to his torment. (41)

It is true that there are several moments at the end of Madame Bovary
when Emma longs "to be nothing" and to die but at the last moment of all
Flaubert refuses her the "entranced vision" of which Nietzsche speaks. She
relapses back into her clinging need to live in the self, to possess her
experience. After she has taken the communion and her face wears "une
expression de sérénité" she asks, like Richard II, like Flaubert after
making love, for a mirror:

En effet, elle regarda tout autour d'elle, lentement, comme
quelqu'un qui se réveille d'un songe; puis, d'une voix
distincte, elle demanda son miroir, et elle resta penchée dessus
quelque temps, jusqu'au moment où de grosses larmes lui
découlèrent des yeux. Alors elle se renversa la tête en poussant
un soupir et retomba sur l'oreiller. (MB, pp. 447-448).

Soon after she dies laughing "d'un rire atroce, frénétique, désespéré..."
(MB, p. 449). She accepts nothing in her death because it is the
extinction of self. All her life the world has been a maze in which she is
trapped, seeking an exit. When she dies she is still in this maze: the
threat of death inspires her with terror but not with any awe for its mystery.

41. The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis
Emma longs to be divested of self but not, as the characters of Dostoievsky do, to lose herself in order to find herself; she wants to lose everything. This is why, when it comes down to it, she cannot bear to lose anything. It is only after death, in not-being, that she can imagine the possibility of a perfection and purity - a release from her encumbering ego - such as we usually associate with being. Because death becomes the unrecognised goal of her life it cannot fill her with the awe we have for something beyond life. There is no longer any spirit of life in her to see through her struggle to the mystery of death. She has really been in conflict with life, not with death. The wonder is not there because the sense of existence which is a necessary part of a vision of death is not there either. Is it enough to see just "the skull beneath the skin"? There is far more than just that in Flaubert but is there enough of that "enhanced vitality" which can stop us from moralising? For when death begins to lose its mystery we are left with the more precise and circumscribed idea of a memento mori. What, we ask, was inside the skull? Is the Flaubertian "nothing" a real answer? Is this moral admonition really an evasion, a giving-in which circumvents a full recognition of the true, unseizable terror of death?

Earlier, I said that an unevasive vision of the separateness of man from the universe - the denial of any shaping anthropomorphic fate - was the most tragic thing in Madame Bovary: the refusal of that insidiously

42. In one of the brouillons for the novel Dr. Larivièere - whom some critics take as an example of GF's own most positive moral strength, based on his admiration for his father - is described as looking at the world in this way: "A part les maladies et les cadavres, il n'existait rien pour cet homme". (NV, p. 606) I should add that it does not seem to me fortuitous that GF's father once performed an unsuccessful operation on a club-foot and that the tone of the above remark is not without irony. There is, however, an analogy to Larivièere's attitude to be found in GF's rather horrible joke about the dead Charles: "Il tomba par terre, il était mort. Trente-six heures après, sur la demande de l'apothicaire, M. Canivet accourut. Il l'ouvrit et ne trouva rien." (MB, p. 481).
consoling acceptance which is a short-cut to the other side of the tragic experience. Perhaps Wordsworth's pantheism was a way of grasping at this acceptance before he had the right to it? Flaubert has more of the authentic savageness of the tragic. This claim for him may seem to have been contradicted by my remarks about the determinism he insinuates into the novel. Their point was, though, that this kind of fate - which is so essential to the novel's "form" - is the reverse of anthropomorphic. It does not re-open the possibility of a metaphysically consoling union of the self with the world. Such union turns out to be possible only in death when the self is compounded back into its elements.

Emma's relative failure to achieve being is therefore, perhaps, the price Flaubert had to pay for communicating the true tragic terror without relapsing into a spuriously tragic acceptance...It is forced upon him by his awareness that his own mysticism has the context of a world without gods. This may be why the ending of Madame Bovary is significantly different from the ending of a Shakespearian tragedy, why it gives us so unusually precise a sense of the physical details of dying. For the culmination of Emma's tragedy is not the moment of her death but the moment of her burial. It is only then, when she is already no more, that we get...

43. I am thinking of a poem like "Tintern Abbey" in which the "burthen of the mystery" of the world is mentioned only to be "lightened" and then forgotten in the ensuing "serene and blessed mood". In making this point I should like to acknowledge my debt in this chapter to Victor Brombert's essay on Madame Bovary. His argument is in some ways similar to mine although I think he juggles too deviously with the word "tragedy" and I would not agree with his statement that "tragedy means consolation": "This apparent negation of tragic values corresponds in fact to a new form of tragedy: a period which discovers the pathos of the unheroic hero also discovers the tragedy of the very absence of Tragedy. For tragedy means consolation: the tragic spirit corresponds to man's increasing need to justify apparently unjustifiable suffering. Thus the chorus, in Oedipus Rex, though sympathetic with the king, hopes that the oracle will be vindicated: pure contingency seems more atrocious than the cruellest of fates. Madame Bovary, despite the implicit hatred of the untragic world, poses the problem of the very possibility of a tragic work in a contemporary context." (Novels of F, pp. 90-91).
to something like a feeling of tragic calm and the whole novel, not
Emma, tells us that "the rest is silence". And this is also why that
scene leaves us feeling a sense of relief rather than a sense of waste,
what Charles, "comme tous les autres", feels as "la vague satisfaction
d'en avoir fini" (MB, p. 467). For the novel, in order to be even this
tragic, had to start out from that sense of waste which usually ends a
tragedy, from the picture of Emma's frustration in a hostile and
unresponding social world. This explains, I think, the vestiges of
moralising we feel at the end of the novel and the fact that we cannot
completely feel what, according to Bradley, we feel at the end of
Shakespeare's tragedies:

It forces the mystery upon us, and it makes us realise so
vividly the worth of that which is wasted that we cannot
possibly seek comfort in the reflection that all is vanity. (44)

Throughout Madame Bovary, as in Ecclesiastes, there is a ground-swell
of lamentation.

For Flaubert, then, tragedy manifests itself as a concentrated
meditation on death. It gives him that wisdom of Silenus, both tragic
and joyously comic, which separates him from so much of his indefatigably
progressing century. It is in this thought that Flaubert finds himself
freed from living only in the toils of the ego, for it is only when Emma
dies that we can attain to a sense of human community, the knowledge
that all the inhabitants of Yonville are subject to the same fate, however
separated they may be from each other in life. The next chapter, from
which I have already quoted the vigil of Homais and Bournisien over Emma's
corpse, begins:

Il y a toujours, après la mort de quelqu'un, comme une
stupéfaction qui se dégage, tant il est difficile de
comprendre cette survenue du néant et de se résigner à
y croire. (MB, p. 450).

For a moment we no longer feel the restraint of that hard definition of outline which makes us feel Emma's death as a sombre anecdote, exhorting us to an unexhilarating submission to the thought of death. Here we feel some of death's grandeur too. The tension between Emma and her creator may never be quite resolved but in the comic scene between Homais and Bournisien the sense of tragedy does, at last, come through with complete clarity. It would be foolish to cite anything so beautifully realised simply as a proof of Flaubert's limitations. Lawrence has finally led us back to the strengths of Madame Bovary too.

I want to return to Lawrence's criticisms, however, to help float a final speculation about Flaubert's art. What they have directed our attention to is the presence of something spiritually static in Madame Bovary. There is something static in Emma, both because her will often seems paralysed and because of the tendency of Flaubert's prose to take hold of her feelings and seem to stop them from growing, and this static quality is echoed in the form of the novel as a whole. The way the prose often seems to be pouring Emma's emotions into a hard mould and watching them set seems to me to derive from Flaubert's view of life (described in chapter II above) as unchanging and eternally repetitious and from his preoccupation with death. An exploration of life's surprisingness, such as we get in a novel like La Charreuse de Parme, becomes almost otiose: Flaubert's forte is rather the sameness of the inevitable passing of time. 45 Thus, one of the ways in which the novel is made rounded and coherent at the end is by showing us the essence of the dead Emma's

45. This is a point noticed by Middleton Murry: "The power of awakening in us a sense of the process of time was Flaubert's most individual achievement as a writer". Countries of the Mind, 1st series, p. 170.
experience being recapitulated in that of the mourning Charles. To have ended with Emma's death and burial would have left the novel seeming too much the story of one particular life. In Flaubert, generality is often achieved by simple extension and hence it finds its expression through its ineffably sad sense of the monotonous recurrence of the past in the present. It is such recurrence which makes the rhythm of L'Education Sentimentale and enables Flaubert to give such a clear shape to Frédéric's apparently formless life. So Charles repeats Emma:

On avait dû, pensait-il, l'adorer. Tous les hommes, à coup sur, l'avaient convoitée. Elle lui en paraît plus belle; et il en conçut un désir permanent, furieux, qui enflammait son désespoir et qui n'avait pas de limites, parce qu'il était maintenant irréalisable. (MB, p. 472).

Charles' "desir permanent, furieux" evokes Emma's:

Où, d'autres fois, brûlée plus fort par cette flamme intime que l'adultère avivait, haletante, émue, tout en désir, elle ouvrait sa fenêtre, aspirait l'air froid, éparpillait au vent sa chevelure trop lourde, et, regardant les étoiles, souhaitait des amours de prince. Elle pendait à lui, à Léon. Elle eût alors tout donné pour un seul de ces rendez-vous, qui la rassasiaient. (MB, p. 399)

She found, just as he does, that desire increases as it becomes unrealisable, that "les meilleurs baisers ne vous laissaient sur la lèvre qu'une irréalisable envie d'une volupté plus haute." (MB, p. 393) Emma came to this conclusion as a result of putting a question to herself: "D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait?" (MB, p. 392) Charles finds that his "désir permanent" has the same result:

Une chose étrange, c'est que Bovary, tout en pensant à Emma continuellement, l'oubliait; et il se désespérait à sentir cette image lui échapper de la mémoire au milieu des efforts qu'il faisait pour la retenir. Chaque nuit pourtant, il la rêvait; c'était toujours le même rêve: il s'approchait d'elle, mais quand il venait à l'étreindre, elle tombait en pourriture dans ses bras. (MB, p. 476)

Here, as so often elsewhere too, the continuity of the novel is created
by a brilliant use of repetition.

It may be, as I have already hinted, that this instinct for recapitulation, when coupled with a tendency to refuse to let Emma's nature expand or, at least, to explore its expansion, makes the last part of Flaubert's novel seem slightly redundant. The novel fails to burst through its own pre-established form, fails to go beyond itself just, perhaps, as Emma fails. This is a view which Lawrence develops in his essay on Thomas Mann:

And yet it seems to me, this craving for form is the outcome, not of artistic conscience, but of a certain attitude to life. For form is not a personal thing like style. It is impersonal like logic. And just as the school of Alexander Pope was logical in its expressions, so it seems the school of Flaubert is, as it were, logical in its aesthetic form. "Nothing outside the definite line of the book", is a maxim. But can the human mind fix absolutely the definite line of a book, any more than it can fix absolutely any definite line of action for a living being? (46)

In fact, the way Lawrence's argument develops shows that he does find a personal quality in "form" in that he takes it to be the expression of a particular philosophy of life which he himself does not share:

Already I find Thomas Mann, who, as he says, fights so hard against the banal in his work, somewhat banal. His expression may be very fine. But by now what he expresses is stale. I think we have learned our lesson, to be sufficiently aware of the fulsomeess of life. And even while he has a rhythm in style, yet his work has none of the rhythm of a living thing, the rise of a poppy, then the after uplift of the bud, the shedding of the calyx and the spreading wide of the petals, the falling of the flower and the pride of the seed-head. There is an unexpectedness in this such as does not come from their carefully plotted and arranged developments. Even Madame Bovary seems to me dead in respect to the living rhythm of the whole work. While it is there in Macbeth like life itself. (47)

There is no space here to go through these criticisms one by one, to go over my point that the problem with Madame Bovary is not so much that it

46. Phoenix, p. 308.
47. Phoenix, p. 313.
lacks a "living rhythm" as that its heroine is not allowed to dance to
it herself: Lawrence himself described it elsewhere as a "very wonderful
picture of life" and we would not expect him to sympathise with a
conception of art so much less kinetic than his own. The reason for
quoting him here is that his criticisms of Madame Bovary were first made,
albeit in a different way, before its publication, by Flaubert himself.

Although he constructed his novel around large set-pieces like the
Comices Agricoles and the ball at La Vaubyessard, although he spent such
pains on finding the clinching adjective, on making the completely
rounded paragraph (such as the description of Dr. Larivière on pp. 441-442),
and on giving a uniformity of finish to his style, Flaubert was as aware
of the dangers of his methods as Lawrence was. In spite of his belief
in the individuality of style and subject he found the subject of Madame
Bovary so antipathetic that he had to force himself to plan it: the
result was, he felt, that the novel had the effect of a tour de force.

He would not have agreed with James that it was a monument to the idea
of Form, precisely because he felt an incompatibility between its subject
and his style:

Bovary... aura été un tour de force inouï et dont moi seul
jamais aurai conscience: sujet, personnage, effet, etc., tout
est hors de moi. Cela devra me faire faire un grand pas par
la suite. Je suis, en écrivant ce livre, comme un homme qui
jouerait du piano avec des balles de plomb sur chaque
phalange. Mais quand je saurai bien mon doigté, s'il me tombe
sous la main un air de mon goût et que je puisse jouer les
bras retroussés, ce sera peut-être bon. (Corresp. III, pp. 3-4)

He felt that the novel lacked "the rhythm of a living thing" and he
constantly looked back with regret to the way he had written the first

Tentation:

Ce livre, tout en calcul, est en ruses de style, n'est pas de
mon sang, je ne le porte point en mes entrailles, je sens
que c'est de ma part une chose voulue, factice. Ce sera peut-
être un tour de force qu'admireront certaines gens (et encore
en petit nombre); d'autres y trouveront quelque vérité de
détail et d'observation. Mais de l'air! de l'air! Les grands tournures, les larges et pleines périodes se déroulant comme des fleuves, la multiplicité des métaphores, les grands éclats du style, tout ce que j'aime enfin, n'y sera pas. (Corresp. III, pp. 201-202).

"Mais de l'air! de l'air!" It is this feeling of frustrated aspiration which Flaubert transferred to Emma as he wrote, thus contradicting his assertion that the novel did not come from his own "entrailles".

Similarly, the passivity of Emma, the way she seems spiritually arrested, is a quality paralleled by the way the novel itself moves. Flaubert's biggest problem was in running episodes together in a natural and fluent rhythm:

Ce qui est atroce de difficulté c'est l'enchaînement des idées et qu'elles dérivent bien naturellement les unes des autres. (Corresp. II, p. 448).

He was more often satisfied with a page than with a whole chapter:

Chaque paragraphe est bon en soi, et il y a des pages, j'en suis sûr, parfaites. Mais précisément à cause de cela, comme marche pas. C'est une série de paragraphes tournés, arrêtés, et qui ne dévalent pas les uns sur les autres. Il va falloir les dévisser, lâcher les joints, comme on fait aux mâts de navire quand on veut que les voiles prennent plus de vent. (Corresp. III, p. 92).

I think we owe it to Flaubert to take such remarks seriously and not to discount them as being simply expressions of discouragement, fatigue and self-doubt.

The feeling that Flaubert may be pressing his pen a little too hard at the end of the novel seems to me to be related to the fact that one of the greatest pleasures the novel has to offer is the delight of a single paragraph so complete in itself that it tends to become a self-contained prose-poem rather than an extract of a developing fiction.

Such passages are too well-known to need dwelling on so I will simply illustrate them in little by pointing to Flaubert's flair for the clinching peroration, the kind of thing that has been so much admired in the final chapters of L'Éducation Sentimentale. Here is a random
example from the end of the first chapter of *Madame Bovary*, where Flaubert is describing the troubles of Charles' first wife, Madame Dubuc:

On lui avait bien dit qu'elle serait malheureuse; et elle finissait en lui demandant quelque sirop pour santé et un peu plus d'amour. (MB, p. 14).

Such beautifully precise wit has a finality which directs us back to itself, makes us less expectant for the next chapter. It may be that such clarity and firmness of vision is not really quite at home in a long novel, that what Flaubert is giving us in such prose is the opportunity to steep ourselves in the tone of his own mind rather than a more tentative and exploratory unravelling of the threads of his novel. He himself always felt that his gift was analytic and descriptive rather than dramatic. Thus he experienced great difficulty in making the jump in his narration from psychology to action, partly, no doubt, because of his already-noted reluctance to allow to Emma her own spontaneity. He spent seven weeks in writing the chapter which leads up to Rodolphe's kissing Emma for the first time, after the *Comices Agricoles*:

C'était un dur passage: il fallait amener insensiblement le lecteur de la psychologie à l'action, sans qu'il s'en apercoive. Je vais entrer maintenant dans la partie dramatique et mouvementée. (Corresp. II, p. 52).

The possible critical judgement that suggests itself here is one that is, in a way, the upshot of everything which I have been saying about *Madame Bovary*. It is a judgement perhaps implicit in James’s essays on him and it will, I think, seem more appropriate when I go on to discuss James’s own novels: Flaubert is not essentially a “psychological” novelist at all. It is not an adverse judgement in any way: a corollary

48. For example, "... il faut chanter dans sa voix; or la mienne ne sera jamais dramatique ni attachante". (Corresp. III, p. 86) "Quant à mes goûts personnels, ils s'assouvaissent mieux, tu le sais, dans les livres de descriptions et d'analyse que dans ceux de drame..." (Corresp. V, p. 99). My main point about Flaubert's style in *Madame Bovary* is something he was very aware of himself in writing the book: "Ce livre, qui n'est qu'en style, a pour danger continuell le style même". (Corresp. IV, p. 16).
of it is that he is too much of a poet to be such a novelist.

Many of the prose-poems in Madame Bovary either describe landscapes or else people seen from outside, often in landscapes like the lovely picture of Emma holding her umbrella when the snow is thawing (pp. 22-23). It is the descriptions of what is going on in Emma's mind, the kind of thing that is more common in novels, that sometimes show a sense of strain and a certain luridity (at the end of the novel, at least) which makes it an effort to rid ourselves of the presence of the author behind them:

La journée du lendemain était affreuse, et les suivantes étaient plus intolérables encore par l'impatience qu'avait Emma de ressaisir son bonheur, - convoitise âpre, enflammée d'images connues, et qui, le septième jour, éclatait tout à l'aise dans les caresses de Léon. Ses ardeurs, à lui, se cachaient sous des expansions d'émerveillement et de reconnaissance. Emma goûtait cet amour d'une façon discrète et absorbée, l'entrentenait par tous les artifices de sa tendresse, et tremblait un peu qu'il ne se perdit plus tard. (MB, pp. 371-372).

This is superbly written but it misses the beauty of some of the purely physical descriptions of Emma. For example Léon is standing behind her at the Opera:

Il se tenait derrière elle, s'appuyant de l'épaule contre la cloison; et, de temps à autre, elle se sentait frissonner sous le souffle tiède de ses narines qui lui descendait dans la chevelure. (MB, p. 315)

Thibaudet noticed this difference between the moments when Emma is feeling sex and those when she is thinking about it:

Toutes les fois qu'Emma est purement sensuelle, il en parle avec une émotion délicate et presque religieuse, comme Milton parle d'Eve; il quitte le ton impassible ou ironique, il s'abandonne à cette musique par laquelle l'auteur assume son personnage et le prend pour son substitut. (Thibaudet, p. 102).

The implication of Thibaudet's perception is that not all the novel is like this, that it is less formally unified than it is sometimes said to be and that there are times when its poetry gets squeezed out as a result
of the way it is structured and plotted overall. Did Flaubert's poetry ever find narrative which could voice it more consistently so that the whole work became a poem?

One of the finest prose poems in *Madame Bovary* is the picture of an old peasant-woman, Catherine Leroux, who receives a medal for long service at the *Comices Agricoles*. The poetry comes from an extraordinary fusion of realistic detail, irony and unsentimental compassion. It makes a portrait, not just of one woman but of a whole class and it does this because Flaubert can communicate such a clear vision of the woman's weather-beaten face and thin, muscular build. Perhaps the whole of the rest of the novel could not provide as moving an example of human dignity, just as it contains no other such example of humble, long-suffering passiveness:

> Alors on vit s'avancer sur l'estrade une petite vieille femme de maintien craintif, et qui paraissait se ratatiner dans ses pauvres vêtements. Elle avait aux pieds de grosses galoches de bois, et le long des hanches, un grand tablier bleu. Son visage maigre, entouré d'un béguin sans bordure, était plus plissé de rides qu'une pomme de reinette flétrie, et des manches de sa camisole rouge dépassaient deux longues mains, à articulations noueuses. La poussière des granges, la potasse des lessives et le suint des laines les avaient si bien encroûtées, éraillées, durcies, qu'elles semblaient sales quoiqu'elles fussent rincées d'eau claire; et à force d'avoir servi, elles restaient entrouvertes, comme pour présenter d'elles-mêmes l'humble témoignage de tant de souffrances subies. Quelque chose d'une rigidité monacale relevait l'expression de sa figure. Rien de triste ou d'attendri n'amollissait ce regard pâle. Dans la fréquentation des animaux, elle avait pris leur mutisme et leur placidité. C'était la première fois qu'elle se voyait au milieu d'une compagnie si nombreuse; et intérieurement effarouchée par les drapeaux, par les tambours, par les messieurs en habit noir et par la croix d'honneur du conseiller, elle demeurait tout immobile, ne sachant s'il fallait s'avancer ou s'enfuir, ni pourquoi la foule la poussait et pourquoi les examinateurs lui souriaient. Ainsi se tenait, devant ces bourgeois épanouis, ce demi-siècle de servitude. (MB, pp. 208-209).

How natural is the movement from tenderness to the savage - and perfect - conclusion, the way the prose keeps us throughout on the brink of pathos and the brink of comedy at the same time. We could not dismiss this as
an example of Flaubert in search of "objects of pity" and there is a
firm emotional discretion in his tone which dissuades us from making any
reference to the way George Eliot broaches the tragedy of humble life in
chapter 17 of Adam Bede. Perhaps Catherine Leroux has something in common
with Wordsworth's leech-gatherer but Flaubert does not need to make any
direct moral inference from her. There is, to re-voke Lawrence, no cant
about the "treasure-of-the-humble" in her "mutisme" and "placidité". Had
there been it would not have been possible to bring out the degradation
of her condition so vividly and without a sense of that degradation we
should have felt less admiration than we do for her staunch patience, her
"rigidité monacale". I find the impact of the passage so profound that
I can hardly forbear wishing that Emma herself could have been presented
more often in the same way. Of course, she could not have been because
the peasant-woman represents precisely that endurance of life which it is,
in a sense, Emma's strength to refuse. But what the passage does suggest
is that more of Flaubert's own tragic sense may be coming through this
"little person", and coming through more spontaneously, than we find
with Emma herself. Was Lawrence, then, radically wrong about where
Flaubert's genius lay? For Catherine Leroux seems to lead us directly to
Un Coeur Simple in search of a work by him which manages to be one
sustained poem from beginning to end.

Part of the greatness of Un Coeur Simple is that it has no need of
psychological complexity to involve us. Flaubert is so much in possession
of his own sense of life that his expression, for all its impassiveness, can
be more lyrical. Félicité has none of that self-pity which sometimes gets
in the way of our compassion for Emma. As Brombert says:

The suffering remains exclusively that of the omniscient and
"impassive" author. Félicité cannot view her own fate: she
does not even know that her story is one of pathos, tenderness,
devotion and naive moral beauty. (49)

49. The Novels of F., p. 245.
But that makes the tale sound too condescendingly conceived to use her to draw a moral from. It is, perhaps, not essential to its effect that she should be good and Flaubert himself is rather blunter in letting us see the ways in which she is stupid or sentimental. Not everything is pathetic and tender - there is room for some subdued absurd comedy, suggesting, as it does, the metaphysical void in this world, in the way Félicité associates her parrot Loulou with the Holy Ghost. Flaubert always had a keen perception of the element of pathos which can be distilled from farce. What the tale gives most of all, however, is the shape of a life, its small events and upheavals made coherent within an enveloping sense of time passing. For instance, as a very brief illustration:

Arrivée au sommet d'Ecquemauville, elle apercut les lumières de Honfleur qui scintillaient dans la nuit comme une quantité d'étoiles; la mer, plus loin, s'étalait confusément. Alors une faiblesse l'arrêta; et la misère de son enfance, la déception du premier amour, le départ de son neveu, la mort de Virginie, comme les flots d'une marée, revinrent à la fois, et, lui montant à la gorge, l'étouffaient. (50)

In some ways this tidal wave of memory is more moving than those moments when Emma looks back on her past: it evokes the events themselves, unaltered and unsentimentalised by the person remembering them. The feeling is, of course, elegiac rather than tragic but Félicité's life does, in little space, conjure up as general a sense of the way the emotions of loss and regret play an increasingly large part in any life with the approach of old age.51 The tale moves inexorably towards the vacant house of Madame Aubain, for sale and unsold, the image of a heart virtually vacant and stripped bare, just as Madame Bovary moves toward

50. Trois Contes (Conard, 1921), p. 51.
51. GF himself lived through the 1870s with a constant sense of loss: Bouilhet died, Sainte-Beuve and Gautier too, and the person for whom Un Coeur Simple was written, George Sand, died before it was finished. In 1876 the year which Un Coeur Simple was written - Louise Colet died.
the arrival of the bailiff and L'Éducation Sentimentale toward the auction of all Madame Arnoux's possessions. Without this sense of time, made more poignant by being evoked through a life nearly static in a somnolent provincial town, the tale would be of little interest save as the slight chronicle of the existence of a servant. Instead, the poetry of it lies almost wholly in the way Flaubert will let the facts of Félicité's life speak for themselves, intruding neither pity nor irony, making everything with perfect seriousness. So the tale seems to reach the status of documentary without ever being naturalistic in intention: there is nothing falsely sociological in its treatment and Flaubert has too much tact to rub in the humdrum pattern of Félicité's life in the way Maupassant might have done. This is how she comes to have such clarity as a vehicle for that undramatic monotony of suffering which Flaubert was so sensitive to in life and which enabled him, not to make life itself seem monotonous, but to illuminate it in its simplest and least eventful form.

When Un Coeur Simple was first published nearly all the main reviewers wanted to describe Flaubert as a poet. Théodore de Banville, for example:

J'ai dit un poète, et ce mot doit être pris dans son sens rigoureux; car le grand écrivain dont je parle ici a su conquérir une forme essentielle et définitive, où chaque phrase, chaque mot ont leur raison d'être nécessaire et fatale, et à laquelle il est impossible de rien changer, non plus que dans une ode d'Horace ou dans une fable de La Fontaine. (52)

Flaubert would have been flattered by the comparison with La Fontaine but it may seem now as if Banville's idea of a poet is too restricted for what Flaubert does. It is not just style, although style is obviously a vital contributor, which gives Un Coeur Simple the kind of poetry

52. In a letter to GF, quoted in the notes to the Conard edition of Trois Contes, p. 220.
which seems to give its every detail so much greater depth and permanence than anything usually associated with the fictional recital of one particular life. The only real way to give an idea of this poetry is to quote the whole tale because it is inseparable from the whole narrative movement and the sequence of event upon event - the prose is some of Flaubert's least flashy. All I will do, having already spent so much time in analysing Mme Bovary, is to quote one long passage in the hope that it will convey some of the flavour of the whole tale. This is how Felicite learns the death of her nephew Victor from Mme Aubain:

- C'est un malheur... qu'on vous annonce, Votre neveu...

Il était mort. On n'en disait pas davantage.
Felicite tomba sur une chaise, en s'appuyant la tête à la cloison, et ferma ses paupières qui devinrent roses tout à coup. Puis, le front baissé, les mains pendantes, l'œil fixe, elle repétait par intervalles:
- Pauvre petit gar: pauvre petit gar!

Liebard la considérait en exhalant des soupirs. Mme Aubain tremblait un peu.
Elle lui proposa d'aller voir sa soeur, à Trouville.
Felicite répondit, par un geste, qu'elle n'en avait pas besoin.
Il y eut un silence. Le bonhomme Liebard jugea convenable de se retirer.
Alors elle dit:
- Ca ne leur fait rien, à eux!

Sa tête retomba; et machinalement elle soulevait, de temps à autre, les longues aiguilles sur la table à ouvrage.
Des femmes passèrent dans la cour avec un bard d'où dégouttait du linge.
En les apercevant par les carreaux, elle se rappela sa lessive; l'ayant coulée la veille, il fallait aujourd'hui la rincer; et elle sortit de l'appartement.

Sa planche et son tonneau étaient au bord de la Touques.
Elle jeta sur la berge un tas de chemises, retroussa ses manches, prit son battoir; et les coups forts qu'elle donnait s'entendaient dans les autres jardins à côté. Les prairies étaient vides, le vent agitaient la rivière; au fond, de grandes herbes s'y penchaient, comme des cheveures de cadavres flottant dans l'eau.

Elle retenait sa douleur, jusqu'au soir fut tres brave; mais dans sa chambre, elle s'y abandonna, à plat ventre sur son matelas, le visage dans l'oreiller, et les deux poings contre les tempes.

53. Perhaps this explains the much greater ease with which the narrator can make direct observations about Felicite? For example: "Elle les baisa plusieurs fois; et n'était n'éprouvé un immense étonnement si Virginie les eût rouverts; pour de pareilles âmes le surnatural est tout simple". (p. 38).
Beaucoup plus tard, par le capitaine de Victor lui-même, elle connut les circonstances de sa fin.
On l'avait trop saigné, à l'hôpital, pour la fièvre jaune.
Quatre médecins le tenaient à la fois. Il était mort immédiatement, et le chef avait dit:
- Bon! encore un!
Ses parents l'avaient toujours traité avec barbarie. Elle aimait mieux ne pas les revoir; et ils ne furent aucune avance, par oubli, ou endurcissement des misérables.
Virginie s'affaiblissait.
Des oppressions, de la toux, une fièvre continue et des marbrures aux pommettes décelaient quelque affection profonde.
M. Poupart avait consommé un séjour en Provence. Mme Aubain s'y était décidée, et eût tout de suite repris sa fille à la maison, sans le climat de Pont-l'Evêque. (pp. 33-35).

What is noticeable, after some of the prose of Madame Bovary, is the genuine continuity with which the effect of the narrative is built up.
Nothing impedes the transition from the news of the death to the washing, to the captain's news, to Victor's parents, to the story of Virginie's illness. There is the same continuity in the passages which follow describing Virginie's death and the mourning of Madame Aubain. It is wrong to think of Un Coeur Simple as just the pathetic story of Félicité, incidentally: Madame Aubain - bourgeoise as she is - has a pathos just as real.

If there is a criticism that can be made of Un Coeur Simple it is that the tale lacks Flaubert's usual intensity; there is perhaps just a shade too much sober acquiescence in its catalogue of suffering for it to have real vitality as a picture of life. Emotion is seen as if with the distance given by memory and it is sometimes hard not to feel that one is looking back on Félicité's life with almost a sentiment of nostalgia. Whereas the elegiac feeling of Madame Bovary was made more acute and painful by the presence of a passionate protest against life, a heroine like Félicité has the effect of making Flaubert's attitude to life itself seem too muted and undemanding to be fully alive, except to life's sadness. But perhaps this is a false criticism because it asks for a more complex
work which would have neither the harmoniousness of tone nor the succinctness of _Un Coeur Simple_?

The same reservations could not be applied to _La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier_, which I am tempted to describe, as Proust does, as "la plus parfaite de ses œuvres". It makes a suitable point at which to close this discussion of Flaubert by drawing together what has been said about the ways in which he approaches a tragic art. What is attractive about it is not simply its brevity but the much greater resonance it has than _Un Coeur Simple_, as a result, I think, of its being not a modern realistic fiction but a legend. The more precisely details are observed by the narrator, the more luminously significant they seem to become; things grow into images, but without our ever being able to assign any fixed prose meaning to them. The beauty of the tale is that any narrative explication of what happens has become superfluous, as here:

_Bientôt, il entra dans un bois. Au bout d'une branche, un coq de bruyère engourdi par le froid dormant la tête sous l'aile. Julien, d’un revers d’épée, lui faucha les deux pattes, et sans le ramasser continua sa route._ (p. 39)

Julien is quite outside us, a hero of legend, and yet, because of this, we can participate all the more spontaneously in the feelings his world prompts in him: there is no gap, as there is in Flaubert's other novels, between the world as seen by those in it and the world as it actually is and as the narrator wants us to see it. One reason for this is that the prior existence of the legend has freed Flaubert's imagination from the intervention of his will, the kind of will which makes us unsure whether Emma Bovary's life is determined by her actions and her world or whether it is determined by the author seeking to disguise contingency as a

55. Cf. the following entry in 1875 in one of Thomas Hardy's notebooks: "Reading the Life of Goethe. Schlegel says that "the deepest want and deficiency of all modern art lies in the fact that artists have no mythology". The Notebook of Thomas Hardy, ed. Evelyn Hardy (1955), p. 51.
necessity of his own making. Julien's life is marked out from the start by the prophecies of the angel and the hermit and, later, the warning of the great stag which he kills. These prophecies come from beyond the narrator. Therefore, we accept the inevitability of the tale without trying to detect breaks in the chain with which causes are linked to effects: it is as if we can see no chain. The continuity of the narrative is so gripping because it is so little the effect of pressure. Supernatural phenomena and destiny conspire so to mould Julien's life into a clear spiritual shape that he seems to sleep-walk his way through it. We can make no distinction between plot and characterisation: everything has the motion of a dream, each image getting fixed in our mind like the stained glass images from which Flaubert drew the tale, and yet image moving effortlessly on to image without our seeking to know why. The tale is both limpidly static and in a state of constant, fluid change. This is not to say that there is anything of the naïve mystical fairy-tale about St Julien. The mythical resonance of the tale derives from the way Flaubert is confronting us with an elemental view of human nature, of parental love, the feelings of being someone's child, of violence, guilt and selflessness. Thibaudet is right to describe Julien's life as "une existence qui à force de plonger dans la nécessité absolue et crue de la nature humaine prend l'apparence d'un songe". (op. cit. p. 214).

It is perhaps a result of Julien's all the time knowing the fate which awaits him that he can be so much better a representative of the human desire to make one's own fate than any other of Flaubert's

56. Brombert describes the tale's rhythm like this: "le mouvement, de même que dans Salammbo et le Tentation de saint Antoine, n'est ici le plus souvent qu'un rapide passage d'une forme d'immobilité à autre". Flaubert par lui-même (1971), p. 164. I think the passages quoted at the end of this chapter show that, although Brombert is making a sensitive point here, the tale grows more organically than he suggests and its mouvement is more constant.
characters. When he leaves home or when he becomes a beggar he is trying to choose his life in a way that Emma or Frédéric — ostensibly so much freer — never can. In fact, all he knows is that he will murder his parents; the rest of what is to happen to him remains hidden from him. But we cannot say that the murder itself is pure accident because it stems so directly from his irresistible desire to hunt and the frustration of his violent lust to destroy all the animals in the forest. The connection between free-will and fate is, as in Oedipus Rex or Macbeth, a mystery and all our attempts to analyse and fathom it bring us back only to the mysterious and inescapable facts of the original legend. Perhaps I would be sticking my neck out too far in saying that this is the one place in Flaubert where the movement of events of the narrative has the authentic tragic feeling of the inexorable that we get from something like the murder of Duncan in Macbeth? Perhaps it is best to say only that what the legend of St. Julien helped Flaubert to show us was, among other things, the difficulty of tragedy in the modern, realistic settings of Madame Bovary or L'Education Sentimentale? Yet the tale seems to me to have something too durable in its significance to allow one to dismiss it as just a beautiful anachronism.

There is, then, no better way to end this chapter than by simply quoting from St. Julien itself. As with Un Coeur Simple there is no point...

57. Just before he commits the murder, after the strange episode when he walks home through the ranks of all the animals he wants to kill but is unable to, Flaubert tells us that, "Sa soif de carnage le reprenait; les bêtes manquant, il aurait voulu massacrer des hommes." (p. 110).

58. Nothing, to my mind, could be farther from the truth than the opinion of Georg Brandes: "The story seems rather adapted to the public of the thirteenth century, or to polished connoisseurs, than to ordinary modern readers". In Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century (1924), p. 257. It is not necessary to accept Brombert's reading of the tale as a submerged Freudian autobiography to object to this: the beauty of the tale as a picture of the medieval world is that there is no feeling of its being a reconstruction, the fruit of scholarly study, as Salmund sometimes seems to be.
at which one can either begin or end a quotation without arbitrariness.

I will begin with parts of the hunting sequence which leads up to the death of the great stag:

Il était en chasse dans un pays quelconque, depuis un temps indéterminé, par le fait seul de sa propre existence, tout s'accomplissait avec la facilité que l'on éprouve dans les rêves. Un spectacle extraordinaire s'arrêta. Des cerfs emplissaient un vallon ayant la forme d'un cirque; et tassés, les uns près des autres, ils se réchauffaient avec leurs haleines que l'on voyait fumer dans le brouillard.

L'espoir d'un pareil carnage, pendant quelques minutes, le suffoqua de plaisir. Puis il descendit de cheval, retroussa ses manches, et se mit à tirer.

Au sifflement de la première flèche, tous les cerfs à la fois tournèrent la tête. Il se fit des enfoncures dans leur masse; des voix plaintives s'élevaient, et un grand mouvement agita le troupeau...

Enfin ils moururent, couchés sur le sable, la bave aux naseaux, les entrailles sorties, et l'ondulation de leurs ventres s'abaissant par degrés. Puis tout fut immobile.

La nuit allait venir; et derrière le bois, dans les intervalles des branches, le ciel était rouge comme une nappe de sang.

Julien s'adossa contre un arbre. (pp. 91-92).

Then he kills the great stag, the leader of the troop:

Le prodigieux animal s'arrêta; et les yeux flamboyants, solennel comme un patriarche et comme un justicier, pendant qu'une cloche au loin tintait, il répeta trois fois:

- Maudit! maudit! maudit! Un jour, cœur féroce, tu assassineras ton père et ta mère!

Il plia les genoux, ferma doucement ses paupières, et mourut.

Julien fut stupéfait, puis accablé d'une fatigue soudaine; et un dégoût, une tristesse immense l'envahit. Le front dans les deux mains, il pleura pendant longtemps.

Son cheval était perdu; ses chiens l'avaient abandonné; la solitude qui l'enveloppait lui semblait toute menaçante de périls indéfinis. Alors, poussé par un effroi, il prit sa course à travers la campagne, choisit au hasard un sentier, et se trouva presque immédiatement à la porte du château.

La nuit, il ne dormit pas. Sous le vacillement de la lampe suspendue, il revoyait toujours le grand cerf nain. Sa prédiction l'obsédait; il se débattait contre elle:

- Non! non! non! je ne peux pas les tuer.

Puis il songeait:

- Si je le voulais, pourtant?...

Et il avait peur que le Diable ne lui en inspirât l'envie. (pp. 93-94).

A man is confronted by the essential nature of his own passions. There is
nothing factitious in the instinct which makes us remember Macbeth faced with the dagger. Like the ghost of Banquo, the great stag reappears later, at the moment of the murder: "il reconnut, terrifiée, le brame du grand cerf noir". (p. 111). Julien is destroyed by the appalling interweaving of his own desires with necessity: "désormais il n'existait plus". (p. 113). The beginning of his action is hidden from him, his own nature impenetrable:

Like Emma Bovary, he looks into a mirror but, unlike her, he comes to recognise himself as he really is:

Et un jour qu'il se trouvait au bord d'une fontaine, comme il se penchait dessus pour juger de la profondeur de l'eau, il vit paraître en face de lui un vieillard tout décharné, à barbe blanche et d'un aspect si lamentable qu'il lui fut impossible de retenir ses pleurs. L'autre, aussi, pleurait. Sans reconnaître son image, Julien se rappelait confusément une figure ressemblant à celle-là. Il poussa un cri; c'était son père; et il ne pensa plus à se tuer. (p. 118).

That is, he recognises himself in other people, does what Emma fails to do. In consequence, "l'idée lui vint d'employer son existence au service des autres". (p. 118). When the leper comes he completes the discovery of his own humanity and, "nu comme au jour de sa naissance" (p. 124), he finally achieves the transcendence which Emma had only dreamt of:

Le toit s'envola, le firmament se déployait et Julien monta vers les espaces bleus, face à face avec Notre-Seigneur Jésus, qui l'emportait dans le ciel. (pp. 124-125). (59)

59. The one major change which GF made to the legend was to turn the leper from an angel into Christ himself. The text of the legend, as told by Saint Antonin, is given in Marcel Schwob's Spicilège: Saint Julien l'Hospitalier (1896), p. 112.
In Lawrence's terms, "he comes through though he dies". It is typical of Flaubert, and what Madame Bovary has led us to expect, that such a conclusion - there is nothing else quite like it in all Flaubert - should only be realised within the context of a Christian legend which is pervaded by the spirit of the Middle Ages, "telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, sur un vitrail d'église, dans mon pays". (p. 125). For the tale had begun as a kind of poetic sport, a relief from his labours on Bouvard et Pécuchet which were, in fact, to be taken up again and continued to his death.
CHAPTER SIX

Evasiveness in "Roderick Hudson"

For a long time James has been held in the background of this thesis while Flaubert's work was being explored. This has meant, at least temporarily, that he has been presented in a dim, generalised way until he has almost come to seem a mere term in my argument. In this chapter I want to begin correcting this previous vagueness and one of the clearest ways of doing this will be to let what is going to be said about James refer back to what has been said already about Flaubert, so that my discussion of Madame Bovary will illuminate the way in which I approach the novels which lead up to The Portrait of a Lady. The connecting link is made up of an obvious question: what are the positive values, as exemplified by James's own fiction, which prompted his criticisms of Flaubert's? Did James have the right to invoke them?

James's 1902 essay on Flaubert brought me to a watershed in my argument. Its somewhat devious profundity compelled the kind of critical choice in which literary questions merge into questions about life, the kind of choice which is so essential to criticism and yet so threatening to the critic's need to remain free from the snares of dogmatism. If I have escaped these snares it has only been by beginning from the blunt conviction that Flaubert's art reveals a broader humanity than any which James, for all his delicacy, could quite conceive of, and then going on to qualify that view. But, until James's own art has been looked at too, everything still remains to be demonstrated: the reader has so far had to bear the burden of a suspension of his disbelief. It is not necessary for my purposes to proceed to a step by step analysis of all of James's
novels. Those novels have been so much written about in the last thirty or so years that it seems best simply to try to float a large general suggestion about them here. Brevity and selectiveness suit the study of an author as comprehensive as James, where criticism is always apt to forget the wood for the trees. The kind of compliment one wants to pay to his range is to leave it beyond the scope of what one has to say about him, so that the reader can go on to test out one's argument against the novels which it fails to touch. So the bulk of this discussion will not go beyond The Portrait of a Lady. This is because it is fairly safe to conclude that by that novel (1881) James had both found his own voice as a writer and had already reached his essential conclusions about Flaubert. A later chapter will try to show why The Portrait is also the James novel which most lends itself to comparison with Madame Bovary.1 Perhaps one other aside to what follows should be made here too: much of what is suggested about James may seem unhelpfully negative and this may well worry my reader, just as, in some ways, it worries me as well. There are two reasons for this critical strategy, The first is simply that in recent years criticism has had the effect of obscuring the real nature of James's novels by beclouding them with incense: it has too often ceased to be critical and declined into the arid pastime, which he himself unwittingly initiated in his prefaces, of tracing their technique. The second reason is more important: my criticism of James always entails an implicit plea for Flaubert. It is a capital fact for the reader of James that our devotion to him may be a barrier to the better understanding of a greater novelist outside the

1. My choice of which novels to study in no way implies a value judgement on the later novels. In fact, my argument may well seem less relevant to them - for example, the prose of a late book like The American Scene often strikes me as being more alive than much of the supposedly fresher early prose.
English or American traditions.

The critic whom this argument immediately comes up against is F.R. Leavis. For Leavis, James is part of an English tradition whose fineness provides an antithesis to the art of Flaubert and those who derive from him. Of the exemplars of this tradition he writes:

... far from having anything of Flaubert's disgust or disdain or boredom, they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity. (2)

Leavis has taken up Lawrence's point that Flaubert "stood away from life as from a leprosy". This means that he chooses to ignore, or distort, the fact that Flaubert did not stand away from leprosy. In other words, why should these emotions which Leavis labels as "disgust", "disdain" and "boredom" — emotions so hard to relegate from life itself — be relegated from the subject-matter of art? We might counter that a full "openness before life" would need to include irreverence too. How would comedy and satire survive otherwise? How could art make us understand the meaning of a "vital capacity for experience" if it were unable to include a recognition of the occasional validity of the response life provokes in Hamlet's:

O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. (4)

It would need a long essay on Leavis to explore these questions adequately but there do seem to be grounds for thinking that The Great Tradition shows him as being at a loss to find a place in great art for what might

2. The Great Tradition, p. 17.
be called the instinct to deny life, an instinct shared by Hamlet and Emma Bovary. Both tragedy and satire have too much in common with this instinct, even if they are not by any means a straightforward expression of it, for Leavis's implication that the "moral intensity" he upholds is a wholly salutary intensity to go unquestioned. There is a submerged idealism in his position which leads him to take "life" not simply as that which is but as the best of that which is. In the name of "openness" he is trying to substitute the part for the whole by characterising "life" only in terms of a "moral intensity" of his own choosing. We would not expect a critic holding this position to sympathise with Flaubert's examination of idealism in Madame Bovary and we would expect him to construe it, rather as James does, without fully seeing the tragic conflict Flaubert sets up between the two imperatives of our need to see the world as it is and our need to see it as it might be.

James used his own idealism in such different ways from the way Flaubert used his that it was inevitable that he should always be puzzled by his predecessor. Although credited by Leavis with possessing a "reverent openness before life", he was equally at a loss when faced with the intensity of Flaubert's rage against life: "Why does the inevitable perpetually infuriate him, and why does he inveterately resent the ephemeral?" Flaubert could not escape the knowledge that the inevitable is inevitable and the ephemeral ephemeral. His anger may have been the only outlet for a desire to live as fully as he could imagine living if the conditions of life did not frustrate that desire. In the same way Hamlet felt bitter at the thought of the noble dust of Alexander stopping a bung-hole. To say "Fie on't, ah, fie" may express not a denial of life so much as a protest on behalf of the human aspirations which life itself

seems to deny. Flaubert may often have been tempted to affect the spleen and to indulge in *saeva indignatio* but his anger at life was not, in essence, either fatigued emotion or a pose: it has a genuinely exhilarating quality, like Emma's anger at Rodolphe when he refuses to help her at the end of the novel. The consequence for Flaubert's art is that such feelings predispose him to look at life in the most general and basic way. When Bournisien and Homais watch over Emma's dead body it is not simply provincial society which is in question but the fact of death itself. If the art there could not be described by the words "marked moral intensity" it is because it takes us beyond morality to a sense of the religious dimension of life.

The gravamen of my argument about James is that it is just this sense of life that he fails to evoke in us. I therefore find common ground with Leavis's own description of the "limiting characteristics" of James's "genius":

It was not, in short, D.H. Lawrence's or any thing like it. James had no such immediate sense of human solidarity, no such nourishing intuition of the unity of life, as could make up to him for the deficiencies of civilised intercourse: life for him must be humane or it was nothing. There was nowhere in his work that preoccupation with ultimate sanctions which we may call religious. (6)

This is so acute that I am puzzled to say whether I am really dissenting from Leavis's view of James or simply suggesting that he was mistaken in placing James in his "great tradition". The absence of an "immediate sense of human solidarity" was precisely my criticism of the 1902 essay on Flaubert and to me the corollary of this was a large doubt as to whether James was really moved by "reverent openness before life". This doubt can be developed by looking at the concern of the early novels with what Leavis

6. The Great Tradition, p. 181. A place where the question of how much Lawrence has in common with WJ might be pursued is the essay in *Phoenix* called "On Being Religious" (pp. 724-730).
calls "civilised intercourse". Is it a preoccupation which distracts him from a religious sense of life?\(^7\) Does an interest in manners and culture limit itself to only the social aspect of "the unity of life"? Are James's characters ever simply men and women or are they always Americans and Italians, Frenchmen and Englishmen?

A good focus for these questions, which also gives us a further suggestion about tragedy, is a passage from Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy*. The argument is that the "real stuff of tragedy" in *The Return of the Native* is the "primitive, primal earth"\(^8\) of Egdon Heath:

This is the wonder of Hardy's novels, and gives them their beauty. The vast, unexplored morality of life itself, what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility, and in its midst goes on the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanized movement; seriously, portentously, till some one of the protagonists chances to look out of the charmed circle, weary of the stage, to look into the wilderness raging round. Then he is lost, his little drama falls to pieces, or becomes mere repetition, but the stupendous theatre outside goes on enacting its own incomprehensible drama, untouched. (9)

The question this prompts about James is whether his absorption in the "little human morality play" of society prevented him from imagining characters who could look beyond its "charmed circle" in the way that Emma Bovary, like some of Hardy's people, is eventually forced to do. In a Fleda Vetch or a Lambert Strether James might seem to entertain a renunciation of the values of society but this is more an inward than an outward-looking solution. Leavis's view that James "was in quest of an ideal society, an ideal civilisation"\(^10\) implies that it involved a retreat

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7. This view is advanced by Charles Du Bos: "J'aboutis de plus en plus à le voir comme sans contenu spirituel, religieux ou métaphysique, untouched by all the inner moral dramas: his whole, his tremendous moral power belonging to the world of standards, of taste, always in fine of art". (Journal, I, p. 251).


into the cultivation of an inner vision on which the actual was not permitted to obtrude. To get back to the roots of such a vision it is necessary to look at Roderick Hudson (1875), a novel in which James first begins to explore his need to render life through the kind of "finer consciousness" which he felt the absence of in Flaubert.

When James looked back in old age to the Roman life on which he drew in Roderick Hudson he found himself lingering with a still fresh affection over "the good faith of the young American for whom Europe meant, even more than now, culture, and for whom culture meant, very much more than now, romantic sentiment". The word "sentiment" prompts the suspicion that such "culture" was felt as an end in itself, but it would be wrong to dismiss it as being simply the goal of the aesthete or the dilettante. In a country where men like James could lament the paucity of "culture" the desire for it amounts to more than this. It is only a sense of estrangement from it - the half of the full story - which makes it appear as a quest for self-gratification. The more positive part of the need for "culture" is the energy generated by a sense of its absence. This is clear in Clement Searle, the hero of the early tale A Passionate Pilgrim (1871):

"Naked come we into a naked world. There is a certain grandeur in the absence of a mise en scène, a certain heroic strain in those young imaginations of the West, which find nothing made to their hands, which have to concoct their own mysteries, and raise high into our morning air with a ringing hammer and nails, the castles in which they dwell." (2)

Searle's eager and yet forlorn aspiration to belong to the old world, symbolised by his tenuous hereditary claim to an aristocratic English

estate, comes over in his odd echo of Job which suggests that a fine civilisation offers a way of transcending the sense of man's vulnerability in nature. His need is not simply for art but for a richer experience of human community than he has found in America. This need contributes to the ultimate disillusion of many of his ideas about English life because it makes him incorporate an American ideal into his image of England. He is still sufficiently charmed by the traditions of English society for his death in Oxford (where else?) to be almost euphoric but essentially he dies in some visionary limbo which is neither American nor European. An alternative, a priori idea of Europe is common in James's fiction. The young aesthetic narrator of The Author of "Beltraffio" (1884) constantly sees English life as a replica of English art, something he already knew about before leaving America. This is how he describes the house of the writer Mark Ambient:

There was genius in his house too, I thought, when we got there; there was imagination in the carpets and curtains, in the pictures and books, in the garden behind it, where certain old brown walls were muffled in creepers that appeared to me to have been copied from a masterpiece of one of the pre-Raphaelites. That was the way many things struck me at that time, in England; as if they were reproductions of something that existed primarily in art or literature. It was not the picture, the poem, the fictive page, that seemed to me a copy; these things were the originals, and the life of happy and distinguished people was fashioned in their image. (14)

To the traveller everything has an imaginary element that lends itself to "romantic sentiment"; it is in dreams that the foreign feels most perfectly...

13. Thus, the following criticism of the early HJ strikes me as unsubtle and too severe: "When James characterised the 'thinly composed society' of Hawthorne's America... he was concerned with the needs of the novelist: in a somewhat similar passage Cooper was concerned with the needs of society itself". Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in HJ (Southern Methodist U.P., 1958), p. 17. For HJ these two needs were one and their tendency to seem separable in the America after the Civil War was itself a kind of comment on that society. The young HJ who criticised Baudelaire and little truck with any philosophy which maintained that life was for Art's sake.

possessed. The narrator's thrill of initiation is not observation but the storing up of a precious sensation that becomes part of his own inner world.  

The American tourists whom James saw in Europe in his youth struck him as "modern man with *culture* quite left out", a statement which seems to encourage the view that he looked on "culture" as something that could be put in. Hence the feeling we sometimes have in early James, that "culture" is a non-essential element in the way men are constituted, a sort of sublime commodity that can be acquired. This can easily mislead one into simplifying the kind of divorce between "culture" and human and social values which menaced James's thinking. Emerson had remarked that Americans "have their intellectual culture from one country and their duties from another" and America-firsters like Brooks and Parrington assiduously rubbed in this Jamesian predicament. But their insistence should warn us off repeating it. It prevents the perception that a book like the *Hawthorne* is preoccupied by a political and social thinness in American life and not just with a thinness of "culture" and a scarcity of subjects for the novelist. The "culture" it desiderates is not in itself a humanly impoverished ideal so much as a slogan for the contention that it is its absence from American society which is humanly impoverishing. In the early American travel writings James constantly regrets a lack of signs of any long tradition of human habitation in the landscape and this helps one to see that more than an aesthetic vibration lay behind the effusive descriptions of the "*picturesque*" qualities of the *Roma* of

15. In James, the Americans tend to appreciate European culture more deeply than the Europeans themselves do. For instance, the heroine of *A London Life* (1888), Laura Wing, enthuses about the homes of the landed gentry and is scandalised by the Philistinism of their occupants. See, too, HJ's play *The High Bid*, which was first published in Edel's edition of *The Complete Plays* of HJ in 1949.

Roderick Hudson. The "eloquent silence of undedicated nature", of which he speaks in his sketch of Saratoga, had less to say to him about the "unity of life". The word "Europe" portends a real need which can even make one take more seriously those rather fulsome rhapsodies about the aroma of history James found there, that almost nouveau riche coveting of what the American millionaire in Lady Barbarina (1888) thinks of as the "unpurchaseable ingredient of age". An American poet of the period puts this need compactly:

... the heart seeks and has forever sought,
Something that man has suffered or enjoyed,
And without human action, passion, thought,
Nature, however beautiful, is void. (20)

In James such a search did not seek to detach "culture" from human society but to discover a "culture" which would be more embedded in actual social institutions, one that would need no quotation marks around it. The paradoxical result was that the artist's most constructive step towards this ideal lay in expatriation. This step is exemplified in Rowland Mallet's taking Roderick Hudson off to Rome and one of its consequences is that it entails an unusual stress being put on the value of art. This stress is not, however, the same as the stress put on art by European writers like Flaubert and Gautier, in whom it proceeded from a very different kind of dissatisfaction with their society. Rowland's connoisseurship is not Art for Art's sake but the outward form of a spiritual need. If an English

17. e.g. RH, pp. 74-75. The edition of RH cited in this chapter is the Penguin, edited by S. Gorley Putt (1969). It corresponds to HJ's first revision of the novel in 1878. Since it provides a reliable text it seemed more convenient to quote from than the original edition which is far harder to get hold of. In a study of HJ's earliest full-length novel there is a critical advantage in using an early text in preference to the revised New York text used elsewhere in this thesis.


reader finds it hard—even impertinent—to feel inward with this need. Its presence still saves the idea of art conveyed by Roderick Hudson from seeming simply dated. The sanction of idealism which Rowland finds in Roderick's sculptures is, in fact, at the roots of the view of art on which James calls in his criticisms of Flaubert. A short account of Roderick's art in the context of the European art of the period will help to bring this point out.21

It is peculiarly American that Roderick should behave like the archetypal Romantic artist but that his art itself should be Hellenistic and Neo-classical. His grand passions seem directly culled from George Sand and he is always reminding us of Balzacian artists like Wenceslas Steinbock or Lucien de Rubempré.22 Nevertheless, he jumps at the chance Rowland offers him to "go to Rome and study the antique" (RH, p. 44) and we learn that his bust of Mr. Striker recalls "the works of the early Italian renaissance" (RH, p. 45). The Rome he inhabits sometimes seems like one vast art gallery and the campagna where he goes riding with Rowland is more reminiscent of the Italian landscapes of a painter like Richard Wilson than any landscapes of nineteenth century.23 This does not mean that James's taste in the visual arts was simply old-fashioned:


22. Cornelia Fulsifer Kelley discusses HJ's debts to Balzac and George Sand throughout her study of his early development. She also mentions his interest in Goethe, who is one possible source for the feeling for Italy and classical sculpture in RH. A more modern source might have been Pater's study of Winckleman which first appeared in 1867 and was re-published in The Renaissance in 1873. D.J. Gordon and John Stokes, in their long essay on "The Reference of The Tragic Muse", quote an unpublished letter in the Houghton Library written to William James in 1873: "I wanted to review Pater's Studies but it treats of things I know nothing about". The Air of Reality: New Essays on HJ, ed. John Goode (1972), p. 167. (The epigraph of Pater's book is, of course, "Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove".) The obvious modern source for Roderick's idealism, though not his classicism, is Ruskin.

23. The nineteenth century "picturesque" paintings HJ seems to have most admired at this time were the oriental landscapes of Decamps. See The Painter's Eye, passim.
the apparent time-lag behind European taste was more a symptom of American idealising. Europe becomes muse ideal when it is pictured in terms of its past rather than its present. Thus, we find Roderick getting into heated arguments with a "corrupt" apostle of the new realism, "an American sculptor of French extraction, or remotely perhaps of Italian, for he rejoiced in the somewhat fervid name of Gloriani" (RH, p. 88).

Gloriani's ideas about art are also "of French extraction":

... to be able to point to one of Gloriani's figures in a shady corner of your library was tolerable proof that you were not a fool. Corrupt things they certainly were; in the line of sculpture they were quite the latest fruit of time. It was the artist's opinion that there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness; that they overlap and intermingle in a quite inextricable manner; that there is no saying where one begins and the other ends; that hideousness grimes at you suddenly from out of the very bosom of loveliness; and beauty blooms before your eyes in the lap of vileness; that it is a waste of wit to muse metaphysical distinctions and a sadly meagre entertainment to caress imaginary lines; that the thing to aim at is the expressive and the way to reach it is by ingenuity; that for this purpose everything may serve, and that a consummate work is a sort of hotch-potch of the pure and the impure, the graceful and the grotesque. Its prime duty is to amuse, to puzzle, to fascinate, to savour of a complex imagination. (RH, pp. 88-89).

The idea that "there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness" in an artist's subject had found a more subtle expression in Madame Bovary and the union of "the graceful and the grotesque" echoes Baudelaire's dictum about modern art: "Le beau est toujours bizarre". 24

Rowland never buys any of Gloriani's work and Roderick's sculpture provides what, in European terms, is a very un-contemporary antithesis to all it stands for. For Roderick realism means a "perfection of form ... to symbolise the perfection of spirit". (RH, p. 94). He therefore rejects

Miss Blanchard's suggestion that to accompany his projected statue of Christ he should make a Judas:

'Never! I mean never to make anything ugly. The Greeks never made anything ugly, and I am a Hellenist; I am not a Hebraist! I have been thinking lately of making a Cain, but I should never dream of making him ugly. He should be a very handsome fellow, and he should lift up the murderous club with the beautiful movement of the fighters of the Greek friezes who are chopping at their enemies.'

'There is no use trying to be a Greek', said Gloriani. 'If Phidias were to come back he would recommend you to give it up. I am half Italian and half French, and, as a whole, a Yankee. What sort of a Greek should I make? I think the Judas is a capital idea for a statue. Much obliged to you, madam, for the suggestion. What an insidious little scoundrel one might make of him, sitting there nursing his moneybag and his treachery! There may be a great deal of expression in a pendulous nose, my dear sir - especially if one has put it there!'

'Very likely', said Roderick. 'But it is not the sort of expression I care for. I care only for perfect beauty. There it is, if you want to know it! That is as good a profession of faith as another. In future, so far as my things are not positively beautiful you may set them down as failures. For me, it's either that or nothing. It is against the taste of the day, I know; we have really lost the faculty to understand beauty in the large ideal way. We stand like a race with shrunkmuscles, staring helplessly at the weights our forefathers easily lifted. But I don't hesitate to proclaim it - I mean to lift them up again! I mean to go in for big things; that is my notion of my art. I mean to do things that will be simple and vast and infinite. You shall see if they won't be infinite! Excuse me if I brag a little; all those Italian fellows in the Renaissance used to brag. There was a sensation once common, I am sure, in the human breast - a kind of religious ave in the presence of a marble image newly created and expressing the human type in superhuman purity. When Phidias and Praxiteles had their statues of goddesses unveiled in the temples of the Aegean, don't you suppose there was a passionate beating of hearts, a thrill of mysterious terror? I mean to bring it back; I mean to thrill the world again! I mean to produce a Juno that will make you tremble, a Venus that will make you grow faint.'

'So that when we come and see you', said Madame Grandoni, 'we must be sure and bring our smelling bottles. And pray have a few sofas conveniently placed.' (RH, pp. 96-95).

The wit in this passage sometimes works against Roderick (we sympathise with Madame Grandoni) but the chief impression James is after is of Roderick's freshness and energy. Gloriani is really a clever second-rate artist whose function is to soften our incipient criticisms of Roderick's ideas by expressing them in a form that makes them seem cynical.
James finds it difficult to sympathise very deeply with the kind of passionate nature Roderick is meant to have. His spontaneity is always coming out as histrionics and the reader is apt to be left feeling that he is tiresome or, as the corrupt Gloriani puts it, "delightfully fresh" (RH, p. 93). The descriptions of Roderick's work are always marked by a refined tone of rather tremulousunction. The terms which Rowland gives the seal of his approval to the statuette called "Thirst" are essentially those of the speech of Roderick's just quoted:

The statuette, in bronze, something more than two feet high, represented a naked youth drinking from a gourd. The attitude was perfectly simple. The lad was squarely planted on his feet, with his legs a little apart; his back was slightly hollowed, his head thrown back; his hands were raised to support the rustic cup. There was a loosened fillet of wild flowers about his head, and his eyes, under their dropped lids, looked straight into the cup. On the base was scratched the Greek word ἀπεδ, Thirst. The figure might have been some beautiful youth of ancient fable - Hylas or Narcissus, Paris or Endymion. Its beauty was the beauty of natural movement; nothing had been sought to be represented but the perfection of an attitude. This had been attentively studied - it was exquisitely rendered. Rowland demanded more light, dropped his head on this side and that, uttered vague exclamations. He said to himself, as he had said more than once in the Louvre and the Vatican, 'We ugly mortals, what beautiful creatures we are!' Nothing in a long time had given him so much pleasure. (RH, pp. 33-34)

There is a strangely erotic undercurrent in this description ("some beautiful youth of ancient fable - Hylas or Narcissus" etc.) but this gets sublimated into a more conscious emphasis on the idealising of human nature. A few pages later Roderick is very ready with an allegorical explanation of the statuette. The youth is innocence, health, strength and curiosity and the cup is "knowledge, pleasure, experience". The ideal figure might be the "young American" James writes of in the biography of Story.

What is American about Roderick's art is the way it can seem new

25. Christina Light takes up this image on pp. 273-274. It appears again in an important passage in The Portrait of a Lady, vol. I, p. 188.
without its being modern. In reading one tends to forget that it is supposed to be created forty years after Horace Vernet's directorship of the School of Rome and nearly as long after the Roman period of Ingres. The fact that Roderick seems unconscious of Neo-classicism makes it worth digressing a little to suggest that his attack on the new realism parallels the conventionality of its most bankrupt heirs. Kenneth Clark describes their reaction to painters like Courbet and the Barbizon school:

But in 1860 the Salon and all the famous art schools were entirely committed to a debased form of academic art, of which the first rule was that nature must be improved in the interest of the ideal. To draw or paint what one saw was merely vulgar.

The widespread use of this word shows that the conflict between realism and academicism, like most conflicts in the nineteenth century, had a social basis. The Count of Nieuwerkerke, the head of all official patronage of art during the Second Empire, said of the Barbizon painters: 'This is the painting of democrats, of those who don't change their linen, and who want to put themselves above men of the world. This art displeases and disgusts me.' (27)

The relevance of this whole attitude to Roderick Hudson begins to unfold when we remember that the word "vulgar" keeps recurring in it. (28)

The element of conventional taste in Roderick Hudson can be placed with the help of a passage from James's fine essay on Delacroix's Letters (1880), written, significantly enough, at the time he was working on The Portrait of a Lady. One of the points on which James agreed with Baudelaire was in sharing the view that Delacroix was the greatest painter of the nineteenth century. In the essay on him he expresses some surprise

26. Roderick's classicism is not that of Ingres, whose idealised nudes have a voluptuous quality which is hardly suggested by the "Thirst". His hellenism seems quite unaffected by the bizarre and almost sinister undercurrent of the romantic which makes Ingres so much less conventional than his reputation. WJ's 1868 essay, "An English Critic of French Painting,"(Painter's Eye, especially pp. 38-40), gives his rather lukewarm reaction to Ingres and his half-romantic, half-conventional views on modern French painting.


28. The word is applied both to taste (e.g. p. 79) and to morals (e.g.p. 107).
that Delacroix had never visited Rome:

Delacroix, strange to say, never went to Italy, and never saw the great gallery at Madrid, and yet he could say to himself that he knew a good deal about Titian and Velasquez. There remains, however, something almost displeasing to an Anglo-Saxon mind in the fact that he should have lived to the age of sixty-five, and attained to the enjoyment of emoluments and honours, without having thought it necessary to cross the Alps and enlighten his eyes with the supreme examples of the art he so robustly practised. He made, indeed, two or three journeys. At the age of twenty-seven (in 1825) he went over to London and spent a portion of a summer. Later, in 1832, he accompanied a French commissioner upon a diplomatic errand to Morocco, where he gathered in a few weeks those impressions of Eastern life which during the rest of his career were so frequently reflected in his work. (29)

It should be added that in 1825 in England Delacroix saw the paintings of Constable and found them more of a stimulus to originality than following the beaten track of Ingres and his disciples to Rome. In fact, many of his early letters speak of his desire to visit Italy (in 1821 he wrote that "Tout mon être s'élance vers l'Italie...") but it is more interesting to compare what James says with a letter he wrote from Tangiers in 1832:

Le beau court des rues; il y est désespérant, et la peinture ou plutôt la rage de peindre parait la plus grande des folies... Il y a ici quelque chose de plus simple encore et de plus primitif: il y a moins d'alliage turc; les Romains et les Grecs sont là à ma porte: j'ai bien ri des Grecs de David, à part, bien entendu, sa sublima brosse. Je les connais à présent; les marbres sont la vérité même, mais il faut y savoir lire, et nos pauvres modernes n'y ont vu que des hiéroglyphes. Si l'école de peinture persiste à proposer toujours pour sujets aux jeunes nourrissons des Muses, la famille de Priam et d'Atrée, je suis convaincu, et vous serez de mon avis, qu'il vaudrait pour eux infiniment davantage d'être envoyés comme mousses en Barbarie sur le premier vaisseau, que de fatiguer plus longtemps la terre classique de Rome. Rome n'est plus dans Rome. (31)

29. Painter's Eye, p. 188.


31. Ibid., vol. I, p. 285-286. (It is worth noting how much Delacroix has in common with GF, like him an early European traveller in North Africa. They share many things: the love of Shakespeare, an aloofness from the public, a predilection for the dix-huitième in preference to the more personal side of romanticism, a violent energy which fuses into tenderness and eroticism. The Delacroix who frequented the zoo in the Jardin des Plantes and painted the death of Sardanapalus would have been the natural illustrator for Salammbô.)
If Rome is the source of the art of the future then it has to be re-located. The exhilarating sense Delacroix gives us of the way art is a dynamic process where getting back to something forgotten in its past helps it forward helps to place an element of the culturally corne il faut in the idealism of Rowland and Roderick. James himself quotes another letter which shows that for Delacroix the "ideal" was not found by the abstract allegorising which characterises Roderick's thinking:

Without the ideal there is neither painting, nor drawing, nor colours; and what is worse than being without it is to have that second-hand ideal which those people go to school to acquire, and which would make us hate our very models. (32)

Perhaps one needs to draw a distinction between idealising and the "ideal"?

The classical aura of Jamesian Rome facilitated an idealising of the real, the kind of reality which for Delacroix in Tangiers was a salutary stimulus. This is how James pictures Roderick's sculpture of a modern Italian:

He had lately begun a representation of a lazzarone lounging in the sun; an image of serene, irresponsible, sensuous life. The real lazzarone, he had admitted, was a vile fellow; but the ideal lazzarone - and his own had been subtly idealised - was the flower of a perfect civilisation. (RH, p. 206).

The spectacle of Italian life has allowed Roderick to give an aesthetic twist to transcendentalism that brings it near the snobbery of the Count of Nieuwerkerke. There was nothing sublimated about Delacroix's "Femmes d'Alger". The point is that idealising results in a thinness and an anaemic quality in the life it romances. The result is a genteel form of conservatism. F.W. Dupee made an acute note of this in a discussion of James's criticism of French literature:

As an essayist, and especially on French subjects, he was touched by that academic humanism and ready made classicism

of the cultivated American who expects literature to be
at all times in the full-dress of its courtly prime. (33)

Such artistic conservatism easily extended itself into the expatriate American's feelings about European society. Roderick's lazzarone is a foretaste of Ralph Touchett's merriment at Lord Warburton's radicalism and Hyacinth Robinson's rejection of revolution on the grounds that it would destroy the "culture" he aspires to. Samuel M. Crothers, a contemporary observer of expatriate Americans in the period, made some trenchant remarks about this sort of political bad faith in his book The Toryism of Travellers:

The American who, in his own country, is in feverish haste to improve conditions, when he sets foot in Europe becomes the fanatical foe of progress. The old world, in his judgement, ought to look old. He longs to hear the clatter of wooden shoes. If he had his way he would have laws enacted forbidding peasant folk to change their ancient costume. He would preserve every relic of feudalism. (34)

James exemplifies this sort of thing himself in a discussion about plans to reform the working of Oxford University in Portraits of Places:

Pending these righteous changes, one would like while one is about it - about, that is, this business of admiring Oxford - to attach oneself to the abuse, to bury one's nostrils in the rose before it is plucked. (35)

A certain lack of seriousness in the enthusiasm here confirms that James was aware of the dangerous thinning down of human values in favour of picturesque ones that this passage reveals. Another essay in the same book is more subtle:

33. Henry James (1951), p. 95. The same point is made more crudely by Maxwell Geismar à propos The Ambassadors: "... James's taste was still classical, academic; very close to the formal or antiquarian taste of the great American fortunes themselves." HJ and his Cult (1964), p. 273.


To travel is, as it were, to go to the play, to attend a spectacle; and there is something heartless in stepping forth into the streets of a foreign town to feast upon novelty when the novelty consists simply of the slightly different costume in which hunger and labour present themselves... half the time that we are admiring the brightness of the Italian smile the romantic natives may be, in reality, in a sullen frenzy of impatience and pain. Our observation in any foreign land is extremely superficial, and our remarks are happily not addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who would be sure to exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture. (36)

Am I alone in finding that the intelligence behind this passage is being used complacently? The urbane flow of perception, the leisure James has for a carefully-turned phrase ("a sullen frenzy of impatience and pain"), seem to me to be signs of artifice. The idea of "pain" is there not so much to introduce a note of compassion as to introduce us to the subtly self-justifying workings of the writer's conscience: he is clearly a superior traveller himself. This curious mixture of openness and retreat from experience - despite all the complex life behind it - goes down even less well in a novel like Rodrick Hudson than in an occasional travel essay.

Rowland Mallet's experience of Europe gets mediated through both the art and the behaviour of Roderick and, because his detachment evokes James's sympathy, it is to Rowland that we must turn for the most authentically Jamesian note in the novel. What I have been saying about the novel's idea of art should help us to focus the main question of how creative James's vision of life in the novel really is.

36. "Italy Revisited", Portraits of Places, pp. 50-51. It is interesting to refer here to HJ's description of Story's sculpture as appealing "not, in any strictness, (to) the aesthetic sense in general, but the sense of the romantic, the anecdotic, the supposedly historic, the explicitly pathetic". W.W. Story, vol. II, p. 75. Story created a romantic sculpture, neither English nor French in style, which was a departure from earlier American "haunters of dim Academic shades". (vol. II, p. 78). HJ identifies Story's "Cleopatra" as the work which Miriam sees in Kenyon's studio in Hawthorne's The Marble Faun (1860). This link with his American predecessor in writing a Roman novel does not mean that Roderick should be equated with Story, although HJ may have idealised Story just as Roderick idealised his lazzarone. Richards (op.cit.) suggests that Story may also have served as a model for Gloriani. The chapter of W.W. Story just quoted from has an amusing account of Victorian prudery about the nude in art: Story, unlike Roderick, went in for voluminous draperies.
James's fiction often depends on his queer propensity to moral and psychological contrivance - an extreme case is a tale like The Altar of the Dead (1895) - and the contrivances in Roderick Hudson are especially puzzling. Why does the prudently celibate Rowland suddenly fall in love at first sight with the very girl who has just accepted a proposal from the new protegé whose work he has just fallen in love with too? Why does this same sensible Mary Garland become more and more long-sufferingly devoted to Roderick the more his actions reveal that she has nothing real in common with him? Do we ever discover whether Rowland's relation to Roderick is that of a patron and tutor or whether a natural friendship exists between the two men? These unanswered questions perplex me more than the rather theatrical mysteries of the conduct of Christina Light. James is always in control when he makes us guess at the dimly conveyed sexual feelings which presumably underlie Christina's rather synthetically femme fatale manner. With Rowland, Mary and Roderick he seems to be making assumptions about their emotional nature and then turning those assumptions into the faits accomplis of his plot. The main drama of the novel turns on a situation which seems to be more imposed from above than to spring from within their characters. The novelist often seems unaware that his reader may be asking questions which he would find it hard to answer himself. The answers the novel gives tend to be on the surface and only help to build up a schematic coherence of themes rather than a coherence of felt life. It is easy to find in Roderick Hudson a superstructure of contrasts between egoism and love, passion and intelligence, inexperience and experience, but this does not make it any

37. The passage on p. 157 about Rowland's "moral passion" explains nothing. 38. On p. 234 Christina is described - poor girl - as a "tableau vivant" and a "figure of radiant picturesqueness".
easier to see Roderick himself as a human being instead of as banal object-lesson of the danger of relying on inspiration. The presence in the novel of a thematic clarity which masks its human obscurity has always made me feel it was a rather frigid book, especially in the way Roderick becomes a monotonous cabotin. Part of the novel may seem more like a put-on than a genuine try-out but the root of the trouble is probably that James could not commit himself to his entire creation because he was still groping to find the right subject-matter for his special gifts. He is rarely as derivative in his characterisation as he is with Roderick and this suggests that he was not deeply interested in him, except as a kind of inflated ficelle for threading together his own thinking about his art. If it could be done with even a fairly loose James novel it would be tempting to do what Laavis did with Daniel Deronda: that is, forget half of Roderick Hudson and call it Rowland Mallet.

At one point in the novel James writes tritely that "Roderick was in the vein and would do something eminently original" (RH, p. 227). We are left equally in the dark in the scene where Rowland and Mary are in the Vatican and he is busy "expounding aesthetics à perte de vue" (RH, p. 235). Perhaps the main reason for the abstractness which enters the prose in the descriptions of Roderick's sculptures is that James is not as interested in a finished expression as in the struggle to express the self. This explains why Singleton's effort to create small landscapes comes over more plausibly than does Roderick's "genius" and why the author seems to regard Singleton with so much more affection. On the moral plane - if it is right to make that distinction - one notes that one's sympathies in

39. Think what Balzac might have made of him by sympathising with his monomania as he does with Balthasar Claes' in La Recherche de l'Absolu. As soon as the young HJ gave himself Balzacian situations to treat he lost himself.

40. Rowland too?
the book are most directed to people who are struggling to express themselves: Rowland, Christina, perhaps Mary, and even the Cavaliere.

In Rowland's conversation with Cecilia in the first chapter he says that:

'I am clever enough to want more than I have got. I am tired of myself, my own thoughts, my own affairs, my own eternal company. True happiness, we are told, consists in getting out of one's self; but the point is not only to get out - you must stay out; and to stay out you must have some absorbing errand. Unfortunately I have no errand, and nobody will trust me with one. I want to care for something or for somebody, And I want to care with a certain ardour; even, if you can believe it, with a certain passion. I can't just now feel passionate about a hospital or a dormitory. Do you know I sometimes think that I am a man of genius half-finished? The genius has been left out, the faculty of expression is wanting; but the need for expression remains, and I spend my days groping for the latch of a closed door."

'What an immense number of words!', said Cecilia after a pause, 'to say you want to fall in love!' (RH, p. 27)

Roderick's role is to provide the "absorbing errand", although it is Mary whom Rowland falls in love with. Roderick does much the same thing for Christina later and he fails her in a similar way. She wants him to exemplify the intense life that she craves. She, too, has only "a certain passion". In chapter 10 she gives Rowland a more self-centred version of the speech he made to Cecilia:

'You see I am a strange girl. To begin with I am frightfully egotistical. Don't flatter yourself you have said anything very clever if you ever take it into your head to tell me so. I know it much better than you. So it is, I can't help it. I am tired to death of myself; but somehow at the end I find myself so vastly more interesting than nine-tenths of the people I meet. If a person wished to do me a favour I would say to him, "I beg you with tears in my eyes to interest me. Be strong, be positive, be imperious, if you will; only be something - something that in looking at I can forget my detestable self!" Perhaps that is nonsense too. If it is, I can't help it.' (RH, p. 150).

Christina wants to lose herself rather than give herself, to be blotted out by a larger and less insecure ego than her own. This comes out in the rather artificially staged scene in the Coliseum when she eggs Roderick on to bring her a flower which is niched in a dangerous place.
James does not want Roderick to become that kind of Romantic figure and Rowland, who has overheard their conversation, is there to restrain Roderick in the nick of time. Christina's vicarious vision of passion cannot be sustained and she lapses back into the toils of her own self-consciousness. She leaves in a fiacre, crying behind her veil. The whole scene is like a contrived and cerebrally dramatic reflection of Emma Bovary's abortive elopement with Rodolphe.

Ford Madox Ford may have been rather gross when he found in James a "peculiar passionlessness" but the worked-up drama of the scene in the Coliseum needs some explanation. Wyndham Lewis offers a clue to one:

... Henry James, who is undoubtedly, in the Anglo-Saxon world, the great genteel classic, embodying better than any other single man the principles of Anglo-Saxon 'idealism', in opposition to the more rough and pagan principles which have always obtained upon the European continent. (42)

This chimes with the way Rowland is described as "extremely fond of all the arts, and he had an almost passionate enjoyment of pictures". (RH, p. 26). All it misses describing is the feline irony that introduces that word "almost", and so it makes James sound unintelligent. In one way it is only too easy not to see Rowland as cold and to respond to his quiet and grave intensity of feeling almost because of the formality that hides it. There is a more subtle distinction than Lewis's in one of James's French critics: "James attribue donc à l'amour une signification profonde, comme émotion sinon comme passion." We are all the time being

41. HJ: A Critical Study (1913), p. 25. (NB. what Ford says in this book about HJ's relations with GF is pure invention.)
42. "HJ: The Arch Enemy of 'Low Company'", Men Without Art (1934), pp. 138-139.
43. When Mrs. Light breaks down in his presence Rowland reflects that "there is something respectable in passionate grief". (RH, p. 267).
44. G. Marcow-Totévy, Henry James, with a preface by André Maurois (1958), p. 76.
told that Rowland's feeling for Mary is infinitely deeper than Roderick's. Where Lewis's word "genteel" really sticks is, it seems to me, for the description of James's early prose. Rowland's formality seems just an aspect of the narrator's prose, which is what makes one feel sure that there is more of James in Rowland than in any one else in the book. I am never certain what it is that makes critics commend the early prose for what Gorley Pult calls its "freshness". It seems to me characterised by the cultivation of an ease of manner and a pompously ironic urbanity - a sort of formal informality - that is far too self-conscious to be called "fresh". Here at random is a passage from chapter I which is representative:

Cecilia met him in the early dusk at the gate of her little garden, amid a studied cultivation of horticultural odours. A rosy widow of twenty-eight, half-cousin, half-hostess, doing the honours of a fragrant cottage on a midsummer evening, was a phenomenon to which the young man's imagination was able to do ample justice. Cecilia was always gracious, but this evening she was almost joyous. She was in a happy mood, and Mallet imagined there was a private reason for it - a reason quite different from her pleasure in receiving her honoured kinsman. (RH, p. 24) (46)

This writing may be more pleasant than bad but the style is one that easily drops, in the same chapter, into an essentially uncreative pretension:

He had seen himself in imagination, more than once, in some mouldy old saloon of a Florentine palace, turning toward the deep embrasure of the window some scarcely-faded Ghirlandaio or Botticelli, while a host in reduced circumstances pointed out the lovely drawing of a hand. (RH, p. 26)

Even simple narration can suffer from a stilted jocosity: we are told of Rowland's grandfather that "he was able to retire, prematurely for so seaworthy a maritime organism, upon a pension of his own providing."

(RH, p. 29) Such lapses are not the rule but they do alert us to the implicit distance from which the narrator regards his characters. This

46. Leavis finds in this ingratiating ironic manner a "finer and fuller consciousness" than is found in Dickens's irony. (Great Tradition, p. 147). HJ's prose seems to me not more mature but simply more civil.
distance is not always a means for what Leavis, in his account of James, calls "discrimination". It can, for example, betray a great deal of uneasiness on James's part when he comes to describe Rowland's deepest emotions. In chapter 16 there is a passage which makes a very embarrassed attempt at getting over the reader's surprise at the persistence of his feeling for Mary:

Very odd, you may say, that at this time of day Rowland should still be brooding over a girl of no brilliancy, of whom he had had but the lightest of glimpses two years before; very odd that so deep an impression should have been made by so lightly pressed an instrument. We must admit the oddity, and remark simply in explanation that his sentiment apparently belonged to that species of emotion of which by the testimony of the poets the very name and essence are oddity. (RH, p. 215)

Can one tell whether his feeling is "odd" or not when it is being hidden by the prose? The word "simply" and the allusion to "the poets" in the second sentence seem merely wishful gestures towards creation. In general, the novel is happier when it is telling us the effect of a person's being than at showing their sense of being from inside. The treatment of Christina is the obvious example of this and another symptom is the way James indulges in a kind of connoisseurship when he describes the appearance of his characters. He did not get the following picture of Roderick from Balzac:

The features were admirably chiselled and finished, and a frank smile played over them as gracefully as a breeze among flowers. The fault of the young man's whole structure was an excessive want of breadth. (RH, p. 37).

This detail is sufficiently indicative and I will finish by quoting the way James deals with a big dramatic moment, Mary face to face with Roderick's dead body:

In the doorway, clinging together, appeared the two bereaved women. Mrs. Hudson tottered forward with outstretched hands and the expression of a blind person; but before she reached

47 e.g. Great Tradition, p. 156.
her son Mary Garland had rushed past her and, in the face of the staring, pitying, awe-stricken crowd, had flung herself with the magnificent movement of one whose rights were supreme and with a loud tremendous cry, upon the senseless vestige of her love.

That cry still lives in Rowland's ears. (RH, p. 349).

If anything lives in our ears it is the build-up to the nauseatingly sculpturesque cadencing of "the senseless vestige of her love". I have quoted enough from Madame Bovary in previous chapters to show how different this is from real prose poetry. It is sufficient to refer to, say, Emma and Charles's first meeting, the description of the aristocrats at la Vaubyessard or père Roualt's journey to Emma's funeral to remind ourselves how much less self-consciously than this a real "openness before life" communicates itself.

The distance of the prose from what it is describing might seem to imply that James is adopting a pose in order to work up the novel's social comedy. I think this conclusion would be going too far; not only because it would lead to an under-estimate of the comic felicity with which James catches his expatriate milieu but because it ignores something more complex in the novel which James is trying, fitfully, to explore. It is the narrator's occasional embarrassments and the way he cannot resist a telling scene or an apparently fine phrase that alerts us to the complexity I am thinking of. It is not just fanciful to observe that the kind of distance maintained by the prose is mirrored by an aloofness in Rowland which is directed not so much at other people as towards his own deepest feelings. He constantly gives the impression of being only half in touch with the deepest springs of his own nature, or —what is perhaps just another way of saying the same thing— James seems only half in touch with them. This seems to be the real application of Eliot's remark that James failed to "detect" Rowland: 48 if Rowland sometimes seems a prig.

it is because there are crucial points in his life at which James's intelligence fails him and he can only ask us to emote. One such moment is during a conversation with Roderick in chapter 19 when the subject of Roderick's engagement to Mary is at last raised between them. As usual Roderick speaks with selfish fatuity and for the first time Rowland sees a possibility of making love to Mary himself:

Rowland's thoughts were crowding upon him fast. If Roderick was resolute, why should he be gainsaid? If Mary was to be sacrificed, why in that way try to save her? There was another way; it only needed a little presumption to make it possible. Rowland tried to summon presumption to his aid; but whether it should come or not it was to find conscience there before it. Conscience had only three words, but they were cogent. 'For her sake - for her sake', it dumbly murmured, and Rowland resumed his argument. 'I don't know what I wouldn't do', he said, 'rather than that Miss Garland should be ill-used'.

'There is one thing to be said', Roderick answered reflectively. 'She is very strong.'

'Well then, if she's strong, believe that with a longer chance, a better chance, she will regain your affection'. (RH, p. 243) (49)

"Conscience" is an abstraction brought in from outside. It glosses over the real nature of Rowland's feelings - why is he unable to "summon presumption to his aid"? - and leaves us only an opportunity to be "moved" by his noble conduct. Rowland may not understand himself why he lacks the positive will to try to realise his desire but James's evasion of this question tends to make one doubt whether he really has the desire at all. The upshot is that there is little life in the supposed conflict between duty and passion within him. This is the more frustrating to the reader because something humanly strange has been glimpsed, rationalised and then lost by the author.

49. Another place where one wonders how serious HJ really is about the inner conflict in Rowland is the passage on pp. 216-218, which begins interestingly but ends with a stagey scene in which he tells a monk that he has seen the Devil but has driven him out of "Paradise". Rowland goes on holding our interest despite such scenes because he has a certain toughness - e.g. in his frankness to Christina - as well as the priggishness that Eliot dislikes.
The consequence of this failure to take us into Rowland's feelings is that James manipulates his plot to bring them in surreptitiously. For example he has so much moral capital invested in Mary's pious self-denying reticence about her feeling for Roderick that he is reluctant to enter far into Roderick's infatuation with Christina. This might have been another interesting subject to explore but the man who can turn up his nose at Mary Garland is so inevitably a petulant adolescent that Roderick's feeling for Christina - it is presumably a response to her seductiveness rather than the theatricality on which James prefers to dwell - remains a blank to us. This makes it possible for us to feel a growing animus against Roderick which compounds our pity for Rowland.

James uses Mary in a similar way. In a scene which echoes the one in the Coliseum Rowland indulges his feelings to the extent of getting a wild flower from a dangerous place for Mary (RH, pp. 312-313). The problem this creates is that the perceptive and mature Mary fails to see that it is love for her that prompts Rowland's reckless action. As a result, the pathos we should feel at Rowland's strange inability to express himself in words gets dissipated by the feeling that James enjoys dwelling on his inarticulacy. What gives the game away is that because there is never any rupture of Mary's and Roderick's engagement James spares Rowland from a situation in which he would have to declare himself, to stake everything on being able to live the life he wants. The plotting of James's novels, in fact, often ensures that this sort of choice is never really forced on the characters like Rowland: Acton, in The Europeans, is partly let off the hook by the Baroness's lie, Ralph Touchett is from the start an invalid, Hyacinth Robinson opts for suicide. These other situations must be discussed later but it is surely significant, here, that the point at which Roderick Hudson closes is with
a picture of Rowland making rare and fleeting visits to Northampton to see Mary - and Cecilia.

If Roderick Hudson is more uncertain than the later novels it is mostly because James, against his bent, attempts the kind of big emotional scene that he learnt to carefully eschew by the time he wrote The Europeans and Washington Square. One such scene, which quickly fades from the memory, is in chapter 21 when Roderick announces to his mother, Rowland and Mary that he is a failure; another, more thought-provoking, scene is the altercation which Rowland and Roderick have just before Roderick goes off on the walk which leads to his death. It begins with Roderick trying to borrow money from Rowland to go to see Christina (now the Princess Cassamassima) and threatening to borrow it from Mary. This develops into the statement that he has "suffered" - something the novel makes it difficult to see - and the indulgence of a few hometruths about Rowland's character:

'You ask too much, for a man who himself has no occasion to play the hero. I don't say that invidiously; it's your disposition and you can't help it. But decidedly there are certain things you know nothing about.'

Rowland listened to this outbreak with open eyes, and Roderick, if he had been less intent upon his own eloquence, would probably have perceived that he turned pale. 'These things - what are they?' Rowland asked.

'They are women, principally, and what relates to women. Women for you, by what I can make out, mean nothing. You have no imagination - no sensibility, nothing to be touched!'

'That's a serious charge', said Rowland gravely. (RH, p. 335) (50)

If there is a disturbing insight into Rowland here it is rather too easily repressed again by the crude way in which Roderick puts it and the fact that by this point James has made him far too insufferable for the reader to see him as a truth-teller. We are feeling so exclusively

50. In The Conquest of London (p. 360) Edel quotes the following remark from E.S. Nadal's "Personal Recollections of HJ" in Scribner's for July, 1920: "The quality of sex in women, which is their first and chief attraction to most men, was not their chief attraction to James". (Nadal knew HJ during his spell as a secretary to the American legation in London in the late 1870s.)
that poor Rowland loves Mary much more deeply than Roderick does that there is no temptation to concentrate on a statement like this:

'There is something monstrous in a man's pretending to lay down the law to a sort of emotion with which he is quite unacquainted - in his asking a fellow to give up a lovely woman for conscience's sake when he has never had the impulse to strike a blow for one for passion's!' 'Oh, oh!' cried Rowland. (RH, p. 336)

James is saying through Roderick exactly what I have been trying to say about Rowland. What stops us from really thinking about what he says is that it is so easy to let Rowland give vent to his justifiable anger and turn the situation by telling Roderick himself a few home-truths:

Rowland frowned; if Roderick would not take generosity he should have full justice. 'It's a perpetual sacrifice to live with a transcendent egotist!' 'I am an egotist?' cried Roderick. 'Did it never occur to you?' 'An egotist to whom you have made perpetual sacrifices?' He repeated the words in a singular tone; a tone that denoted neither indignation nor incredulity, but (strange as it may seem) sudden violent curiosity for news about himself. 'You are selfish', said Rowland; 'you think only of yourself and believe only in yourself. You regard other people only as they play into your hands...' (RH, pp. 337-338)

In this way Rowland refutes the charge that he is "an abnormal being". (RH, p. 339). He is able to go on to a long-expected moral victory over Roderick by revealing that he has been in love with Mary for two years and that he has also done all he could to preserve her engagement with Roderick. For all the contrived nature of this row, it reveals a very original gift for giving us the interaction of two very different people in dialogue. This said, it also has to be admitted that the scene fails to become truly dramatic because of a stagey quality that encourages the reader to a facile emotional response. What starts as a genuinely dramatic conflict between two people, with the author's intelligence controlling the scene in such a way that we can enter into the point of view of each of them without coming down on either side, ends with us firmly identifying
with only one of them - the easiest to identify with: the person in
the right. It seems as if James needs to do this if he is to find any way
of voicing the obvious reaction to Rowland's love, the reaction he was
trying to defend Rowland against in that uneasy passage about its "oddity".
For some reason, the insight has to be simplified and then slipped
covertly into what is ostensibly a large statement about the nature of
Roderick's "egoism". 51

When I come to this point in the novel and still find myself
trying to plumb the mainsprings of the central character I conclude that
what is being offered is not a real "openness before life" but a surface
drama which is sufficiently schematised to allow a half-controlled
substratum of psychological perception to float up at moments into view.
One's attitude to this substratum has to be tentative because James seems
tentative about it himself. All I would claim is that if - or even
because? - it is less artistically controlled it is far more absorbing
and disconcerting than what occurs at the level of the novel's "themes".
My own inference is that what we are getting is some disguised self-
revelation from James: insights of which he is imperfectly conscious which
well up into the fable as if in dreams. It is really the fact that James
is able to do this sort of dreaming, despite his highly rationalising
concern with structure and method, that interests me in him as a novelist.

Leon Edel's biography of James serves as a warning of the dangers
of giving neat psychological interpretations of the novels and working
up a putative series of complexes to fill in our ignorance of their
author. I shall therefore end this account of Roderick Hudson with only
a brief speculation about its personal resonance. Mary Garland's

51. The idea of dramatic intelligence in this paragraph is indebted to
an excellent recent book on Shakespeare: H.A. Mason's Shakespeare's
unswerving love for Roderick seems to me to be a fact of the plot because it guarantees Rowland the luxury of a stoic withdrawal from living. James wants to protect his hero from something and has no interest in a plot which would lay Rowland's inner uncertainties bare to Rowland himself. What one infers from this is crudely this: that, ultimately, Roderick's art - the "Thist", the lazzarone - was merely a surrogate for some other quality in him which appealed to Rowland. Is it, after all, just an accident that Rowland falls in love with the same woman as Roderick or that it is Rowland who cuts short Roderick's demonstration of his passion for Christina? The precise bearing of these questions matters less than the fact that there is something undeclared in the novel, if it ever becomes explicit it is through the pathos of the scene where Rowland looks at the dead body of Roderick which is now as ideal as one of his own statues:

He had fallen from a great height, but he was singularly little disfigured. The rain had spent its torrents upon him, and his clothes and hair were as wet as if the billows of the ocean had flung him upon the strand. An attempt to move him would show some hideous fracture, some horrible physical dishonour, but what Rowland saw on first looking at him was only a strangely serene expression of life. The eyes were those of a dead man, but in a short time, when Rowland had closed them the whole face seemed to awake. The rain had washed away all blood; it was as if Violence, having done her work, had stolen away in shame. Roderick's face might have shamed her; it looked admirably handsome.

"He was a beautiful fellow!" said Singleton. (RH, p. 348).

One phrase particularly suggests a biographical interpretation of this conclusion to the strange mixture of animus and admiration in the picture of Roderick: "some horrible physical dishonour". One thinks, perhaps impertinently, of the "obscure hurt" which James himself received as a youth. It is tempting to invent a fantasy about the novel like the fantasy of Spencer Brydon in the late ghost story The Jolly Corner: in Roderick James confronts himself with an image of what he might have been
and then exorcises it. But perhaps the idea that the novel has this autobiographical level might never have occurred to me without Leon Edel's sentimentalised account of the way the Rowland/Roderick situation came to life years later in the oddly sublimated homo-erotic affection which James felt for the equally selfish Danish sculptor Hendrik Anderson? 52

This speculation may seem very half-baked but it should also be clear that it is not simply an illegitimate attempt to rewrite Roderick Hudson. The novel itself encourages such rewriting from the reader who wants to understand the life in it. It is finally the responsibility of the author that it leaves us so tantalisingly in the dark. 53

52. The two last volumes of Edel's biography of HJ - The Treacherous Years and The Master - describe the history of this strange platonic relationship. HJ's letters to Anderson have a disturbing pathos; they gush even by the standards of the late letters and combine forlorn irony at HJ's own expense with unaccustomed warmth. It is almost embarrassing to find a man of HJ's maturity and genius in the grip of a virtually adolescent passion. One does not expect the author of so many psychological novels to be so inexperienced at expressing deep personal emotion himself. The feeling might be described as a "crush". Perhaps the floweriness of the letters was HJ's way of distancing himself from a passion which frightened him, of taming it with exaggerated articulateness?

53. I have not mentioned HJ's own preface to RH in this chapter although it makes some of the same criticisms of the novel that are made here. It seems to me that, despite its acuteness, the preface makes the novel more obscure by explaining its unsatisfactoriness in technical terms rather than probing the psychological problems it leaves unanswered. HJ's (un-Balzacian?) concern with technique at that stage of his career might be seen as a more sophisticated way of rationalising the undercurrents of a novel than the use of "themes" in RH itself.
CHAPTER SEVEN

From "The American" to "Washington Square"

... a tendency to withdraw from all personal concerns, from all emotion or action... was mainly because he conceived that this shrinkingness of nature (which foolish persons call egoism) was the necessary complement to his power of intellectual analysis; and that any departure from the position of dispassioned spectator of the world's follies and miseries would mean also a departure from his real duty as a novelist. (1)

At first glance this might seem like a description of Flaubert's "impassibilité" but it is, in fact, from Vernon Lee's fictional portrait of James in her story Lady Tal. I shall come back to what Vernon Lee says about James later in this chapter; the above remarks simply provide for the moment a text from which to explore the question of how James's detachment as a novelist is different from Flaubert's. For it is, I think, very difficult to see Flaubert as shrinking and withdrawing from life in the same way that Vernon Lee sees James as doing so. Flaubert's reserve as an artist, his wish to transcend personal emotion, was accompanied by a wish to immerse himself more deeply in life in general, to become a "coeur général": "cette faculté de s'assimiler à toutes les misères et de se supposer les ayant est peut-être la vraie charité humaine". The argument of this chapter will be that James is a very different kind of "dispassioned spectator" and that this is shown by the way he handles those characters into whose consciousness he is most concerned to enter.

James may well have learnt much of his technique of the central consciousness from Flaubert but he put it to radically different uses. (2)

2. The following discussion of GIP's and HJ's different ways of dealing with a character's subjective interpretations of reality has benefitted greatly from the discussion of the problem in relation to George Eliot in the unpublished Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis by Kenneth M. Newton, "George Eliot and Romanticism: Romantic Elements in George Eliot's Thought and Their Relation to the Structure of Her Novels" (1972). Newton argues convincingly that George Eliot should be seen as a kind of neo-Kantian structuralist.
When Flaubert lets us see things from Emma's point of view he does so with a satiric intention, in order to sabotage her romantic subjectivity. His irony centres on the discrepancies between the way she sees the world and the way the world really is. The emphasis of the novel is on the illusoriness of her vision rather than its creativeness. Point-of-view is used somewhat in the spirit of Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*; that is, Emma's wishes are explored in order to reveal the true, un-ideal nature of the world in which they originate. Flaubert writes as if there were an immanent reality in the world, even though his world seems to have no God in it. His novels may suggest that the way the world appears to any one person depends on the subjective interpretation they put on the world but he sees such interpretations as being essentially the way people deceive themselves as to the real nature of the world. In other words, interpretations may change but reality does not change with them, it is always the same, governed by the same universal laws of time, change and death. Therefore, the imagination is seen as a cross to be borne, the source of that human blindness about the world which is responsible both for the tragedy and for the comedy of life. It is true that there are moments in *Madame Bovary* when one is tempted to see Emma's idealism and imaginativeness as signs of a spiritual superiority in her - this is how R.P. Blackmur saw her - but in general Flaubert presents them as signs of her inability to face the real. When we read the novel we are plunged into a relentless sequence of events in which Emma constantly embroiders reality in her dreams only to be rudely awoken, time after time, to the perception of its grim, unembroidered nature. Her moments of disillusionment come as inevitably as if they were the work of some inscrutable and malignant Fate. Reality seems immutable and inescapable; it is its nature to be hostile to man's creative and idealising faculties.
Therefore, wisdom consists in accepting this fact and the noblest and truest use of the imagination is simply to see the world clearly as it is. This is, of course, what Emma cannot do but what Flaubert sees it as his responsibility as a novelist to do. The reader is asked to fix his or her mind on a vision of the real.

In James's novels the real does not dispel the imagined in the same way. James is more pragmatic and likes to make us hold together in our minds the imagination of the real and the imagination of the possible at the same time. In *The Ambassadors*, for example, we take Strether's romantic interpretation of reality both as a comic instance of his naïveté and as an index of his spiritual distinction. For James, the imagination is most nobly used when it is used both to see life as it is and, at the same time, to see life as it might be. Especially in his later novels, the world invites innumerable possible interpretations of which none is totally true. He therefore uses the technique of point-of-view as a way of presenting the kind of imagination which Flaubert presents as a curse as a source of spiritual value, a blessing. He does, of course, offer many examples of the kind of irony which has just been described as pervading Flaubert's novels. It would be far too simplistic to set him up as being an idealist in contrast to a Flaubert who was just a realist. Nevertheless, there is this essential difference between them, that the kind of imaginativeness which is satirised by Flaubert is celebrated by James, and the reason for the difference is that where Flaubert tends to

3. For HJ as a pragmatist, see Marius Bewley's *The Complex Fate* which has a good discussion of the connection between his thought and that of William James. Bewley argues that, "It is this pragmatic bent in James, 'this extreme freedom of improvisation' in the world of human behaviour - this belief that there is no immutable reality behind appearances, but that appearances can always be twisted into new and convenient realities - which constitutes so much of Henry James's American flavour." (p. 148). The apt words "twisted" and "convenient" seem to me to call for a more critical judgement of the novels than Bewley is prepared to make.
see life universally James sees it much more pragmatically.  

I can perhaps make what I am saying rather more clear by a brief allusion to James's book on Hawthorne. The book is often read as if James were criticising Hawthorne because he was not a Balzacian realist and as if James himself felt a longing to be an American Balzac, the recorder of a complex society, when he wrote it. This is partly true and, what is more, the essays on Balzac in French Poets and Novelists, which was published just before the Hawthorne, suggest that at this stage in his career James's own creative concerns made him so responsive to the realistic Balzac that he failed to take proper note of the visionary Balzac so much admired by Baudelaire. But if James criticised Hawthorne from the standpoint of European realism he also had a positive reason for wanting to write about him: a deep interest in Hawthorne's use of "romance". Never a literal kind of realist himself, he could see that Hawthorne's kind of "romance" might be turned into an essential part of the equipment of the true realist which he himself aspired to be:

Hungry for the picturesque as he (Hawthorne) always was, and not finding any very copious provision of it around him, he turned back into the two preceding centuries, with the earnest determination that the primitive annals of Massachusetts should at least appear picturesque. His fancy, which was always alive, played a little with the somewhat meagre and angular facts of the colonial period and forthwith converted a great many of them into impressive legends and pictures. There is a little infusion of colour, a little vagueness about certain details, but it is very gracefully and discreetly done, and realities are kept in view sufficiently to make us feel that if we are reading romance, it is romance that rather supplements than contradicts history. The early

4. It might be argued that it was thanks to his philosophical anachronism in GF, this harking back to a pre-Romantic idea of reality as having an immanent structure, that he was able to come so near to writing a tragic novel.

5. Baudelaire refers frequently to Balzac in Curiosités Esthétiques and L'Art Romantique and his view of him should be set against HJ's.

annals of New England were not fertile in legend, but Hawthorne laid his hands upon everything that would serve his purpose, and in two or three cases his version of the story has a great deal of beauty. The Grey Champion is a sketch of less than eight pages, but the little figures stand up in the tale as stoutly, at the least, as if they were propped up on half a dozen chapters by a dryer annalist, and the whole thing has the merit of those cabinet pictures in which the artist has been able to make his persons look the size of life.

Hawthorne, to say it again, was not in the least a realist - he was not to my mind enough of one; but there is no genuine lover of the good city of Boston but will feel grateful to him for his courage in attempting to recount the "traditions" of Washington Street, the main thoroughfare of the Puritan capital. (7)

This is just one passage in the book in which James analyses the paradoxical fact that although Hawthorne is no realist, and despite his taste for the picturesque and the symbolical, he manages to say so much about the reality of New England. If Hawthorne embroiders the facts this does not mean that he distorts or conceals them but, strangely, that he brings them to life: "it is romance that rather supplements than contradicts history". It is precisely this imaginative quality in Hawthorne's "romance" which James tries to give to so many of the Americans who are the centres of consciousness in his own novels.

Christopher Newman, the hero of The American (1877), has Hawthorne's penchant for "romance" just as he has something of the American simplicity and provinciality that James attributed to Hawthorne. As a successful businessman he has already made his life conform to the demands of his imagination before he arrives in Paris: from a penniless adventurer he has become one of the new Western millionaires. In Paris his imagination is tested even further when he falls in love with Claire de Cintre who is his social and cultural opposite, aristocratic where he is plebian, civilised where he is gauche, polished where he is rough.

One thing the novel does is to show him as an American romantic in a world of European cynics - one might almost say "realists" since at this date realism was so often thought of as being synonymous with cynicism. These cynics are Madame de Cintré's family and they inhabit what is ostensibly a bastion of French culture, the Faubourg St. Germain. Part of Newman's experience in the novel is that he is gradually educated into a knowledge of how un-romantic and un-ideal these people really are, his eyes are opened to their real nature as he comes to see all the moral shabbiness which their urbanity conceals. Put like this, it sounds as if the novel is about the way romantic illusions have to be shed in the face of reality, as if it is another version of Les Illusions Perdus. In fact, Newman is not spiritually destroyed like Lucien de Rubempré because James is much more concerned than Balzac is to show that there is something in the world which answers to the needs of romantic idealism. Madame de Cintré's family may fail to live up to the romantic promise of high civilisation which Newman is tempted to see in them but the realistic brush which tarnishes them leaves her unsmirched: she remains an ideal creature and, although Newman fails to win her, the fact that she exists satisfies his imagination and, indeed, forces him to extend his notion of the ideal. Although the novel is about the failure of his romantic aspirations to come to fruition in reality it is also about the way reality forces him to jettison a relatively vulgar idealism in favour of a more sublime kind. It is precisely because James treats the romantic world of aristocratic Paris in such an ironical, deflationary way that he is able to plant an ideal creature of romance in it while in the very act of saying that it is un-romantic. He both sabotages and

8. HJ's version of the French aristocracy has often been criticised as a sub-Balzacian fantasy by French readers. See, for example, Garnier, HJ et la France, p. 31. Garnier considers the novel to be marred by being prejudiced against France and this may be because it was written at the time when HJ had just reacted against Paris and settled in London.
corroborates Newman's idealism. He explodes Newman's innocent illusions about Parisian civilisation only to come up with what might seem an even more fairy-tale version of it himself, for Madame de Cintré is meant to represent the fine flower of that civilisation, however much she may seem like one of his own American girls. I am not sure whether this testifies to a complexity in the novel or whether it is really no more than a piece of double-think on James's part. The American is one of the few James novels where the relationships of Americans and Europeans are described so as to suggest simplistic antitheses and much of it strikes me as being crudely written. What is interesting in it, for my purposes, is the way it shows how James gives his central consciousness, Newman, the same kind of creativeness as he himself is exemplifying as a novelist in describing him.

This point can be brought out, without going through the novel in detail, by relating one passage from the novel to James's description in his preface, of what he was doing in writing it. The passage is from the opening of chapter 13 and it concerns the nature of Newman's feeling for Madame de Cintré. The question I would like the reader to ask himself in reading it is whether it manages to make her seem like a real person with a life outside of Newman's imagination. A long quotation is necessary:

He kept his promise, or his menace, of presenting himself often in the Rue de l'Université, and during the next six weeks saw Madame de Cintré more times than he could have numbered. He flattered himself he had not fallen, and hadn't needed to fall, after the fashion enjoined by him on Valentin, in love, but his biographer may be supposed to know better what, as he would have said, was the matter with him. He claimed certainly none of the exemptions and emoluments of the merely infatuated state. That state, he considered, was too consistent with asinity, and he had never had a firmer control of his reason or a higher opinion of his judgement. What he was conscious of, none the less, was an intense all-consuming tenderness, which had for its object an extraordinarily graceful and harmonious, yet at the same time insidiously agitating woman who lived in a grand grey house on the left bank of the Seine.
His theory of his relation to her was that he had become conscious of how beautifully she might, for the question of his future, come to his aid; but this left unexplained the fact that his confidence had somehow turned to a strange, muffled heartache. He was in truth infinitely anxious, and, when he questioned his anxiety, knew it was not all for himself. If she might come to his aid he might come to hers; and he had the imagination—more than he had ever had in his life about anything—of fantastic straits or splendid miseries in the midst of which, standing before her with wide arms out, he would have seen her let herself, even if still just desperately and blindly, make for his close embrace as for a refuge.

He really wouldn't have minded if some harsh need for mere money had driven her; the creak of that hinge would have been sweet to him had it meant the giving way of the door of separation. What he wanted was to take her, and that her feeling herself taken should come back to him for their common relief. The full surrender, so long as she didn't make it, left the full assurance an unrest and a yearning—from which all his own refuge was in the fine ingenuity, the almost grim extravagnace, of the prospective provision he was allowing to accumulate. She gave him the sense of "suiting" him so, exactly as she was, that his desire to interpose for her and close about her had something of the quality of what solicitude with which a fond mother might watch from the window even the restricted garden-play of a child recovering from an accident. But he was above all simply charmed, and the more for feeling wonderstruck, as the days went on, at the proved rightness both of the instinct and of the calculation what had originally moved him. It was as if there took place for him, each day, such a revelation of the possible number of forms of the "personal" appeal as he could otherwise never have enjoyed, and as made him yet ask himself how, how, all unaided (save as Mrs. Tristram, subtle woman, had aided him!) he could have known. For he had, amazingly, known. And the impression must now thereby have been for him, he thought, very much that of the wistful critic or artist who studies "style" in some exquisite work or some quiet genius, and who sees it come and come and come, and still never fail, like the truth of a perfect voice or the safety of a perfect temper. Just as such a student might say to himself, "How could I have got on without this particular research?" so Christopher Newman could only say, "Fancy this being to be had and—with my general need—my not having it!"

He made no violent love and, as he would have said, no obvious statements; he just attended regularly, as he would also have said, in the manner of the "interested party" present at some great liquidation where he must keep his eye on what concerns him. He never trespassed on ground she had made him regard, ruefully enough, as forbidden; but he had none the less a sustaining sense that she knew better from day to day all the good he thought of her. (9)

9. The American, pp. 210-212. This passage is in many ways very different from the first version of the opening of chapter 13 and many of the points made in the discussion which follows would need to be formulated rather differently in an account of the first version. The reader can check whether my argument applies, as it is meant to, to either version. It is worth adding that the first version is not always more freshly written than the New York revision: at many points it is more flowery.
Though this gives a delicate sense of two people mutually recognizing each other the fact that James is describing their love from Newman's standpoint means that the emphasis of the passage falls less on their love than on the faculty of loving in Newman. That is, James's main concern is to show how the image of Madame de Cintre is being nursed in Newman's imagination so that she gradually seems to take on an ideal quality and to become a figure of "romance", both for Newman and for James who are both, here, romancers. The image of Newman as "the wistful critic or artist who studies "style" in some exquisite work or some quiet genius" makes his feeling seem more aesthetic than passionate for the moment. This impression is strengthened by the fact that "he had never had a firmer control of his reason" and that he makes "no violent love" to her. If he were not like this, if James's main concern had been to show us a depth in a man answering to a depth in a woman in a more dramatic way, then things would have been different: Newman would "have minded if some harsh need for mere money had most driven her" and he would not have been sustained just by the "sense that she knew better from day to day all the good that he thought of her". Both Newman and James would have been more concerned about how Madame de Cintre actually feels about Newman. As it is, her feelings are in a way taken for granted because they are so much less relevant to the narrator than the feelings which Newman's imagination can impute to her. For, I would argue, James is more interested in making Newman's vision of Madame de Cintre into the reader's vision of her than he is - here or elsewhere in the novel - in making the reader see the affair from her point-of-view so that the reader can compare the image of her that Newman has with what she really is in fact. This is not to deny that Madame de Cintre does have a certain tenuous reality as a character - in some ways she is very realistically
described in terms of her looks, her class and her setting. But, despite this, our abiding impression of her is that she is a figure of "romance" and that this is because James has used his central consciousness in such a way that we feel Newman's personal way of imagining her imperceptibly becoming the way the novel as a whole asks us to imagine her. Point-of-view, therefore, is being used in an entirely different way from the way Flaubert uses it: to compound rather than to undermine the individual character's way of seeing the life in the novel.  

James is detached from Newman in many ways, in the comic use he makes of him for example, but ultimately his detachment from Newman's way of seeing things is less than is his attachment to it. If the novel leaves Madame de Cintré seeming rather vague and unexplained this is a consequence of the way it has handled point-of-view, so that we know far more about Newman than about her. The American lacks the Flaubertian kind of detachment which consists in the reader's being immersed equally deeply in the points of view of each of the participants in a drama.

There is too little space here to demonstrate this criticism of The American properly but it can be partly substantiated, and its relevance to my general argument brought out, by turning to James's preface to the novel. The preface describes the same use of "romance" in the novel as I have been trying to describe and it makes some of the same criticisms.

10. A similar point is challengingly put by R. Michaud, Mystiques et Réalistes Anglo-Saxons: "que font en définitive les globe-trotters et esthètes de Henry James, sinon perpétuer jusqu'à nous le romantisme que nous croyions démodé et que l'Amérique nous renvoie, nuancé et plus délicat, un demi-siècle après que nous le lui avons donné?" (p.120).

11. For example, the parting scene between Newman and Madame de Cintré in chapter 20 succeeds in working up a considerable dramatic excitement of a rather nervous, superficial sort but leaves one feeling that HJ is more concerned to make her behaviour contribute to the excitement of our suspense on Newman's behalf than to give a convincing human explanation of her feelings.
of the novel that I have just made, but it also rejoices in the use of Newman as a centre of consciousness. There is, then, a critical self-contradiction in the judgement made by the preface and it is, I think, a self-contradiction of great importance to our understanding of James’s art.

James begins by noticing that in The American he had "been plotting arch-romance without knowing it". By "arch-romance" he means a disposition to play imaginatively with what he takes to be reality. It is perhaps the same kind of creative activity which had the odd joint-effect of making Roderick Hudson so psychologically unconvincing at the same time as it was throwing shafts of half-light into its darkest corners. Looking back on The American from a distance of thirty years James was most struck by its freedom of inventiveness: "I lose myself, at this late hour, I am bound to add, in a certain sad envy of the free play of so much unchallenged instinct". (AN, p. 25). This faculty of imaginative recreation is especially fertile in youth - one thinks of a poem like Shelley's The Witch of Atlas - and James says that "it was lucky to have sacrificed on this particular altar while one still could". (AN, p. 26). In fact, James always possessed it in abundance and some of his late tales - even The Beast in the Jungle and The Jolly Corner - gain much of their vitality from a kind of serious playing with fancy. The most sympathetic aspect of the late James's concern with "form" is that it is really a way of liberating his instinct to play with reality. It is some such instinct which Christopher Newman possesses: his imagination conspires with his love for Madame de Cintre to transform her into a figure of "romance". As such she comes to seem distant from the reader and rather evanescent.  

13. Examples of the same kind of "romance" abound in the other novels; for example, in the way Verena is seen through the eyes of Basil Ransome in The Bostonians and Milly Theale through the eyes of Kate and Densher in The Wings of the Dove.
It is precisely the need of the artist to maintain a distance from the impressions he uses creatively which James goes on to discuss in his preface. For example, he says that to render the feeling of a city like Paris:

"The image has had for the most part to be dim if the reflexion was to be, as is proper for a reflexion, both sharp and quiet: one has a horror, I think, artistically, of agitated reflexions. (AN, p. 27)."

Such "reflexions" testify to the imagination's capacity to take off from the "real" into the inner world of the "romantic":

"The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another; it being but one of the accidents of our hampered state, and one of the incidents of their quantity and number, that particular instances have not yet come our way. The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire. (AN, pp. 31-32)."

This could almost stand as a description of the relation in which the "romantic" Emma Bovary stands to the "real" Yonville l'Abbaye were it not for the fact that for James "the romantic" is more unequivocably a spiritual value and is seen much less as escapism: its "subterfuge" is "beautiful". The example of Madame Bovary in fact occurs to James and it helps him to define the way his own art of "romance" is different from Flaubert's: "It would be impossible to have a more romantic temper than Flaubert's Madame Bovary, and yet nothing less resembles a romance than the record of her adventures." (AN, p. 33). Flaubert's analysis of Emma's dreams always has the object of bringing them up short against reality so that we see, say, Rodolphe changing from a hero of "romance" into a paltry egotist. James handles Newman's consciousness in such a way that we are nearer to witnessing a change in the opposite direction:
Madame de Cintré becomes more, rather than less, "romantic". Our final image of her is in a way a tribute to the strength of Newman's imagination whereas our final image of Rodolphe underlines the inadequacy of Emma's. This is because James finds his artistic truth in a transcending of the "real" just as Newman comes to love more deeply by turning Madame de Cintré into an object of imaginative contemplation. To draw out the analogy to its limits one might say that just as Newman's conception of her beauty, and of the beauty of his love for her, helps him to resign himself to losing her, so James resigns himself to the failure of realism in *The American* when he considers how successful it is as "romance":

> The balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are.

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14. The preface to *The American* helps one to understand why HJ disliked *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. GF gives us a tragic version of the imaginative instinct to play with reality. Saint Antoine's dreams are frightening hallucinations far from enabling him to play with outside reality he is at their mercy and played with by them. GF has none of that Jamesian relativism which would let the saint turn them into the recreation of "romance" by subtly detaching them from the "real". He is all the time horrified by the fact that his dreams are distortions of the real world which disqualify him from living in it.

15. This is not meant to suggest that Newman is an egotist and that HJ does not see it. At first Madame de Cintré may be a uniquely prestigious object to the new arrival from America who is hungry for culture and romance but as his imagination responds to her she becomes something much finer to him. In fact, it is rather an excessive tenderness in his feeling for her than anything egoistic in it which comes to seem strange in a lover. For, in the end, it seems to reconcile him to not possessing her so that there are moments when it almost seems as if it is enough for him to possess a truly delicate and loving image of her. His refusal to play his final card in order to win her back recalls Rowland Mallet's reticence about declaring his love for Mary Garland: Newman is allowed the consolation of feeling that he is being nobler than other people when, perhaps, renunciation is really a subtle way of keeping his dreams as dreams? HJ's characters will often build a world of "romance" on the basis of the "real" but they seldom want to turn the "romance" back into reality. This curious moral dialectic is less clear, though, in *The American* than it is in later novels, in, say, Fleda Vetch's renunciation of her love for Owen in *The Spoils of Poynton*. 
and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated: we only swing apart from the globe—though remaining as exhilarated, naturally, as we like, especially when all goes well. The art of the romancer is, "for the fun of it", insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him. What I have recognised then, in "The American", much to my surprise and after long years, is that the experience here represented is the disconnected and uncontrolled experience—uncontrolled by our general sense of "the way things happen"—which romance alone more or less successfully palms off on us. (AN, pp. 33-34).

This passage may be very ambiguous about the virtue of "romance" in a novel but it does not lead James into criticising The American as a fantasy, even though he has several strictures to make about its social inaccuracies. Instead, he goes on to another statement of the advantages of having a central consciousness. He describes reading The American as a process of assisting "at the window of his (Newman's) wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness". (AN, p. 37). Newman provides a "centre" which not only validates the subjective view of the "real" which we have in "romance" but also sets the seal on the novel's "economy" of form. (AN, p. 37; p. 38). This is where the contradiction in the preface comes in. Although Newman's consciousness is "quite sufficiently wide" and James thinks him adequate as a "centre" for the reader, he goes on to complain that Madame de Cintré, who is largely seen through Newman's eyes, always remains too vague for the full nature of her relationship with him to become clear:

... with this lady, altogether, I recognise, a light plank, too light a plank, is laid for the reader over a dark "psychological" abyss. The delicate clue to her conduct is never definitely placed in his hand... (AN, p. 39)

Surely the only explanation of this failure must be that when he wrote the novel James was so content to see Madame de Cintré through his "centre", so concerned with using Newman's imaginativeness in order to create "romance", that he forgot about all the things in Madame de Cintré that Newman was unable to see?
There are many things in The American and the preface to it which could be explored further but which I prefer to go on to explore in the context of The Europeans (1878) and Washington Square (1881), both of which I take to be much finer novels. Two things are worth emphasizing now. The first is that the evidence of The American and the preface to it suggests that James's peculiar kind of imaginativeness—the way it transforms realism into "romance"—ought to find its finest expression in an art of delicate and high-spirited comedy. The second point is that this comedy might be expected to take the form of a humorous playing with reality which skates over the surface of deeper human issues. For the most satisfactory part of The American is the delightful comedy of Newman blundering good-heartedly through the wiles of the apparently more refined inhabitants of the Faubourg St. Germain and then, in the end, turning out to be so much more refined than they are; where the novel is unsatisfactory is in the way James allows this comedy to degenerate into melodrama when it brings him to the point of having to explore a complex human relationship. A further inference which might be made from the preface to The American concerns the connection James sees between his use of Newman as a central consciousness and his pursuit of formal coherence. He has, as I have tried to show, developed a technique which makes the exclusion of part of the life of the book from our vision a condition of its clarity of structure. The novel would not have the same symmetry if we were asked to see Newman through Madame de Cintré's eyes in the same way and at the same time as we are asked to see her through his eyes. One has the feeling that the effect of the

16. That is, the comic writer needs that margin for the play of fancy which is provided by an art which can be, in HJ's words, "uncontrolled by our general sense of "the way things happen"." In the lighthearted way in which Felix Young conducts his experiment of trying to enliven New England society in The Europeans HJ gives us a good symbol of this comic spirit.
rational control James has over the way their love is described is to hold the reader at a distance from full understanding of it. The novel gives us glimpses into what he calls a "dark'psychological' abyss" but it tantalisingly refuses to probe it. This strange blending of clarity and obscurity in the way it treats its human drama resembles the curious mixture of psychological half-penetration with a rationalising concentration of surface themes which I described in Roderick Hudson. It is what makes James so fascinating and yet so frustrating as a novelist. I probably describe it very badly because I find it very hard to grasp but I will, nonetheless, risk a hypothesis about the way James wrote his novels in the attempt to explain it: that he felt an over-riding need to find conscious and rational expressions for everything dark, unfathomable and unconscious in the experiences out of which he made his art, that this need was the symptom of a fear of life and that he disguised it as a quest for "form". Whether or not the reader accepts this hypothesis is perhaps unimportant as long as I can use it as a way of communicating what I take to be the strangest and most unique quality of James's imagination. I will begin to test it out by looking at The Europeans and trying to explore those qualities in it which we ordinarily call - using terms he himself would have sanctioned - by names like wit, discrimination and detachment. But before doing this it will be useful to make a short digression to provide a psychological context in which to see James's "detachment". This brings me back to my epigraph from Vernon Lee.

Vernon Lee's 'Lady Tal' is an entertaining, if somewhat loaded, account of her own literary relationship with James. He appears in the tale under the name of Jervase Marion, a "psychological novelist" and
"cosmopolitan American" who is described as being "an inmate of the world of Henry James and a kind of Henry James, of a lesser magnitude." She herself appears in the tale, in a rather more flattering form, as Lady Tal, a rich and beautiful young Englishwoman who has recently been widowed. Vernon Lee (or Violet Paget, to use her real name) lived from 1856 to 1935. During the course of a long career she was a writer of fiction, an English expatriate in Italy who was one of Bernard Berenson's associates, a kind of predecessor of Bloomsbury, a feminist, an aesthetician and the author of a book of criticism called The Handling of Words which anticipating some of the ideas of I.A. Richards. She had a rather unfortunate association with James, dedicating her first novel, Miss Brown, to him and being wounded by his rather unflattering response to it. He tried to be as kind as critical honesty permitted him to be. He was wounded by her using him as a character in Lady Tal — which he never read — and in a letter in 1893 he warns his brother William, who had met her in Italy, to avoid her because she had repaid his "particular consideration" in an "impudent and blackguardly" way. Vernon Lee herself thought that James had used her as a model for Christina Light in Roderick Hudson. All this gives a special piquancy to Lady Tal, which is moreover still worth reading for its own sake, with its own brand of tough, acid, rather Jamesian comedy. It tells how Lady Tal writes a novel and then enlists Jervase Marion, who is recovering in Venice from a three volume novel of his own, to help her to correct it. He agrees to

17. Vanitas, p. 11. (All future references to this work are incorporated into the text.)

18. For a full account of her career see Peter Gunn, Vernon Lee: Violet Paget 1856–1935 (1964).

19. Quoted by Gard, Critical Heritage, p. 238. Gard recognises the interest of "Lady Tal" by reprinting some selections from it but his comments on it tend to leave the reader to conclude that the tale is little more than a churlish response to HJ's generosity which was written in a fit of pique.
help because he is amused and puzzled by her literary pretensions and is eager to unravel her character, thinking eventually of making a novel of his own round it. The upshot of what follows is that Lady Tal decides she is no novelist and Marion that he has behaved like a cad and a middle-aged fool. It ends with her proposing that they collaborate on another novel which would tell the story of their relationship and their mutual discomfiture. Lady Tal is a satiric tale but it is also a very acute and understanding picture of James, despite the animus it displays. There is a case for saying that it should be a crucial minor document for any really critical biography of Henry James: it reveals too much critical intelligence for Jamesians to dismiss it as just a grotesque parody of him.

Vernon Lee's main critical perception is that James's power as a novelist was intimately connected with what she calls a "shrinkingness of nature (which foolish persons called egoism)". She felt that both James's art and his own peace of mind depended on his making a rigid and rational distinction between the self and its world - something which, one could say, Emma Bovary tries to do. In a letter to her mother in 1885 she describes him as a "curious mixture of (I should think) absolute social and personal insincerity and extreme intellectual justice and plain-spokenness." She is too perceptive to portray Marion as simply a monster—on the contrary, he is kind and conscientious—and she sees the explanation of his cold curiosity about Lady Tal in:

... a kind of moral scruple against getting to know the secret mechanism of a soul, especially if such knowledge involved an appearance of intimacy with a person in whom he could never take more than a merely abstract, artistic interest. It was a mean taking advantage of superior strength, or the raising of expectations which could not be fulfilled; for Marion, although the most benevolent and serviceable of mortals, did not give his heart, perhaps because he had none to give, to anybody. (p. 56).

20. Quoted by Gunn, p. 106.
The reader may suspect that Vernon Lee was half in love with James herself but there is more than sour grapes to interest us. She sees James's aloofness as bringing him loneliness as well as calm and she makes Marion more than just a man who nourishes himself with the sense of his own intellectual powers:

That gift... of being, although a pessimist, no misanthrope, was the most remarkable characteristic of Jervase Marion; it was the one which made him, for all his old bachelor ways and his shrinking from close personal contact, a man and a manly man, giving this analytical and nervous person a certain calmness and gentleness and strength. (p. 71).

This is remarkably judicious as a picture of both the strengths and the weaknesses which the reader of James's novels meets. It leads Vernon Lee to the best moment in her tale, where Marion is trying to penetrate Lady Tal's mask and suggests to her that the character in her novel who "makes up her mind to avoid the temptation of all passion in the abstract" is "rather far fetched" (p. 77). Lady Tal silences him by observing that there are "men who, without ever having been in love, or in danger of being in love - poor little things - have gone through life with a resolute policy of never placing themselves in danger, of never so much as taking their heart out of their waistcoat pockets to look at it, lest it might suddenly be jerked out of their possession" (p. 77). He winces as his penetration: rebounds on himself. Marion becomes really grieved by the way Lady Tal suffers as a result of their friendship and yet finds himself unable to communicate his sympathy except through trying to rewrite her novel by making its heroine into his own version of Lady Tal herself. He soon imagines that it is a better novel than it really is! The

21. As may be seen by comparing Marion with the impression of HJ which emerges from Edel's account of his friendship with Constance Fenimore Woolson. (See The Conquest of London, HJ: The Middle Years 1884-1894 (1963).)
friendship becomes too much for him at this point:

Had he not long ago made up his mind to live contemplative only of external types, if not on a column like Simon Stylites, at least in its meaner modern equivalent, a top flat at Westminster. (p. 111).

When he does think he understands Lady Tal and has the character he was looking for, Vernon Lee has him throwing himself into an arm-chair to read a volume of Flaubert's letters.

The main limitation of Lady Tal as a tale is that it is too obviously biographical and, as this leads one to expect, it therefore gives us too personal a view of Marion's creative gifts for literature to make them seem directed to anything beyond the pursuit of covert autobiography. This makes a warning to me to get on to The Europeans quickly but it is worth referring first to some remarks James made about himself as a way of confirming the claim that Vernon Lee's portrait of him is illuminating for the critic too. In a journal written by James after he left Paris for London in 1876 he explains the move like this: "I saw that I should be an eternal outsider". And yet in London he complained, in talking to the American diplomat Nadal, of still experiencing "that excluded feeling". This made for more than a sense of self-pity; James flourished on the feeling of not belonging. The whole aura of value with which he surrounds the word "Life" - especially in novels like The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove and The Ambassadors - grows out of that sense. When he refused the chairmanship of the English Association in 1912 he told John Bailey: "I am a mere stone, ugly monster of Dissociation and Detachment". It was in reaction from this feeling that he found such exhilaration in the prospect of having an allegiance

when war broke out in 1914. He told his nephew Henry:

... it really 'makes up' almost for some of the huge horrors that constantly assault our vision, to find one can be on a 'side' with all one's weight, that one never supposed likely to be offered one in such perfection, and that has only to be exposed to more and more light, to make one more glory, so to speak, for one's attachment, for one's association. (25)

The war enabled James to direct his deep sense of pity to the community at large, although the way its political and economic meaning baffled him also brought out a streak of attitudinisingly tragic and romantic paranoia. It was one of the few times in his life – another was during the rehearsals of Guy Domville – when he plunged himself into a kind of Dickensian activity: visiting the hospitals and helping care for the sick and wounded of both sides who found themselves in London. This was not what he usually meant by "life". In his introduction to the Letters of Henry James Percy Lubbock reminisces about his habitual attitude:

... he spoke of himself as a confirmed spectator, one who looked on from the brink instead of plunging on his own account; but if this seemed a pale substitute for direct contact he knew very well that it was a much richer and more adventurous life, really, than it is given to most people to lead. (27)

In vulnerable moments this richness of vicarious living could become a form of self-protection too: in an emotional crisis he would summon the aid of reason and his faith in art. Edel describes such a period in his discussion of the novels which came immediately after the failure of Guy Domville in 1894. Edel is too sentimental about James's sufferings in this period to really tell us whether he is offering us criticism or not but what he says is interesting in the way it bears out Vernon Lee:

His emotions were blocked, defended, confused, full of past and recent hurt. At this moment, therefore, James begins to use the supremacy of his intellect. He concerns himself more

26. HJ's account of his wartime experience is given in Within the Rim (1919). Virginia Woolf writes interestingly about this book in The Death of the Moth (1943).
ultimately with 'method' than ever before. Rational form and mind were thus interposed against the chaos of feeling... His best, his 'safest' identity was the artist; there he was in full possession. (28)

Edel seems to approve of the art which resulted, but his picture of the mind which created it does raise a serious doubt as to how far James wanted to say something general about life in his fiction of the 1890s and how far he used his art for personal compensation. What Edel says about the fiction of the nineties contains a truth about even James's earlier novels too. This does not mean that we should conclude that those novels were written by Jervase Marion for James was too self aware not to see, and ponder, the presence of a Jervase Marion in his make-up himself. The evidence for this lies in the way he treats the highly ambiguous character of Robert Acton in The Europeans, in whom we see the seeds not only of Gilbert Osmond but of Isabel Archer too.

As an epigraph to a discussion of Acton's role in The Europeans one might take the pregnant sentence already quoted from L'Education sentimentale which describes Frédéric Moreau's efforts to forget Madame Arnoux by writing a Histoire de la Renaissance: "En plongeant dans la personnalité des autres, il oublia la sienne, ce qui est la seule manière peut-être de n'en pas souffrir". Against it might be set a few typical examples of the mixed irony and sympathy with which James feels himself into Acton's Jervase Marion-like response to the Baroness:

28. The Treacherous Years, p. 101. The interesting coincidence of Edel's views here with "Lady Tal" helps to suggest the difference between HJ's "detachment", which both see as a refuge from personal feeling, and GF's, which aims rather at transcending the personal. (See the quotation from the Correspondance at the beginning of this chapter.) This difference exists in spite of the superficial resemblance between HJ and the hermit of Croisset - one explanation of it is that GF's letters show him exploring his own personal emotions much more openly and spontaneously than HJ does in his, and doing this at the same time as he is striving to be the detached artist.
He was ashamed, for inscrutable reasons, of the vivacity of his emotion, and he carried it off, superficially, by taking, still superficially, the humorous view of Madame Munster. (29)

(How justified is James's adjective "inscrutable"?) A more barbed comment comes in the crucial opening paragraph of chapter 9, to which I shall return later:

From the first she had been personally fascinating, but the fascination now had become intellectual as well. He was constantly pondering her words and emotions; they were as interesting as the factors in an algebraic problem. This is saying a good deal; for Acton was extremely fond of mathematics. (Eur., p. 136)

This prose has more bite than the prose of The American. The reader of The Europeans must be prepared for something which can be remarkably astringent, not simply for the graceful lightness of wit and the lyric charm which the novel is more commonly valued for. If one adds that Acton represents many qualities which James admires in the cultured American - "his natural shrewdness had a reach of which he had never quite given local circles the measure" (Eur., p. 86). - it becomes clear that this astringency goes with a more complex sense of national differences than was to be found in the simple antitheses of The American. This new quality does not necessarily make for a greater freshness and spontaneity but it does seem to allow James to release a new gaiety into his prose and


30. For example, no irony like this is directed at the engaging Valentin de Bellegarde's comparable studying of Noémie Néoche, HJ's version of the Balzacian courtesan at the start of her career: "She's poor, she's pretty and she's silly", he said; "it seems to me she can only go one way. It's a pity, but it can't be helped. I'll give her six months. She has nothing to fear from me, but I'm watching the process. It's merely a question of the how and the when and the where. Yes, I know what you're going to say; this horrible Paris hardens one's heart. But it quickens one's wits, and it ends by teaching one a refinement of observation. To see this little woman's little drama play itself out is now for me a pleasure of the mind" (p. 129). It is as if Valentin's "observation" is redeemed by the fact that he does not want to sleep with her himself, a voyeur being more respectable than a rake! One prefers the infatuation of Balzac's Baron Hulot for his Madame Marneffe.
discard his youthful pomposity of manner. One aspect of this gaiety is a feline habit of insinuation which is at once impish and devious. It is not always irrepressible in an attractive way but it does herald the fact that James can now keep the poetry of his fiction freer from that mushiness into which the prose of *The American* is often in danger of slipping. A brief quotation should make this clear because it brings out the lurking malice in James's urbane manner:

> It is my misfortune that in attempting to describe in a short compass the deportment of this remarkable woman (the Baroness) I am obliged to express things rather brutally. (*Eur.*, p. 129)

James does not find it difficult to reconcile himself to this "misfortune". The sentence is reminiscent of nothing so much as the Baroness's own habit — deplored by Acton — of saying one thing and meaning another. Here, at least, we can speak of James as being influenced by what D.W. Harding called Jane Austen's "regulated hatred". 31 If there is any difference it is that James's wit lacks the vigour of Jane Austen's and is more old-maidish.

*The Europeans* is a novel in which James makes much playful use of the cant word "clever": Eugenia is constantly described as a "clever woman" and people frequently use the word in talking about each other. Acton, though, is "very judicious — and something more beside" (*Eur.*, p. 86). This "something more", beyond his subtlety, is an unplumbed and inarticulate shyness or reserve which James dearly wants to probe. Nevertheless, Acton is "extremely interested in the Baroness Munster". (*Eur.*, p. 87). This interest is strange because it makes him assume a deceptive air of indolence and almost of boredom: whenever we see him, especially at emotional moments, he is lounging about, under a tree, in the

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Baroness's drawing-room, or turning away and putting his hands in his pockets. He has a kind of refined shiftiness about him. He also has a rather priggish variety of New England conscience which one critic sees as conscience become "evil". 32 We study it as he tries to decide whether or not it is wise to fall in love with the Baroness. Whether he exemplifies the discretion of a mature affection or is simply judiciously naive is never quite clear but it was a brilliant idea to put him into relation with the Baroness; it makes for a far more complex version of the kind of relationship between Jervase Marion and Lady Tal.

It is no easier to describe the Baroness from what James gives us of her. This is not simply because she appears as a "kind of conversational mountebank" (Eur., p. 46) who, at the end of the novel, says bitterly as she packs up her cushions and curtains: "I feel like a strolling actress; these are my properties" (Eur., p. 206). Behind her European manner is a genuinely mature capacity for emotional experience that makes her the most substantial person in the novel. If she is as ambiguous as Acton it is because her European manner is out of its element in New England and what she says is always being misunderstood or understood too literally:

Her declaration that she was looking for rest and retirement had been by no means wholly untrue; nothing that the Baroness said was wholly untrue. It is but fair to add, perhaps, that nothing that she said was wholly true. (Eur., p. 58).

Thus James reflects on the scene in which Eugenia breaks down and asks Mr. Wentworth to take her in and care for her "yielding to one of the most genuine emotions she had ever known" (Eur., p. 47). Her tears may be theatrical in part but they also have a real simplicity and purity of feeling which makes the scene impressive and deeper in tone than much

of the novel. The scene, at the end of chapter 3, ends with the reaction of Robert Acton who "turned away, with his hands stealing into his pockets" (Eur., p. 48).

Acton and Eugenia are difficult to assess simply because of the novel’s felicitously dramatic quality. To say so is not, necessarily, to agree with Dr. Leavis, who writes excellently about The Europeans. James's drama seems to me more heady and wrought-up than he admits when his enthusiasm for the novel leads him to claim that its comedy "rivals the admired and comparable things of Shakespeare and Molière". I find James's imaginative control of his "fable" (to use Leavis's apt and un-Shakespearian word) makes me use my intelligence in an altogether more cerebral and excited way when I read The Europeans than when I see Twelfth Night, which has a less self-conscious poetry, or Tartuffe, which can frighten and exhilarate in a way that the urbane James cannot. I think that Leavis may be right to say that "When we elicit judgements and valuations from the fable - which is perfectly dramatic and perfectly a work of art - we don't think of them as coming from the author". This "self-sufficiency" of the drama depends, though, on the novel's sharpening in us a habit of "discrimination" which is a less imaginative habit than Leavis claims:

The Baroness and her brother, we shall have noted, are themselves opposed in value to one another; as representative Europeans, they are complementary, and establish, in their difference, another essential discrimination for James. In fact, all the figured in the book play their parts in this business of discriminating attitudes and values, which is performed with remarkable precision and economy; the total effect being an affirmation, made with the force of inspired art. (36)

34. Ibid., p. 70.
35. Ibid., p. 70.
This is better as a description of the novel than it is as a value-judgement. There is some likelihood that, even after his book on Dickens, Dr. Leavis would still see this sort of "discrimination" as part of a "reverent openness before life" and yet, whether it is used to positive or satiric moral effect, it seems to me less than that and less than, say, the freedom of interpretation which Dickens allows the imagination of his readers in a more resonant, less rational, "fable", like Great Expectations. 37 One might suggest that a "fable" which takes its shape from such precise "discriminations" as The Europeans does could only hope to be "dramatic" in a restricted sense. This is not to say that the Jamesian "discrimination" is not the fine quality Leavis takes it to be but that it is more critical than imaginative. James's comedy seems to me to enliven us by putting us in a position where we can feel confident about our perceptions and their capacity to grasp a complex situation, but it does not rely on us having imaginations. This makes it a less disturbing comedy than Molière's. 38

Before leaving Leavis I want to quote a passage which exemplifies

37. I do not mean that one can make Great Expectations mean anything one wants it to mean but it has a poetry which defies any schematic version of its meaning. It is significant that Mrs. Leavis's efforts to persuade us that the novel does work on a rational, conscious level have the effect of temporarily robbing it of its poetry. (See her essay in Dickens the Novelist.) The only places where one might confidently assert that "we shall have noted" a moral discrimination made in it are places, like the treatment of Herbert Pocket's gentleness, where that discrimination is cruder and more obvious in intention than the rest of the book and in those places we recall the rest of the book in order to see further than Dickens means us to see.

38. In even a relatively simple Molière comedy like Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme we soon find ourselves questioning the very judgements which the comedy tempts us to make: no sooner are we convinced of the absurd snobbery of Monsieur Jourdain than we realise that we have fallen into the trap of seeing him from the point of view of the aristocratic parasites who exploit him; no sooner do we feel rebuked into imaginative sympathy with him than Molière confronts us with what is inhuman as well as ridiculous in his behaviour. At moments of the greatest hilarity we can be held in the grip of an almost intolerable tension as a result of the way the wit appeals to our imagination to make us probe our judgements. Our minds are never allowed the respite and the repose of feeling assured.
the sort of wit and vivacity in The Europeans which he admires even more than I do. In chapter 5 there is a conversation in which Felix proposes to paint Mr. Wentworth's portrait. It illustrates the fact that few writers should be lightly compared to Molière. If there is one quality in it which does recall the greatest dramatists it is the exquisite shaping of the passage as a whole, a more aesthetic quality, perhaps, if that word can be made not to sound pejorative:

"I should like to do your head, sir", said Felix to his uncle one evening, before them all - Mr. Brand and Robert Acton being also present. "I think I should make a very fine thing of it. It's an interesting head; it's very medieval."

Mr. Wentworth looked grave; he felt awkwardly, as if all the company had come in and found him standing before the looking-glass. "The Lord made it", he said. "I don't think it is for man to make it over again."

"Certainly the Lord made it", replied Felix, smiling, "and He made it very well. But life has been touching up the work. It is a very interesting type of head. It's delightfully wasted and macabre. The complexion is wonderfully bleached." And Felix looked round at the circle, as if to call their attention to these interesting points. Mr. Wentworth grew visibly paler. "I should like to do you as an old prelate, an old cardinal, or the prior of an order."

"A prelate, a cardinal?" murmured Mr. Wentworth. "Do you refer to the Roman Catholic priesthood?"

"I mean an old ecclesiastic who should have led a very pure, abstinent life. Now I take it that has been the case with you, sir; one sees it in your face", Felix proceeded. "You have been very - a - very moderate. Don't you think one always sees that in a man's face?"

"You see more in a man's face than I should think of looking for", said Mr. Wentworth coldly.

The Baroness rattled her fan and gave a brilliant laugh. "It is a risk to look so close!" she exclaimed. "My uncle has some peccadilloes on his conscience". Mr. Wentworth looked at her, painlessly at a loss; and in so far as the signs of a pure and abstinent life were visible in his face they were then probably peculiarly manifest. "You are a beau vieillard, dear uncle", said Madame Minster, smiling with her foreign eyes.

"I think you are paying me a compliment", said the old man.

"Surely I am not the first woman that ever did so!" cried the Baroness.

"I think you are", said Mr. Wentworth gravely. And turning to Felix he added, in the same tone, "Please don't make my likeness. My children have my daguerreotype. That is quite satisfactory."

"I won't promise," said Felix, "not to work your head into something!"
Mr. Wentworth looked at him and then at all the others; and then he got up and slowly walked away. "Felix", said Gertrude, in the silence that followed, "I wish you would paint my portrait." (Eur., pp. 72-73).

This is delightful and its grace disguises an extremely delicate notation of the interacting American and European values at issue. There is, however, something in the way James can manage a formal purity in the dramatic exposition of them that makes it seem as if the wit is there to steer our judgements on course. It is not, like Molière's, a comedy which undermines our confidence in our own ability to judge. Underneath the gaiety lies a sagacious aloofness which invites our solidarity. This quality may seem to encourage in us a certain complacency in our own perceptiveness when we reflect that one thing which The Europeans is doing is to explore a world in which the kind of common standard of manners that we find in Jane Austen no longer exists.

It is at this point that one has to part company with Leavis's hypothesis about the novel's "discrimination". When we look at what the book has to offer in the way of a moral touchstone like Mr. Knightley in Emma we come up against the ambiguous nature of Acton's penchant for making discriminations about Eugenia. James's word for this is, in fact, a much more suggestive one; he calls it "legitimate experimentation" (Eur., p. 205). It is worth tracing how it operates. When he is first described Acton does seem to be a kind of Knightley figure:

... there can, perhaps, be no better proof of the high esteem in which he was held than the fact that no explicit judgement was ever passed upon his actions. He was no more praised than he was blamed; but he was tacitly felt to be an ornament to his circle. He was the man of the world of the family. (Eur., p. 85).

Leavis takes this up and tries to make it the whole story, as if James really is harking back to Jane Austen. He misses the force of Eugenia's description of Acton as a man of the "Chinese world" (Eur., p. 36) and he makes Acton's function seem important to the "fable" in a way that is not
"dramatic" in the sense of the remarks quoted earlier:

She (Eugenia) finds something eminently eligible in a cousin of the Wentworths, Robert Acton, 'the man of the world of the family'. He is, by her standards, too, a man of the world, and he has 'quintupled a fortune already considerable'. We are told, significantly, that 'his national consciousness has been complicated by a residence in foreign lands', and that he 'yet disliked to hear Americans abused'. He has a consciousness, then, that is central to the fable, and his valuations have a peculiar authority. He is strongly attracted by the Baroness: 'He was in love with her now', we are in due course told, '... and the only question with him was whether he could trust her'.

His final judgement is adverse, and its significance for us is defined with the greatest delicacy and precision. Being Robert Acton's, it is not a New England judgement, and for that reason has its force as an endorsement of New England. There is nothing narrow, provincial or inexperienced about Acton's morality; he still goes on admiring and being attracted after the point at which he can say: 'She is a woman who will lie'. (39)

My own reading of Acton is quite different from this: that he is a far more disturbing, Jervase Marion type whom we take as our vantage-point on the drama at our peril. The Baroness is not, after all, the only person who can tell a lie: Gertrude does too. 40 It becomes worrying to think how much Acton's strictness about fibbing, or even a legitimate lie in self-defense, has in common with Mr. Wentworth's literal-minded lack of imagination. If the Baroness's lie is really just the justified resource of an unprotected woman who is being pressed for a declaration by a man who is not willing to put his own amatory cards on the table until she will, then the whole situation seems changed. 41 It is much more of a question whether she can trust him than whether he can trust her. This reading is open to several interpretations. Leavis may be simply wrong in giving so moral an account of the novel; it may be that James has too

39. 'Anna Karenina' etc., p. 66.
40. On p. 19. In this case we are meant to smile at Charlotte's feeling that one must always tell the truth as at a piece of Puritan literal-mindedness. It is not clear why white lies should become black ones when, as in the Baroness's case, there is a more serious reason for lying.
41. I take it that the important lie is her equivocation over whether or not she has sent off her letter to the Prince rather than the well-intentioned lie she tells Mrs. Acton, which Leavis mentions ('Anna Karenina' etc., p. 67). The equivocating Acton is not without responsibility for the former.
much of his own kind of wit and intelligence invested in Acton to
detect him completely; it may be that James is, in fact, analysing the
impossibility of finding any sure moral touchstone in this kind of
international situation. I prefer this last solution because it makes the
novel more "dramatic" and less of a "fable"; it means that it can still
go on raising unanswerable questions at the end, that it leaves us not
with Acton but with the figure of Eugenia in whom there is a human
richness which we sense but cannot sum up as Acton would. We know, after
all, that Eugenia will go off to a Europe where she will find the real
field of action for the humanity which in New England has been so out of
place that she has been restricted to the role of a "strolling actress".42

The Europeans concludes with the sunshine atmosphere of a string
of marriages but it should not be forgotten that it opens on a picture of
a Boston grave-yard:

The window-panes were battered by the sleet; the head-stones
in the grave-yard beneath seemed to be holding themselves
askance to keep it out of their faces (Eur., p. 2).

The prose is poetically playful and the impression of death tells mainly
on the Baroness, just as it does later in the novel during her visit to
the dying Mrs. Acton, a visit which, to the reader, is mainly a piece of
social comedy. On both occasions Eugenia would prefer not to be reminded
of the fact of death and yet she is the one major character in the novel
who, for all her vivacity, seems genuinely mortal; Felix, by comparison,
seems lightly immortal in his hopeful gaiety and even the venerable

42. See the passage on pp. 154-155 where she is vexed with herself for being
upset that Acton has failed to visit her: "the social soil on this big,
vague continent was somehow not adapted for growing those plants whose
fragrance she especially inclined to inhale, and by which she liked to
see herself surrounded... Her power, in the American air, seemed to have
lost its prehensile attributes". She is like an inmate of the world of
Balzac who has wandered by mistake into the world of Hawthorne. Whether
EJ, at this stage in his career, could have shown us the Baroness's
"power" in a European context is a moot point. Madame Merle, in The
Portrait of a Lady, may seem more like a diminution than an extension
of her emotional complexity.
Mr. Wentworth seems never to age. Only Eugenia seems conscious of the passage of the years, seems, it might be said, really grown-up. This is perhaps why one question which is raised by her relations with Acton, when we compare them with the successful love of Felix and Gertrude, is whether the society which accepts Felix and rejects her is one which, by its embarrassed response to the mature adult of the two, reveals itself as unready to recognise that its own innocence and youth are only transitory. But although James can poke some fun at the prudent way Acton withdraws his affection from the Baroness her rueful departure from New England suits him too and the question is not one that he wants us to press. The thought of a quiet, pastoral New England (gradually purified by the high spirits of Felix and Gertrude of any of its genteel vestiges of the Hawthornian pre-occupation with sin and death) is a comforting one to him. It might, then, he argued that James watches over his American community during the Baroness's visit rather as Acton himself does and that he allows her to go back to Europe again in order to end his novel with a slightly nostalgic celebration of a vista of youthful hope in which the thought of time's hurrying people on to maturity need have no part. To test out this speculation it is necessary to look more closely at why Acton turns away from the Baroness and at what it is in her that he is turning away from.

At the beginning of chapter 9 there is a fascinating passage in which James tries, with the aid of some probing metaphors, to feel his way into the full complexity of Robert Acton:

It was agreeable to him to find himself in her little drawing-room; but this was not a new discovery. There was a change, however, in this sense; that if the Baroness had been a great deal in Acton's thoughts before, she was now never out of them. From the first she had been personally fascinating; but the fascination now had become intellectual as well. He
was constantly pondering her words and motions; they were as interesting as the factors in an algebraic problem. This is saying a good deal; for Acton was extremely fond of mathematics. He asked himself whether it could be that he was in love with her, and then hoped he was not; hoped it not so much for his own sake as for that of the amatory passion itself. If this was love, love had been overrated. Love was a poetic impulse, and his own state of feeling with regard to the Baroness was largely characterised by that eminently prosaic sentiment - curiosity. It was true, as Acton with his gently cogitative habit observed to himself, that curiosity, pushed to a given point, might become a romantic passion; and he certainly thought enough about this charming woman to make him restless and even a little melancholy. It puzzled and vexed him at times to feel that he was not more ardent. He was not in the least bent upon remaining a bachelor. In his younger years he had been - or he had tried to be - of the opinion that it would be a good deal 'jollier' not to marry and he had flattered himself that his single condition was something of a citadel. It was a citadel, at all events, of which he had long since levelled the outworks. He had removed the guns from the ramparts; he had lowered the drawbridge across the moat. The drawbridge had swayed a little under Madame Münster's step; why should he not cause it to be raised again, so that she might be kept a prisoner? He had an idea that she would become - in time at least, and on learning the conveniences of the place for making a lady comfortable - a tolerably patient captive. But the drawbridge was never raised, and Acton's brilliant visitor was as free to depart as she had been to come. It was part of his curiosity to know why the deuce so susceptible a man was not in love with so charming a woman. If her various graces were, as I have said, the factors in an algebraic problem, the answer to this question was the indispensable unknown quantity. The pursuit of the unknown quantity was extremely absorbing; for the present it taxed all Acton's faculties. (Eur., pp. 136-137).

Acton is certainly "judicious - and something more beside" and this something is very hard to place if we assent to his own estimate that he is a "susceptible man". What he feels is a kind of pre-coital sadness; it is as if he has the feelings that Troilus experiences after his night with Cressida when he is in the position Troilus is in as a wooer. He is not just a prig because he is genuinely "puzzled and vexed" at his

43. The nature of his susceptibility is not clarified by the passage on p. 138 when Acton asks himself the meaning of his wish to "spend a fortnight at Newport with Eugenia alone": "Such a vision, certainly, seemed a refined implication of matrimony, after the Baroness should have formally got rid of her informal husband. At any rate, Acton, with his characteristic discretion, forbore to give expression to whatever else it might imply, and the narrator of these incidents is not obliged to be more definite."
lack of passion and James is certainly giving us a deeper insight into the questions he burked when Roderick accused Rowland of knowing nothing about women. Acton's "citadel" seems to be less a place where the Baroness might be a captive than Acton's own prison of self. Why should he imagine that either the freedom or the imprisonment which he offers her could satisfy a woman who would make the kind of emotional and sexual demands that one guesses she would make? If there is something moving as well as something unpleasant in Acton's seemingly frigid egotism it stems from what can only be a sexual disquiet rather than a moral vice. James, then, opens up a real field of inquiry into Acton's sexual feelings for Eugenia and it seems to me problematic whether we can say that The Europeans as a whole is willing to venture into this field or not.

The point to which Acton's study of Eugenia takes him is the perception of a mysterious "unknown quantity". It seems to me that it is only because James presents Eugenia as too theatrical and charismatic that after this point Acton is allowed to retain the initiative over her for so long and indulge in so much "legitimate experimentation" with her honesty. I doubt whether it is really a moral dilemma he is in at all and, if the Baroness were seen to have the physical presence that obviously goes with her costumes, then this would be too clear for Acton to remain safely cool without seeming very odd. What, after all, is the point of his expressing the wish that he would like to spend a fortnight with her at Newport or Niagara? Does the novel need to get this intrusive serpent of sexuality out of its New England paradise before it can celebrate the chaste and innocent affections of Gertrude and Felix? From the start,

44. Acton's "citadel" points us forward to Gilbert Osmond's villa in The Portrait of a Lady, and even to Olive Chancellor's efforts to hide Verena away from the rest of the world in The Bostonians. Is the kind of sexual feeling which HJ is best at describing possessiveness?
there is something paradisal about this New England. We forget about the energy of Puritan America when we contemplate the pious leisure of Mr. Wentworth or Mr. Brand. Felix soon notices that they have "the ton of the golden age" (Eur., p. 35). The thing one begins to notice about this paradise is that there is no Eve in it until the Baroness comes: Mr. Wentworth's wife is never mentioned, the only mother in the book is Mrs. Acton who is dying, and femininity of the conventional American sort is represented by Lizzie Acton. In this context one begins to think back to Acton's affection for his mother, who is the most vague and the most suggestive character in the book. His feeling for her "had almost resolved itself... into the subjective emotion of gratitude" and he never talks of her (Eur., p. 100). It is when Eugenia tells Mrs. Acton that he often has that Acton fails to see that she only wants to be kind and withdraws, ceasing to visit her eventually. The Baroness sees the importance of his mother to him and she is vexed that he should stay at home rather than visit her and she hints her disapproval:

It seemed to Acton that there was a spark of irritation in her eye - a note of irony (as when she spoke of Lizzie being never away from her mother) in her voice. If Madame Münster was irritated, Robert Acton was vaguely mystified... (Eur., pp. 148-149).

It would be tempting at this point to turn for further light on this hinted-at psychological depth to James's own biography. I think this would be wrong. James answers our questions for the purposes of the work of art in a way that precludes further pressing of them. In the book's last

45. See the exquisitely artificial description of pre-Civil War Harvard in W.W. Story and his Friends: "... a picture of young affections and alliances dancing, ever so mirthfully, of warm summer evenings, among the slim, vague, Corot trees of the old Harvard 'yard', to the sound of the oaten pipe. That note indeed - the murmur of Arcady itself, that of innocent versified homage, precocious and profuse, mingled with the rustle of feathery elms - pervades the crepuscular scene and makes us think of it wistfully." (vol. I, p. 38). On pp. 238-239 of the same volume is a description of the "almost paradisaical ease of intercourse" of the Washington of the period which, in 1974, is hard to imagine!
sentence, and perhaps its most acid one too, he adopts the ironic tone of the Baroness: "... and Robert Acton, after his mother's death, married a particularly nice young girl" (Eur., p. 209). "Particularly" is savage though it still contrives to pull down the blinds. In place of the mature woman is a "nice young girl". Meanwhile, the rest of the conclusion can busy itself with getting the other young people married off. New England has lost something potentially valuable as well as dangerous in the Baroness but it is happy to do so if the marriages that do occur reinforce the myth of its innocence. It might seem that Felix is allowed to bring in a healthy sexual affection — the novel is selective about sex — but this is the point at which to emphasise that Felix has always been a genteel bohemian:

"... in Bohemia I always passed for a gentleman. I wish you could see some of my old camarades — they would tell you! It was the liberty I liked, but not the opportunities! My sins were all peccadillos; I always respected my neighbour's property — my neighbour's wife." (Eur., p. 193).

Felix, for all his banter, is a safe and unthreatening substitute for his sister. The "old world" he represents is sunny enough to be accommodated without strain.

If the novel promises to take us somewhere real with Acton and Eugenia and then holds back at the brink it shows James freeing the balloon of "romance" when he comes to the love of Felix and Gertrude. It has always seemed surprising that Leavis should lay so much emphasis on

46. I feel sceptical about HJ's claim that he put in the happy ending in deference to W.D. Howells for a sad ending would have been out of keeping with the rest of the novel. "I do incline to melancholy endings — but it had been a part of the bargain with Howells that this termination should be cheerful and that there should be distinct matrimony. So I did it off mechanically in the closing paragraphs. I was not at all weary of the tale at the end, but I had agreed to write it in 100 Atlantic pages, and its abrupt ending came from outward pressure — not from internal failing". HJ to Lizzie Boott, October 30th, 1878. (The letter, which is in the Houghton Library, is quoted in Leyburn, Strange Alloy, p. 28.) On the whole, we may be grateful to Howells if he influenced HJ in this way.
the spontaneity of life in Felix—whose own wit corresponds to a
groundtone in the book itself—when he has so much affinity with the
kind of would-be artist whom Leavis sees Lawrence and Dickens and Tolstoy
as despising for lack of seriousness: Rico in St. Mawr, Henry Gowan in
Little Dorrit, Vronsky in Anna Karenina. Felix has a lightweight charm
which is admired for what it is; it is not an understated way of
representing true creative play in the way that Sleary's horse-riding
is in Hard Times. He is genteel and urbane and has just as much vitality
and Bohemianism as is compatible with good breeding. In other words, if
he represents "life" and the desire to live it, the "life" he represents
is in no way socially dangerous and explosive (like Birkin's say) and the
most he will do is to take Gertrude off to Europe for a time and then
bring her back for any important family occasion. When he weans her away
from the influence of Mr. Brand and "the great questions of life" (Eur.,
p. 123) Gertrude wakes up to something which is only dubiously a more
real kind of living:

"I am trying for once to be natural!" cried Gertrude
passionately. "I have been pretending, all my life; I have
been dishonest; it is you that have made me so!" Mr. Brand
stood gazing at her, and she went on, "Why shouldn't I be
frivolous if I want? One has a right to be frivolous, if it's
one's nature. No, I don't care for the great questions. I care
for pleasure— for amusement. Perhaps I am fond of wicked
things; it is very possible!" (Eur., pp. 123-124).

We have little fear (or hope) that Gertrude will ever do anything very
wicked even if Felix would let her. This sort of individual hedonism is
not threatening and a certain amount of it can always be accommodated by
society. It is not a sort of living which gives much back from what it
takes from the world though. Gertrude has little compassion to spend on

48. This is not to ignore the fact that Gertrude makes self-cultivation
into an ideal. As Du Bos remarks of RJ, "son idéalisme n'était pas
Mr. Brand, a character whose feelings are always a matter of the author's convenience, and when he asks her, "Am I really losing you?", we hear that "She was touched - she was pained; but it had already occurred to her that she might do something better than say so" (Eur., p. 124). She goes on to take an almost malicious pleasure in insinuating to Mr. Brand that Charlotte loves him and to Charlotte that she loves Mr. Brand. This reminds us of the end of chapter 5 when Mr. Brand pesters her as she comes home across the fields from the Actons. On that occasion he did succeed in moving her - if only because his unhappiness made her upset:

... when she reached the middle of the next field she suddenly burst into tears. Her tears seemed to her to have been a long time gathering, and for some moments it was a kind of glee to shed them. But they presently passed away. There was something a little hard in Gertrude; and she never wept again. (Eur., p. 84).

This last mild and astonishing statement is surely there to make us contrast these tears of petulance with the tears that the ambiguous Eugenia sheds a little earlier when she asks Mr. Wentworth to take her in?

Before looking further into what Gertrude becomes in the course of the novel it is necessary to look at Felix, who both forms her and is formed by her. His appearance in the Wentworth House on a Sunday morning when everyone but Gertrude is at church is the most romantic moment in the book:

She possessed herself of a very obvious volume - one of the series of the Arabian Nights - and she brought it out into the portico and sat down with it in her lap. There, for a quarter of an hour, she read the history of the loves of the Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess Badoura. At last, looking up, she beheld, as it seemed to her, the Prince Camaralzaman standing before her. A beautiful young man was making her a very low bow - a magnificent bow, such as she had never seen before. He appeared to have dropped from the clouds; he was wonderfully handsome; he smiled - smiled as if he were smiling on purpose. Extreme surprise, for a moment, kept Gertrude sitting still; then she rose, without even keeping her finger in her book. The young man, with his hat in his hand, still looked at her, smiling and smiling. It was very strange. (Eur., pp. 24-25).
Well might Felix have dropped from the clouds! He is a harmless intruder in this open house which has "the trustfulness of the golden age" (Eur., p. 24). His seductiveness issues in a smile which is innocent. Essentially, Gertrude is not awakened from the childhood romance she is reading. Felix performs the odd task of bringing back a pre-lapsarian America to a generation consumed by earnestness. The lyricism of the scene does not promise us any account of a mature young affection, even though Felix is twenty-eight. I think this comes out through the typically Jamesian way in which neither of them are interested in what the other essentially is, either physically or morally. To Felix Gertrude is New England girlhood, to Gertrude Felix is a brilliant European ("she had never in her life spoken to a foreigner", Eur., p. 26) who has a Baroness for a sister. When he tells her the story of Eugenia's marriage:

The cheerful off-hand tone in which her visitor related his darkly-romantic tale seemed to Gertrude very strange; but it seemed also to convey a certain flattery to herself, a recognition of her wisdom and dignity. (Eur., p. 31).

She is already beginning to wake up. Visiting the Baroness will soon be "like going to Europe" (Eur., p. 54). It is not clear whether, as her imagination dawns, it can take her beyond these national stereotypes, to the human beings beneath them. The other stereotype which she takes up for Felix is even less essential:

"I have never studied; I have had no training. I do a little of everything, and nothing well. I am only an amateur."

It pleased Gertrude even more to think that he was an amateur than to think that he was an artist; the former word, to her fancy, had an even subtler connotation. (Eur., p. 71).

Can we take what James gives us in Felix seriously?

Felix may be a European but he in fact has a large store of American pragmatism in his nature. For him, the life a person leads depends most on that person's attitude to life rather than on external factors. It is the idea behind James's belief that life can only be fully rendered in a
novel if it is rendered through a fine consciousness, the idea that makes him reject what is tragic in Flaubert for whom thought can never be so free. 49 This is made clear by a conversation between Gertrude and Felix in chapter 5. Felix begins:

"You don't seem to me to enjoy... Do you mind my saying this? he asked, pausing.
"Please go on" said the girl earnestly.
"You seem to me very well placed, for enjoying. You have money and liberty and what is called in Europe a 'position'. But you take a painful view of life, as one may say."
"One ought to think it bright and charming and delightful, eh?" asked Gertrude.
"I should say so - if one can. It is true it all depends upon that", Felix added.
"You know there is a great deal of misery in the world", said his model.
"I have seen a little of it," the young man rejoined. "But it was all over there - beyond the sea. I don't see any here. This is a paradise".

Gertrude said nothing; she sat looking at the dahlias and the currant-bushes in the garden, while Felix went on with his work. "To enjoy", she began at last, "to take life - not painfully, must one do something wrong?"
Felix gave his long light laugh again. "Seriously, I think not. And for this reason, among others: you strike me as very capable of enjoying, if the chance were given you, and yet at the same time as incapable of wrong-doing."
"I am sure", said Gertrude, "that you are very wrong in telling a person that she is incapable of that. We are never nearer to evil than when we believe that."
"You are handsomer than ever", observed Felix irrelevantly.
Gertrude had got used to hearing him say this. There was not so much excitement in it as at first. "What ought one to do?" she continued. "To give parties, to go to the theatre, to read novels, to keep late hours?"
"I don't think it's what one does or one doesn't do that promotes enjoyment", her companion answered. "It is the general way of looking at life."
"They look at it as a discipline - that is what they do here. I have often been told that."
"Well, that's very good. But there is another way", added Felix, smiling: "to look at it as an opportunity."
"An opportunity - yes", said Gertrude. "One would get more pleasure that way."
"I don't attempt to say anything better for it than that it has been my own way - and that is not saying much!" (Bur., pp. 77-78).

49. Bourget has a good phrase which, although simplified, serves to confirm how far GF is from sharing HJ's "pragmatism": "Le mal dont il a souffert toute sa vie, cet abus de la pensée qui l'a mis en disproportion avec son milieu, avec son temps, avec toute action, involontairement, instinctivement, il le donne à ses tristes héros." Etudes et Portraits, vol. I, p. 193.
I think James has too big a part of his own thought invested in Felix here for us to really feel that this polished dialogue is offering us mature discriminations about conduct and philosophy. Certainly, James sees round Felix - he sees round most of his characters - but he is not troubled by the airy way Felix brushes the question of the "misery in the world" under the carpet. Felix's blitheness is part of a temperament which is there for the reader as well as Gertrude to envy and want to emulate. There is always something remarkable about people who contrive to eat their cake and have it too. No wonder Felix makes Gertrude feel so much "excitement". Her spontaneity, at least, seems to reside in the nerves.

James makes the point that Felix has found a way of evading tragedy by giving us one of those rare moments when the Baroness's manner drops and she shows her actual suffering, just for an instant. Felix has just announced that he and Gertrude are in love and Eugenia replies:

"While you are amusing yourself - with the brilliant Gertrude - what shall I be doing?"
"Vous serez de la partie!" cried Felix.
"Thank you; I should spoil it." The Baroness dropped her eyes for some moments. "Do you propose, however, to leave me here?" she inquired.
Felix smiled at her. "My dearest sister, where you are concerned I never propose. I execute your commands."
"I believe", said Eugenie slowly, "that you are the most heartless person living. Don't you see that I am in trouble?"
"I saw that you were not cheerful, and I gave you some good news" (Eur., p. 159).

His own good news. Felix's optimism comes very close to self-centredness here. One understands why there is always a slight note of patronage in the way Eugenia addresses him: she has the right to it because her feelings are deeper. Earlier, Felix had complained to Gertrude that "You are all so afraid, here, of being selfish" (Eur., p. 120). We now begin to wonder if Felix is himself a very adequate alternative to what is stifling in the New England selflessness.
These doubts crystallise around the final relationship between Gertrude and Felix, when Gertrude's nature is fully awake and whirls Felix along "like a runaway horse" towards her desires (Eur., p. 169). The question is, what is her desire for? Is it really for Felix? Mr. Brand asks Felix to explain to him what he means by calling Gertrude "strong":

"Well", said Felix meditatively, "I mean that she has had a great deal of self-possession. She was waiting - for years; even when she seemed, perhaps, to be living in the present. She knew how to wait; she had a purpose. That's what I mean by her being strong."

"What do you mean by her purpose?"

"Well - the purpose to see the world!" (Eur., p. 169).

What is this "self-possession"? Mr. Brand is right to be puzzled by it. How do you desire to see the world through another person in such a way that your desire to see the world is equal to your desire for that other person? Is Gertrude using the fact that Felix is a European or is it James using that same fact to round out the meaning of his "fable" at the expense of a deeper sensitivity to human relationships? Gertrude's wildness and Felix's gaiety manage to sweep this issue under the same carpet where all the other issues raised by Acton's feeling for Eugenia are consigned. We participate in the feeling that Felix is lucky and the novel is able to end in an atmosphere of excited exuberance - New England rejuvenated by Europe through an intense action of the mind. When the Baroness bids goodbye to Mrs. Acton she has a more human perception of such things:

"And my son is so fond of going to see you", Mrs. Acton added. "I am afraid my son will miss you."

"Ah, dear madam", said Eugenia with a little laugh, "I can't stay in America for your son!"

"Don't you like America?"

The Baroness looked at the front of her dress. "If I liked it - that would not be staying for your son!" (Eur., p. 173).

Then is Gertrude going to Europe for Felix?
In the New England of Mr. Wentworth imagination is excluded by the moral spirit and the main aim of the novel is to try to reconcile the two faculties through Felix and Gertrude. Diluted versions of both are, in fact, reconciled at the end but the reconciliation leaves us with the same questions as does their love for each other. What place do imagination and spirit find to live in? All we know is that "Gertrude left her father's house with Felix Young; they were imperturbably happy, and they went far away" (Eur., p. 208). It is some refined, disassociated paradise of the cultural hedonist: the kind of spiritual limbo which the expatriate American heroine of the early tale Madame de Mauves (1874) calls "a nameless country of my own". We do not feel that the Europe to which they go will be the Europe of the Baroness and the rather shady doings of the court of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein. In their innocence they are en route for the Europe of Gilbert Osmond, the man through whom Isabel Archer hopes to see the world. It is like the journey that Rowland Mallett made when he turned down the chance of being socially useful in America and took Roderick to Rome, what R.P. Blackmur has acutely described as "the general heresy of the late nineteenth and twentieth century that the arts and learning can be divorced from the power and resources of society without danger to both". If the place that Gertrude and Felix go to seek is the ideal fusion of their Americanness and Europeanness then can James's concern with imagining an ideal civilisation be a profoundly human concern after all? If one's answer to this final question about the novel is negative then I think it has to be denied the right to be considered as a great comic novel too. The last

word on the novel's comedy may be left to a recent English critic:

The high spirits in The Europeans are conceited, very much of the nerves and unnaturally chaste and they are therefore not as animating as they might be expected to be, but they make a distinctly pleasanter impression that any high spirits in The Portrait of a Lady. (52)

The fact that this criticism can be made, whether or not one agrees with it, is not unrelated to James's reticence about Eugenia.

More than the complexities of the "international situation" and a delicate touch for light comedy are developed from The Europeans into The Portrait of a Lady, Washington Square provides a further element which was not compatible with the verve of The Europeans: a peculiarly Jamesian kind of pathos. It is a quality which is often the other side of his irony. James often regards the plain and modest Catherine with a disingenuous version of the franker irony with which Dr. Sloper regards her. Dr. Sloper is intent on discovering whether his dull daughter is capable of supplying him with the kind of surprising behaviour which will enliven his rather pallid curiosity in her. In a way, the whole novel consists of James's manipulating Catherine to oblige Dr. Sloper's analytic streak – to Dr. Sloper's ultimate discomfiture. James understands Catherine much better and is concerned with bringing off the quiet tour de force of a gripping novel about a dull person. The hidden depths he elicits are in the field of resignation and passive suffering – emotions which he made peculiarly his own in many later novels. There is, therefore, much in Washington Square that recalls The Europeans as well as something new.

52. J.M. Newton, "Isabel Archer's Disease, and HJ's", The Cambridge Quarterly, II, no. 1 (1966), 21. I have found this one of the most useful pieces of criticism on HJ and one which deserves to become current. (A way of placing the "high spirits" of The Europeans might be to refer to the kind of gaiety, one dependant on keeping constant touch with potentially tragic feelings, which we find in a comedy like Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro.)
Both novels share the same felicity in comic dialogue which has a freshness and polish as fine as anything in James and perhaps only equalled in the later books by *The Awkward Age* (1899).

*Washington Square* is a novel where people constantly confuse a person's real being with money and not, as in *The Europeans*, with culture. That is, it is a story of old New York and not of an older New England. The same tender nostalgia for a vanished past is still there and this time it has a more personal note:

I know not whether it is owing to the tenderness of early associations, but this portion of New York appears to many persons the most delectable. It has a kind of established repose which is not of frequent occurrence in other quarters of the long, shrill city; it has a riper, richer, more honourable look than any of the upper ramifications of the great longitudinal thoroughfare - the look of having had something of a social history. It was here, as you might have been informed on good authority, that you had come into a world which appeared to offer a variety of sources of interest; it was here that your grandmother lived, in venerable solitude, and dispensed a hospitality which commended itself alike to the infant imagination and the infant palate; it was here that you took your first walks abroad, following the nursery-maid with unequal step, and sniffing up the strange odour of the ailantus thee which at that time formed the principal umbrage of the Square, and diffused an aroma that you were not yet critical enough to dislike as it deserved; it was here, finally, that your first school, kept by a broad-bosomed, broad-based old lady with a ferule, who was always having tea in a blue cup, with a saucer that didn't match, enlarged the circle both of your observations and your sensations. It was here, at any rate, that my heroine spent many years of her life; which is my excuse for this topographical parenthesis. (53)

James himself was born in Washington Square. The slightly ponderous way in which he enters into the feelings of childhood cannot efface the strong charm the place has for him, it even brings in an old-fashioned quality which accentuates the wistful note. The passage, when taken together with Arthur Townsend's description of the way New York is moving uptown (WS., pp. 28-29) and the arriviste character of Morris Townsend, alerts us to

the fact that Catherine's suffering and spinsterdom may in reality be a lament for the passing of the old New York. Dr. Sloper himself is appalled at Catherine's loud taste in dress, her lack of "Republican simplicity" (WS., p. 14) and favours the quietly refined display of wealth that he feels is disappearing from his city:

For himself, he was fond of the good things in life, and he made a considerable use of them; but he had a dread of vulgarity, and even a theory that it was increasing in the society that surrounded him. (WS., p. 14).

This is a sentiment and an opinion that he shared with James himself: one thinks back to the "dread of vulgarity" that kept coming up in Roderick Hudson and forward to Olive Chancellor's tribulations with Mathias Pardon in The Bostonians. One thing which distinguishes the novel from Balzac's Eugénie Grandet is that in a similar tale where a member of the monied classes suffers at the hands of a penniless adventurer the different nature of the money makes the pathos different too. James's old New York is utterly different from the frightening concreteness of Balzac's Saumur.

Washington Square only becomes a melodrama if we misread Dr. Sloper as being a conventionally harsh father. James is not likely to want us to dismiss so simply a man who can tell Aunt Penniman "Don't undervalue irony; it is often of great use" (WS., p. 173). In fact, he is the most complex character in the book. He is very like Acton but James describes him more decisively. He too enjoys playing with people and prides himself on his penetration. As a fashionable doctor he has "passed his life in estimating people" (WS., p. 81). His weakness is that his irony and wit make him seek in society for situations which will gratify his own sense of humour and justify his mordant and honourably conservative opinion of his fellows. While Aunt Penniman hopes for a romantic drama Dr. Sloper, equally blinkered by self, looks to Catherine to provide him with a comedy of manners. The mordancy is understandable. One has all the time the
impression that there is more to Dr. Sloper than to any one else in
his world and that the events of his life are never such as to allow him
to give us his full measure. Frustration turns to mockery. It is part of
James's odd picture of pre-Civil War America that there is nothing in
it to test men of real ability, Rowland or Acton or Sloper. If America—even the North—had been like this in reality there would have been no
Civil War at all. One of the things in Dr. Sloper which are hidden under
the assumed coldness is his passionate nature. He alarms his mild
daughter in Europe by suddenly turning on her, dropping his mask and
saying:

"... you ought to know what I am. I am not a very good man.
Though I am very smooth externally, at bottom I am very
passionate; and I assure you I can be very hard". (WS., pp. 155-156).
The passion only gets expression in exaggerated hardness. (As in the case
of Mr. Wentworth, Dr. Sloper has no wife.) One of the few characters in
later James whom one can think of as having this latent forcefulness is
Basil Ransom in The Bostonians (1886). Caspar Goodwood, in The Portrait
of a Lady, is part of the new, economically agressive America and he quite
lacks Sloper's complexity. Basil is, of course, a more full-scale
picture of the impassioned reactionary radical who inveighs against the
debased values of the age—a Carlylean aristocrat from the deep South.
In Washington Square James is too realistic to give Dr. Sloper Basil's
scope for action and there is no suspicion of fantasy in the picture of
his final isolation as there is about the last scene of The Bostonians.
In fact, I wonder whether I am the only reader who has wondered whether
Dr. Sloper is not the source of the novel's most real pathos—a pathos
which, like Flaubert's, forces us to flex our imagination before granting
us the luxury of sympathy? Ostensibly, he is a part of the way the whole
plot is engineered to make Catherine nobly and obstinately long-suffering.
His fate resembles Morris Townsend's in that the book punishes him for possessing a fuller and more unmanageable energy that is compatible with the kind of sympathies James wants to evoke. Morris Townsend is a mere papier mâché cliché in comparison but, eventually, the book asks us to regard the life of Dr. Sloper with the same moralising dislike. Our sympathy is reserved for someone who, through her position, can have only the courage to endure and not the courage to live. The irony is that Dr. Sloper was right about Townsend all along. Townsend is a device to make Catherine suffer and her suffering is a way of eliciting our pity.

Catherine has an "exaggerated power of suffering" (WS., p. 87) - a quality James tends to associate with an ability to respond more intensely to life, as in the case of Milly Theale - and her behaviour is often "unnaturally passive" (WS., p. 95):

The idea of a struggle with her father, of setting up her will against his own, was heavy on her soul, and it kept her formally submissive, as a great physical weight keeps us motionless. (WS., p. 97).

The kind of sympathy she evokes is therefore tender rather than emotional; James sees her plight from a sufficient distance for compassion to become gratifying and not all painful. The irony helps: "She was really too modest for consistent pathos" (WS., p. 126). We may be sure that James has sized up her dramatic possibilities with a precise finesse: he restricts her to one real passionate moment, after Morris has given her up:

It was almost her last outbreak of passionate grief; at least, she never indulged in another that the world knew anything about. But this one was long and terrible; she flung herself on the sofa and gave herself up to misery (WS., p. 193).

From the first her love has a reticent quality:

If she had been told she was in love, she would have been a good deal surprised; for she had an idea that love was an eager and exacting passion, and her own heart was filled in these days with the impulse of self-effacement and sacrifice. (WS., p. 49).
Already? It is as if the final outcome is the one which would in any case have suited her best. Is her refusal to marry a revenge on her father, a compliment to Morris or, more likely, a subtle way of gratifying her own gift for suffering? Is the final impression we take from the novel one of her loneliness or of her solitude: the purity of the inviolate self? I do not think we can take it as the end of a story about intense love:

Love demands certain things as a right; but Catherine had no sense of her rights; she had only a consciousness of immense and unexpected favours. (WS., p. 50).

The modesty goes with an obstinacy which is a delicate form of pride. Rather than call Washington Square the story of a relationship I should call it the story of Catherine Sloper.

This explains why the final scene of the book is so curiously restrained and even possesses a quiet elation. There is only a minor sense of the passage of time with Morris's reappearance - "He was forty-five years old, and his figure was not that of the straight, slim young man she remembered. But it was a very fine person..." (WS., p. 229) - and the main stress falls not on something that has been lost but on something Catherine has gained: "How long ago it was - how old she had grown - how much she had lived!" (WS., p. 230). For James, she has lived. When she settles down at the end to her embroidery, "for life, as it were" (WS., p. 234), there is no feeling that she would have lived more if she had been married to a scapegrace, nothing irrevocable. Might we not take Catherine's words in the following dialogue with Morris literally?

Morris stood stroking his beard, with a clouded eye. "Why have you never married?" he asked, abruptly. "You have had opportunities."
"I didn't wish to marry."
"Yes, you are rich, you are free; you had nothing to gain."
"I had nothing to gain."
Morris looked vaguely round him, and gave a deep sigh. "Well, I was in hopes that we might still have been friends."
"I meant to tell you, by my aunt, in answer to your message — if you had waited for an answer — that it was unnecessary for you to come in that hope."
"Good-bye, then", said Morris. "Excuse my indiscretion."
He bowed, and she turned away — standing there, averted, with her eyes on the ground, for some moments after she had heard him close the door of the room. (WS., p. 233).

For a brief moment it is as if Morris might be suffering more than Catherine and his very emptiness evokes pity. Catherine has found a stoical strength that teaches her how to circumvent tragedy through a reliance on the resources of the self. It is a more triumphant version of Madame de Cintré's taking the veil in The American. In an argument which has already centred on asking whether we find a "reverent openness before life" in James I cannot resist concluding by quoting the infinitely more moving chapter at the end of L'Éducation sentimentale where Frédéric and Madame Arnoux part for the last time. The novel has many flaws but here it does show us that it can be an agony for the cinders of an old feeling to be raked over again when they are half-cold. Not many novels can make us feel so blank and take us so far out of our usual selves into a sense of time:

Elle se rassit; mais elle observait le pendule, et il continuait à marcher en fumant. Tous les deux ne trouvaient plus rien à se dire. Il y a un moment, dans les séparations, où la personne aimée n'est déjà plus avec nous.
Enfin, l'aiguille ayant dépassé, elle prit son chapeau par les brides, lentement.
— Adieu, mon ami, mon cher ami! Je ne vous reverrai jamais!
C'était ma dernière démarche de femme. Mon âme ne vous quittera pas. Que toutes les bénédictions du ciel soient sur vous.
Et elle le baissa au front comme une mère.
Mais elle partit chercher quelque chose, et lui demanda des ciseaux.
Elle défît son peigne; tous ses cheveux blancs tombèrent.
Elle s'en coupa, brutalement, à la racine, une longue mèche.
— Cardez-ès! adieu!
Quand elle fut sortie, Frédéric ouvrit sa fenêtre, Mme. Arnoux, sur le trottoir, fit signe d'avancer à un fiacre qui passait. Elle monta dedans. La voiture disparut.
Et ce fut tout. (ES., p. 606).

The smallest words can embody a great intensity — "lentement"; "à la racine"; "un fiacre qui passait" — because it is really something in life
which is speaking through them. By comparison our pity in Washington Square is just for Catherine’s condition, not our own too.

This reference to L’Education sentimentale might serve to distract us from the usual parallel between Washington Square and Eugénie Grandet. The evidence of a debt to Balzac is considerably diminished when we remember that the source of the plot was a story James had from Fanny Kemble, and, in any case, the novel has a quite different kind of intensity from Balzac’s and a charm which replaces the Balzacian drive. 

Rebecca West thought she could detect Flaubert’s influence on the style of James’s novel:

... it was that great master who had taught him his art of rubbing down the too brilliant phrase to tone with the quiet harmony of the whole, of obliterating the exotic effect that would compromise the dour simplicity of the subject. (55)

If one were bent on finding a French influence on James’s prose perhaps the less tense precision of Mérimée’s style or the lightness of Gautier’s would be more plausible ones? But there is no need to go this far afield when describing James’s prose. The obvious comparison is with Jane Austen.

John Lucas claims, in his essay on the novel, for example, that "Washington Square is best seen as a novel in the tradition that Jane Austen’s fiction inaugurates". 56 This statement seems to me acceptable only in terms of the generalities of literary history: firstly, Jane Austen, owing so much to Rasselas and Richardson, hardly inaugurates tradition; secondly, her irony is really very different from James’s. Yet the point about the

54. See Notebooks, pp. 12-13. Against Leavis’s claim that WS is "fine in a way that is beyond Balzac" (Great Tradition, p. 154) I can do no better than to quote the comments of the young Lawrence on Eugénie Grandet: "The book has that wonderful feeling of inevitableness which is characteristic of the best French novels... Can you find a grain of sentimentality in Eugénie? Can you find a touch of melodrama, or caricature, or flippancy... Balzac can lay bare the living body of the great life..." (Moore, Letters, vol. I, pp. 35-36).


prose and the general subject matter is neatly made if we remember
that there is a parallel for Catherine Sloper in Jane Austen as well
as in Balzac: Catherine Morland, the equally plain heroine of Northanger
Abbey.

What I have to say is more or less said by transcribing the
opening descriptions of Catherine Morland and Catherine Sloper. The
differences and likenesses speak for themselves:

She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour,
dark lank hair, and strong features; - so much for her person;
- and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind. She
was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket
not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of
infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering
a rose-bush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she
gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of
mischief - at least so it was conjectured from her always
preferring those which she was forbidden to take. - Such were
her propensities - her abilities were quite as extraordinary.
She never could learn or understand anything before she was
taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive,
and occasionally stupid. Her mother was three months in teaching
her only to repeat the "Beggar's Petition"; and, after all, her
next sister, Sally, could say it better than she did. Not that
Catherine was always stupid, - by no means; she learnt the
fable of "The Hare and many Friends", as quickly as any girl in
England. Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine
was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling
the keys of the old forlorn spinnet; so, at eight years old she
began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it; - and Mrs.
Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished
in spite of incapacity or distaste, allowed her to leave off.
The day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest
of Catherine's life. Her taste for drawing was not superior;
though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from
her mother, or seize upon any other odd piece of paper she did
what she could in that way, by drawing houses and trees, hens
and chickens, all very much like one another. - Writing and
accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother; her
proficiency in either was not remarkable, and she shirked her
lessons in both whenever she could. What a strange, unaccountable
character! - for with all these symptoms of profligacy at ten
years old, she had neither a bad heart nor a bad temper; was
seldom stubborn, scarcely ever quarrelsome, and very kind to the
little ones, with few interruptions of tyranny; she was moreover
noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing
so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back
of the house.

Such was Catherine Morland at ten. (57)

Here is Catherine Sloper, rather older:

She was a healthy, well-grown child, without a trace of her mother's beauty. She was not ugly; she had simply a plain, dull, gentle countenance. The most that had ever been said for her was that she had a "nice" face, and, though she was an heiress, no one had ever thought of regarding her as a belle. Her father's opinion of her moral purity was abundantly justified; she was excellently, imperturbably good; affectionate, docile, obedient, and much addicted to speaking the truth. In her younger years she was a good deal of a romp, and, though it is an awkward confession to make about one's heroine, I must add that she was something of a glutton. She never, that I know of, stole raisins out of the pantry; but she devoted her packet-money to the purchase of cream cakes. As regards this, however, a critical attitude would be inconsistent with a candid reference to the early annals of any biographer. Catherine was decidedly not clever; she was not quick with her book, nor, indeed, with anything else. She was not abnormally deficient, and she mustered learning enough to acquit herself respectably in conversation with her contemporaries, among whom it must be avowed, however, that she occupied a secondary place. It is well known that in New York it is possible for a young girl to occupy a primary one. Catherine, who was extremely modest, had no desire to shine, and on most social occasions, as they are called, you would have found her lurking in the background. (NS., pp. 9-10).

This clearly owes more to Jane Austen than to Hawthorne, George Eliot or the French novelists but that is not to say it has really learnt its lessons any better than Catherine has. The irony is more devious ("an awkward confession to make about one's heroine") and it comes across as a way of protecting Catherine by the way it is muzzled by the author's urbanity. This impression that the comic tone can never truly forget itself in its enjoyment of what it describes is reinforced by a pompous way of joking about childhood ("a candid reference to the early annals of any biographer"). No writer who had been trained in eighteenth century prose style could have used the word "candid" so uncandidly; nor would an eighteenth century writer have been guilty of the stiltedness of "among whom it must be avowed, however". The desired impression of ease of manner soon gives way to the feeling that James is unnecessarily self-conscious. This is a way of saying that he appears to hold himself
at a distance from what he is describing as well as from his reader. The inappropriate word "glutton" is just one symptom of the way he misses communicating. There is no conviction behind the irony and we have no desire to laugh at Catherine. In fact, it soon appears that we are meant to feel sorry for her as a back number: there is something tremulous in the wit and the main reward it offers us is not laughter but a rather superior feeling of how sympathetic we are. At the end of the chapter we are told that "In reality, she was the softest creature in the world" (WS., p. 12). James hopes that his ingratiating wit will have induced us to value such softness. All these impressions are intensified by turning back to Jane Austen. She makes no attempt to protect her Catherine; there is an admirable bluntness in her prose which is yet delicate enough to invite rather than evaporate our sympathy. This bluntness, in fact, is one way in which she gets into the direct vision of the child and she takes us much nearer to her Catherine. She can do this while remaining perfectly judicious so that her reader is quite clear about what each evaluative word means. For example, the irony behind her strong word "profligacy" is much more precise than the irony behind James's vague phrase about "a critical attitude". One result of her frank way of eschewing any special pleading for her heroine is that her prose releases for us a vigorous personality in whom we can see the seeds both of moral delicacy and a real appetite for life: James's prose, in contrast, seems to keep Catherine Sloper on a leash. It is, I think, this sense of his controlling the impression Catherine makes that brings us back to the nature of our pity for her. Perhaps it also brings this chapter to an end with the memory of Jervase Marion studying Lady Tal and planning how to use her?
"The Portrait of a Lady": James's "Simple Young Woman from Albany"

... I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths that we shall ever find, but as yet we do not know truths that belong to us from opinions caught up in casual irritation or momentary fantasy. As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory, whether over ourselves or others, and it is these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions... We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy. (1)

Yeat's thought offers me not a definition but a point of departure, for James's novel is the exploration of the growth of a soul through suffering. With Madame Bovary as my example of a tragic novel I want to put this question: Can we call The Portrait of a Lady, as has been claimed, a tragedy? I shall argue that we can't because the final impression it leaves us with is one of an untragic puzzlement which is too exclusively focussed on the individual nature of its heroine. James has not plumbed his personal involvement in Isabel deeply enough to take us beyond her suffering into the impersonal clarity of a common experience of the human predicament. His strange emotional complicity with her is the source of a discrepancy between what he says about her on the surface and an undercurrent of implications about her nature which he avoids the labour of bringing into the light of the general truths Yeats describes. James is too attached to Isabel to let her be the kind of representative of ourselves that Emma Bovary is and, therefore, he complies with her own conscious casting of herself in the role of tragedy queen. These thoughts can only be developed at length and by approaching the novel from a number of different angles to build up slowly as whole a picture of it as possible.

The difficulty of doing this is that the basis of my approach is that the novel does not hold its whole meaning surely within itself, that ultimately it leaves one with half-answered speculations rather than a fully articulated meaning. This is why, beginning in obscurity, I need as a base my question about whether or not The Portrait is tragic, for tragic art, like the convictions of which Yeats speaks, is, among other things, an art of total articulation. My question is necessarily somewhat factitious because the tragic can never be defined conceptually. As Jaspers saw, it springs from a vision which may have a deep significance for philosophy but is the result of experience and not of "philosophical preference".

The meaning of those tragedies that lie before us as the work of poets cannot possibly be reduced to a single formula... Every one of the great poems has a meaning which cannot be exhausted by interpretation. They offer no more than directions for interpretation to pursue. Where complete rational interpretation is possible, poetry becomes superfluous - indeed, there has never been truly poetic creation from the beginning. Where interpretation can make some elements stand out clearly, it heightens their accessibility precisely by virtue of a profound vision that is uncharted, that is not exhaustible by any analysis or interpretation. (4)

Any general thought about tragedy in these pages springs from those things in either James or Flaubert which prompt the notion of tragedy. It may well be that what I find untragic in The Portrait will seem to the reader

2. In the course of this chapter and the next I shall cite various sources - both in the novel, in HJ's other writings and in his critics - which will, I hope, provide some justification for my discussion of The Portrait in terms of tragedy. It would, however, be foolish to use the word pedantically and it is certainly not my intention to prove that HJ conceived the novel with any strict generic idea of tragedy in mind - indeed, such an idea, would hardly be a fruitful basis for any work of art. I simply find it helpful to express my doubts about the novel by describing it as untragic. No doubt most of what I say could be said without recourse to the word tragic, though perhaps it would then be said less clearly.


4. Jaspers, p. 43.
to belong to everything in it I leave 'uncharted'. This need not matter: a critic's terms are only his tools and they are judged only by whether they can do the job assigned them.

James's novel has enough in common with Flaubert's so one to see why he said of Madame Bovary that "the reader himself seems to have lived in it all, more than in any other novel we can recall". It would be wrong to labour this point because The Portrait has been shown to be derivative in other ways too; the impression James took from Emma Bovary was in many ways very like the one he took from George Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth: "The universe forcing itself with a slow, inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind, and making it ache with the pain of the process". One of my questions about Isabel Archer will be whether there is anything forcing itself into her consciousness at the end of the novel which we can call "the universe", as in the case of Gwendolen or Emma Bovary. Both The Portrait and Madame Bovary have, at any rate, more in common than their surface resemblance as novels in which a young woman of imagination marries the wrong man and fails to satisfy the demands of her imagination. That Isabel is virtuous while Emma is not is perhaps less central than the fact that they each imagine that they are spiritually free only to discover that they are not so. Flaubert has a description of the sculptor Pradier's unfaithful wife which, morals apart, fits Isabel like a glove: "La poésie de la femme adultère n'est vraie que parce qu'elle-même est dans la liberté,


6. The often parasitic relation of PL to George Eliot has been shown by Q.D. Leavis, "A Note on Literary Indebtedness: Dickens, George Eliot, HJ", Hudson Review, VIII (1955), 423-428 as well as in the well-known chapter in The Great Tradition. See also George Levine, "Isabel, Gwendolen and Dorothea", ELH, XXX, no. 1 (1963), 244-257. (Levine argues that HJ faces the tragedy which George Eliot evades by having Casaubon and Grandcourt die.)
au sein de la fatalité". This is precisely the same irony as we feel when Isabel accepts Gilbert Osmond. Mattheissen was at least true to the overt meaning of The Portrait when he called it "an essay on the interplay of free will and determinism". When Isabel rejects Lord Warburton the reason she gives is that "I can't escape my fate"; during one of her periodic cold-shoulderings of Caspar Goodwood she tells him that "I wish to choose my fate" (PL, I, p. 202). It is therefore no surprise to find her resemblance to Emma being commented on. Quentin Anderson thinks that "James may very well have been intent on producing an American analogue to Emma Bovary, who likewise incorporates internal contradictions". Stallman is, I think, right to see the following


8. F.O. Mattheissen, HJ: The Major Phase (NY, 1963), p. 185. (This is, of course, a preoccupation of many writers in the period; for example, George Eliot, Hawthorne, Hardy and Tolstoi.)

9. The Portrait of a Lady, 2 vols., vol. I, p. 164. A brief note on the New York text, used here, is in order. Slight modifications in one's reading of the novel have to be made according to whether the revision or the original text is being used. My impression is that the revision makes certain things which are half-submerged in the original rather more clear; for example, the nature of Isabel's "fear". It also - though this is a less undisputable gain - shows a deepening of HJ's affectionate feeling for Isabel which, if it softens the irony, implicates the author more deeply in her humanity. A less central gain is that it moves towards a subtler and more dramatic sense of the pathos in Madame Berle. As my reader will discover, these things make my case in some ways harder to argue and I have chosen to quote from the revision, not simply because it is the richer text, but because it makes me refine my criticisms more. On the other hand, some of the contradictions which I try to analyse in Isabel are accentuated in the revised text: it may contain a discrepancy between, as it were, a New York Isabel and an 1881 Isabel. Some passages were inevitably more revised than others. A good essay on the revisions is "The Painter's Sponge and the Varnish Bottle", in Mattheissen, The Major Phase, pp. 152-186.

10. The American HJ (Rutgers U.P., 1957), p. 198. (Grover's Ph.D. thesis argues that HJ's novels from PL to The Tragic Muse are indebted to GF's use of style indirect libre for their maintenance of a balance between empathy and detachment (p. 176). I am not convinced by his argument and I try below to distinguish PL from MB on the grounds that HJ's "form" is not concerned to achieve the same balance as GF's.)
exchange between Isabel and Henrietta Stackpole as an allusion to Madame Bovary:

"Do you know where you're drifting?" Henrietta pursued, holding out her bonnet delicately.

"No, I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see - that's my idea of happiness."

"Mr. Goodwood certainly didn't teach you to say such things as that - like the heroine of an immoral novel", said Miss Stackpole. (PL, I, pp. 207-208).

Could Emma be said to "drift" though? She certainly had less leisure for aphorisms. It seems here as if the passionate desperation of Emma's risk-taking has found a curiously self-conscious, even self-satisfied, extension into a cool flirting with life. But James would have said that Isabel was spiritually larger than Emma...

The irony of the short passage just quoted might not seem very clear. Is it mocking Isabel's naive irresponsibility or is the way it brings in Henrietta's crudity a sign that Isabel herself is being whimsical? I feel rather at a loss to know what to do with my thought that for Emma Bovary the point in being whisked away in a carriage at dead of night was the man who would be in the carriage with her. If there is some doubt about whether Isabel's imagination really prompts the thought of an intenser living, as Emma's does, it has not, surprisingly, prevented one critic from assuming that The Portrait is "sufficiently recognised as a tragic novel of the first order". Despite an evasive irony James certainly invites us to accord Isabel with the status of tragic heroine. She is a figure, like Cleopatra or Phèdre, whose destiny holds a deeper


12. D.W. Jefferson, Henry James (1960), p. 36. (Jefferson does go to discuss the reader's uncertainty about Osmond's feelings but he does not argue, as I would, that it is one of the main things which prevent the novel from being tragic.)
interest for her acolytes than does their own. Dorothea Krook claims that "James's millionaires and heiresses have in his novels exactly the same dramatic function as the kings, queens and princes in Shakespeare's plays. They are "representatives" of all humanity in the modern world..." Even if one waived the obvious objection that there is an essential difference between the head of a community and a Jamesian expatriate, such representativeness would not necessarily be of the tragic kind we get in Lear or Macbeth, a representativeness as much bound up with what happens to them as with what they are in themselves. Indeed, the exalted position of an Isabel or a Milly Theale may work against tragedy. A Lear of an Oedipus only exist on a pedestal before their tragedies have really begun. It is when Lear is stripped of outward royalty that he can begin to grow as a man until his sufferings seem to include the audience. In Yeats's words, "tragedy must always be a drowning, a breaking of the dykes that separate man from man." If we dissent from the view that The Portrait is tragic it is likely to be because we are looking not for a surrogate self in Isabel but for a soul that can so go to the end of itself as to touch beyond self a bedrock of humanness which bespeaks community. I shall try to explore later whether James can afford to take Isabel to the edge of doom where she might find such humanness. All that needs to be noted yet is his liking for the

15. Many critics have written about HJ's imagination as tragic: for example, Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (1954), p. 265; Frederick C. Crews, The Tragedy of Manners: Moral Drama in the later Novels of HJ (New Haven, 1957); Leyburn, Strange Alloy; Elizabeth Stevenson, The Crooked Corridor: A Study of HJ (NY, 1949). The last two find tragedy inseparable from comedy in the novels, as does Bewley, Complex Fate, pp. 16-17. Their view may be more tenable though it seems to me worth asking whether HJ isn't too serious, in too personal a way, about tragic characters like Isabel and Milly Theale to be able to see them comically and not just with mild irony. Some critics have argued that HJ is incapable of tragedy; for example, Anderson (p. 238); Chase (p. 114); Constance Rourke, American Humour: A Study of the National Character (NY, 1931), pp. 255-261.
problematic open ending:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so. (16)

It is a sense that we do not find in Flaubert or even Balzac, a sense that the English novelists may always have had more abundantly than the French. A contemporary admirer like Howells found it the most modern quality in James's novels:

There is no question, of course, but he could tell the story of Isabel in The Portrait of a Lady to the end, yet he does not tell it. We must agree, then, to take what seems a fragment instead of a whole, and to find, when we can, a name for this new kind of fiction. Evidently it is the character, not the fate, of his people which occupies him; when he has fully developed their character he leaves them to what destiny the reader pleases. (17)

For Howells the novel began and ended with its heroine and there is nothing in his preface to it to suggest that James thought differently. Yet there is a large assumption in what Howells says. It gives me an angle from which to look at Isabel Archer more clearly. How far can a character be "fully developed" if its "destiny" is left unfinished?

Both for the reader, the author and the other characters Isabel is the cynosure of The Portrait. What puzzles me about this fact is that I have found that the more light James tries to shed on her the less confident of understanding her I become. This reaction has been a common one. Practically all of the early reviewers of the novel echoed

17. Gard, Critical Heritage, p. 129. cf. the following remarks on PL by HJ: "The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished - that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation - that I have left her an l'air. - This is both true and false. The whole of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity - it groups together. It is complete in itself - and the rest may be taken up or not, later". Notebooks, p. 18.
R.H. Hutton's blunt response to its title: "She is the lady of whom no portrait is given, though she is studied till the reader is weary of the study". In our own time Dr. Leavis has remarked that "James's marvellous art is devoted to contenting us with very little in the way of inward realisation of Isabel, and to keeping us interested, instead, in a kind of psychological detective work - keeping un intently wondering from the outside, and constructing, on a strict economy of evidence, what is going on inside". Even if this view is mistaken it is significant that it could have been held. Did James want to conceal Isabel from us or was he himself groping towards an understanding of her inner life as he analysed her? The way Isabel's character is described might certainly be called putative but then this is because Isabel's relation to herself is also putative and questioning. The novel is full of self-conscious descriptions of her self-consciousness but was it not James's object to get right inside the sense of life of his central consciousness? This question can be followed by taking a passage from "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905), which can be accepted as a good account of what James is usually thought of as doing with Isabel, and silently placing it against a passage from The Portrait for comparison. James is discussing Taine's view that Balzac loved his Valérie Marneffe in a way that Thackeray could not love Becky Sharp:

He (Balzac) at all events robustly loved the sense of another explored, assumed, assimilated identity - enjoyed it as the hand enjoys the glove when the glove ideally fits. My image indeed is loose; for what he liked was absolutely to get into the constituted consciousness, into all the clothes, gloves and whatever else, into the very skin and bones, of the habited, featured, coloured, articulated form of life that he desired to present. How do we know given persons, for any purpose of

demonstration, unless we see it from their point of vision, that is, from their point of pressing consciousness or sensation? — without our allowing for which there is no appreciation. Balzac loved his Valérie then as Thackeray did not love his Becky, or his Blanche Amory in Pendennis. (20)

Was this how James loved his Isabel? Here is a passage from chapter 6 of The Portrait:

... she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior. Whether or not she was superior, people were right in admiring her if they thought her so; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs, and this encouraged an impatience that might easily be confounded with superiority. It may be affirmed without delay that Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right; she treated herself to occasions of homage. Meanwhile her errors and delusions were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his subject must shrink from specifying. Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgement of people speaking with authority. In matters of opinion she had had her own way, and it had led her into a thousand ridiculous zigzags. At moments she discovered she was grotesquely wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After this she held her head higher than ever again; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only under this provision life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organisation (she couldn't help knowing her organisation was fine), should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of one's self as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend; one should try to be one's own best friend and to give one's self, in this manner, distinguished company. The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her great many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action; she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong. (PL, I, pp. 59-60).

This is only a truncated extract but it helps to refresh one's sense of how much James enjoys elaborating on his heroine's nature.

Am I being too subtle in finding in James's prose here something

20. House of Fiction, pp. 77-78.
of the admiration of a fond parent? The irony which catches Isabel's foibles tends to be blurred, even evaporated, by a need to maintain her dignity under the guise of candid criticism. The affectionately playful tone in fact suggests not a real detachment but a hedging reserve. "Whether or not she were superior" insinuates a doubt that neither James nor Isabel really feel. Similarly, the candour of "It may be affirmed without delay" is dissolved by the word "probably" so that any sting in the words "the sin of self-esteem" is removed and they become an urbaine circumlocution. There is no Balzacian plunge into the depths of the character and less of a desire to swim with it as to watch it swimming from the shore. It is perhaps a certain condescension which maintains James's admiration; hence, the old-maidish wit of that shuffling reference to "a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his subject". One might suggest that James cannot get far enough inside Isabel to create any really humane distance from which we can respond to her. 21 This is the point at which to recall that if Balzac loved his Valérie he always knew that the vitality he entered into drew its source from something radically evil that was shown to be so. By the time Isabel is reflecting on the fineness of her "organisation" James's view of her is almost inseparable from her own: we are ready to take up her own "theory" that she moves in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy
21. See H.E. Scudder's review in The Atlantic Monthly, January, 1882: "when the people in the book stop acting or speaking, it is to give the novelist an opportunity, not to indulge in general reflections, having application to all sorts and conditions of men, of whom his dramatis personae are but a part, - he has no desire to share humanity with them, - but to make acute reflections upon those particular people, and to explain more thoroughly than their words and acts can the motives which lie behind". (Gard, Critical Heritage, pp. 109-110. This is one of several early reviews which are acute and sympathetic. By no means all HJ's reviewers were too gross to appreciate his subtlety; some of them, unlike many more recent admirers, were able to value it and to place it critically against the work of his predecessors.)
impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic". It becomes natural and charming in Isabel that she has "an unquenchable desire to think well of herself". She has been criticised to disarm criticism and her faults are there to endear her to us. This means that the more searching observations which follow lack rigour and seem to be reported in a generalised way, despite the irony which the development of the novel gives them. Confidence, optimism, lack of fear and fear of doing wrong are all analysed more deeply later but we already have reservations about the author's willingness to push his insights through. For at the end of the paragraph quoted from James comes out into the open:

... her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions: she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant. (PL, I, p. 61) (22)

Of course we owe it to Isabel's humanity not to be destructive in our judgements of her but is the nourishing of self-gratifying tender impulses the reader's only alternative to the "scientific criticism" James smiles at? One is entitled to suspect that James himself has a vested interest in Isabel's particular brand of "superiority". As in the case of Washington Square, the critical comparison must be with Jane Austen. In Emma she can criticise her central consciousness in a free and frank spirit which leaves one with no temptation to make up for

22. I would not want to press the comparison too far but Isabel's "flame-like spirit" does put one in mind of Pater's "hard gem-like flame". At several points Pater's famous Conclusion seems to be describing a similar desire for "life" to Isabel's, and the following passage might serve as a description of the nature of her "fear": "Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world". Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), p. 209.
reserves in her irony by the irritated quibbling that becomes so compulsive once we notice a gratuitous ambiguity in James's treatment of Isabel. Isabel, alas, did not have the blessing of a Mr. Knightley. Ralph Touchett, like most of her critics, was in love with her. Her bluntest critic was Henrietta Stackpole who, on one occasion, "crossed the stormy ocean in midwinter because she had guessed that Isabel was sad". (PL, II, p. 249).

James's reserved love of Isabel parallels the self-esteem and reticence which Isabel feels about herself. This is what makes us judge his effort to get to the bottom of her to be an effort to get to the bottom of himself. Her use of an aloofness from her friends to foster an aura of mystery and unpredictability around herself is corroborated by the teasing aloofness of James's irony. Just as there are things in her which James never fully explains or probes so she withholds many of her deepest feelings from her friends. Neither Madame Merle, her sisters nor Ralph are told about the progress of Osmond's courtship of her and James also declines – with one of these gaps which are superficially in the interest of formal economy – from telling us what it was like. And, like her author, she has the facility of self-conscious people for seeing herself as if she were someone else. When Warburton proposes to her, for example:

23. Not that PL should have had a Knightley figure, of course, but that there is inevitably uncertainty when we are asked to admire someone as we are asked to admire Isabel and yet are not given any clear impersonal criteria on which to base our admiration. It seems as if we are being asked for indulgence such as Ralph gives. (Although Knightley loves Emma his admiration takes the form of his wanting to live up to what is best in herself, not of making excuses for her.) Leavis makes a similar point about Isabel: "we are invited to share an evaluation of Isabel that is incompatible with a really critical irony... he (HJ) admires her so much, and demands for her such admiration and homage, that he can't be credited with 'placing' the conditions that, as an admirable American girl, she represents. James's lack of specificity favours an evasiveness, and the evasiveness, if at all closely questioned, yields inconsistency of a kind that partly empties the theme of The Portrait of a Lady of moral substance". (Great Tradition, pp. 126-127).
It suddenly came upon her that her situation was one which a few weeks ago she would have deemed deeply romantic: the park of an old English country house, with the foreground embellished by a 'great' (as she supposed) nobleman in the act of making love to a young lady who, on careful inspection, should be found to present remarkable analogies with herself. But if she was now the heroine of the situation she succeeded scarcely the less in looking at it from the outside. (PL, I, p. 129).

There is something really frightening in the lack of spontaneity of very subjective people like James and Isabel when they are being objective. The way reason stifles instinct in Isabel looks forward to John Marcher in The Beast in the Jungle, a late tale which could almost be seen as a more honest rewriting of The Portrait of a Lady. Isabel never sees Warburton as being simply a man who is in love with her; he is a "magnificent 'chance'" and a "great opportunity" (PL, I, p. 137). She is unable to see people as having something to give her or herself as having something to give them. Warburton would take away her freedom and she, in accepting him, would give it away. She sees her love for Osmond in the same way. It is the fantasy of the narrator of The Sacred Fount: to love someone is to part with some of one's self. Love is subject to the same fluctuations as capital. It is for this reason that James makes Osmond respond to Isabel as "a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects" (PL, II, p. 8).

He tells her "I'm absolutely in love with you" (PL, II, p. 16):

"Oh don't say that, please", she answered with an intensity that expressed the dread of having, in this case too, to choose and decide. What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread - the sense of something within herself, deep down, that she supposed to be inspired and trustful passion. It was there like a large sum stored in a bank - which there was a terror in having to begin to spend. If she touched it, it would all come out. (PL, II, p. 16).

Her reserve is a defence against this fear of giving the self. Osmond can overcome it because he can seem not to be wanting to take it like an
ordinary lover. In an early chapter James makes the sly comment that "Isabel's chief dread in life at this period of her development was that she should appear narrow-minded; what she feared next afterwards was that she should really be so". (PL, I, pp. 72-73). It is the kind of thought which underlies her seemingly extrovert self-effacement when she marries Osmond and the horror of public scandal which makes her return to him at the end. It is only because James is so intent on keeping her and Osmond apart in our minds that we forget that we might say just as easily that what Osmond desired most was to be thought "the man with the best taste in the world" (PL, II, p. 169), and that what he desired next was really to be that man.

James's real unacknowledged inwardness with Isabel is such that her own theoretical images of herself constitute the core of his own tragic feeling for her. We find these images in her proneness to flirt with ideas. Far from being the future prey of suffering she envisages herself from the start as being almost morally obliged to suffer: in her mental blueprint of life she is already the tragic heroine:

   It appeared to Isabel that the unpleasant had even been too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction. (PL, I, p. 37). (24)

In this way she can evade grasping her chances of life by cultivating a passive expectation of suffering which can present itself as deeper living. She spells this out to Warburton:

   "I'm not bent on a life of misery", said Isabel. "I've always been intensely determined to be happy, and I've often

24. It is hard to assign precise meaning to words like "unpleasant", "interest" and "instruction" but I think they reveal a vagueness HJ shares with Isabel as well as his habitually cool and distant kind of polite irony. HJ's own feelings were similar to Isabel's here: "I suspect that it is the tragedies in life that arrest my attention more than the other things and say more to my imagination..." (Selected Letters, p. 99.)
believed I should be. I've told people that; you can ask them. But it comes over me every now and then that I can never be happy in any extraordinary way; not by turning away, by separating myself."
"By separating yourself from what?"
"From life." (PL, I, p. 165).

It might seem that it is just such a separation that she is effecting here. To minimise one's capacity for intense happiness is surely the same thing as to minimise the hold tragedy can have on her? What is unfolding itself here is the possibility of the strange Jamesian passion of renunciation to which we come at the end of the novel. Isabel and James constantly peddle a series of running ideas which give this passion fuel. "The finer natures were those that shone at the larger times" (PL, I, p. 214); "The more you know the more unhappy you are". (PL, I, p. 325). Thoughts which in most tragedies come as the upshot of an entire dramatic situation, slowly and impersonally evolved, seem willed and lie across the surface of The Portrait like the catchphrases of the critic. It is one thing to say that in Hamlet the hero comes to knowledge through suffering, another thing altogether to take this as a programme for action. I would argue that James deliberately planned a tragedy for Isabel as a demonstration for her "noble nature". In doing so his own profoundest instincts and hers went hand in hand. Only a veneer of comic detachment disguises this in the following passage from chapter 12:

Smile not, however, I venture to repeat, at this simple young woman from Albany who debated whether she should accept an English peer before he had offered himself and who was disposed to believe that on the whole she could do better. She was a person of great good faith, and if there was a great deal of folly in her wisdom those who judge her severely may have the satisfaction of finding that, later, she became consistently wise only at the cost of an amount of folly, which will constitute almost a direct appeal to charity. (PL, I, p. 127).

James doesn't really see her as a "simple young woman" although the patronising tone of the words is conducive to our being endeared to her enough to feel a patronising "charity". It is plain that we judge Isabel
This brings us up against one of the main problems in reading The Portrait: how do we go beneath the admiration and its veil of irony to the deepest springs of Isabel’s selfhood? How do we cross the distance made my romance? This problem is not just James’s or his reader’s; all of Isabel’s friends feel it too. One of the more curious features of James’s world is that people seek personal relationships with others in a direct ration of their feeling of something inaccessible and perplexing in them.25 Another example occurs with the shadowy, shimmering personality of Milly Theale who evokes love and mystery simultaneously. In The Portrait people interest each other because something makes them put up screens around themselves, and this applies to good and bad characters alike.

Ralph, for example:

"I keep a band of music in my ante-room," he said once to her. "It has orders to play without stopping; it renders me two excellent services. It keeps the sound of the world from reaching the private apartments, and it makes the world think that dancing's going on within." It was dance-music indeed that you usually heard when you came within earshot of Ralph’s band; the liveliest waltzes seemed to float upon the air. Isabel often found herself irritated by this perpetual fiddling; she would have liked to pass through the ante-room, as her cousin called it, and enter the private apartments. (PL, I, p. 72).

In the same way, Isabel is a closed door to Ralph:

His cousin was a very brilliant girl, who would take, as he said, a good deal of knowing; but she needed the knowing, and his attitude with regard to her, though it was contemplative and critical, was not judicial. He surveyed the edifice from the outside and admired it greatly; he looked in at the windows and received an impression of proportions equally fair. But he felt that he had only by glimpses and that he had not yet stood under the roof. The door was fastened, and though he had keys in his pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit. (PL, I, p. 76).

25. Hyacinth Robinson, in The Princess Casamassima, has this feeling in abundance; it counts for a lot of his attraction to the Princess, Paul Muniment and, even, Millicent Henning. In Maisie Farange HJ expresses it through the eyes of a child.
As Ralph feels about Isabel so she feels about Osmond. Her introduction to him begins with her view of his Florentine villa, which is another screen:

... this antique, solid, weather-worn, yet imposing front had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask, not the face of the house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way - looked off behind, into splendid openness and the range of the afternoon light... The windows of the ground floor, as you saw them from the piazza, were, in their noble proportions, extremely architectural; but their function seemed less to offer communication with the world than to defy the world to look in. They were massively crossbarred, and placed at such a height that curiosity, even on tiptoe, expired before it reached them. (PL, I, pp. 286-287). (26)

One could almost substitute this description of Osmond's villa for Ralph's impression of Isabel. We see them both "only by glimpses". Such vision is not only the basis of the novel's psychology; it is also what generates its peculiar kind of suspense.

The confirmation of this view of Isabel as the half-seen, half-obscured cynosure of the novel is found, I think, in James's preface to the New York edition. The preface is a relevant guide because it comes from more than just the hindsight of an older man. One of the most attractive qualities of the prefaces is the sense they give of a mind in communion with its own creative past. James is as concerned to evoke again his former inspiration as to submit his early work to detached criticism. He can tell us a lot about a novel simply through trying to re-possess it, to put back, as it were, the umbilical cord which was cut when he first completed it. The prefaces were written not so much to look back on the past as to bridge it. If we allow for the wistful romantic patina which

26. See Stallman (op.cit.) for a full discussion of this kind of architectural imagery in PL. His reading of Isabel's resemblances to Osmond coincides with mine at several points though he is not very clear as to how far EJ intended the comparison.
the later James always shed on his own past they can take us far into
the springs of his creation. He begins the preface to *The Portrait* with
a nostalgic passage on the Venice where much of it had been written and
this makes him feel that the novel is his again. Then, as always, he goes
to the first gleams of its subject in his imagination:

> Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my
idea, I see that it must have consisted not at all in any
conceit of a "plot", nefarious name, in any flash, upon the
fancy, of a set of relations, or in any one of those
situations that, by a logic of their own, immediately fall,
for the fabulist, into movement, into a march or a rush, a
patter of quick steps; but altogether in the sense of a single
character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging
young woman, to which all the usual elements of a "subject",
certainly of a setting, were to need to be super-added. (*AN*, p. 42).

At this stage Isabel is not exactly a character or a motive so much as one
of those "lurking forces of expansion" (*AN*, p. 42) in her creator's
imagination. The memory of the preface-writer has become a means of
plumbing what is deepest and most inscrutable there and Isabel comes to
seem a mystery that is concurrent with the mystery of James's own mind:

> Thus I had my vivid individual - vivid, so strangely, in spite
of being still at large, not confined by the conditions, not
engaged in the tangle, to which we look for much of the
impress that constitutes an identity. If the apparition was
still all to be placed how came it to be vivid? - since we
puzzle such quantities out, mostly, just by the business of
placing them. One could answer such a question beautifully,
doubtless, if one could do so subtle, if not so monstrous, a
thing as to write the history of the growth of one's
imagination. (*AN*, p. 47).

No doubt Isabel retains, for the reader, much of the inaccessible
suggestiveness of an "apparition".²⁷ Perhaps we should trust James's
instinct to leave her half-remote and beyond our moral definitions of her,
even when he seems to have been diverted to a shallower kind of wonder
at her uniqueness of being, a wonder too deliberately sustained by the

²⁷ On one occasion Osmond sees her as an "apparition" (*PL*, I, p. 348).
perplexing effect she makes on the little ring of Isabel-watchers in
the novel. But a doubt does arise here: how can James manage to manipulate
an "apparition" - something mysterious and distanced from himself - so
that his other characters are puzzled in a way that he, the narrator, is
not? The suspicion of manipulation comes up in the preface, I think, as
James moves from seeing Isabel as a strangely intimate projection of
his imagination to feeling proprietorship in her as a "precious object"
that is "curiously at my disposal" (AN, p. 48). (We might describe this
move as being from Ralph's way of seeing Isabel to Osmond's.) As far as
the later James could recall, Isabel changed from a fleeting apparition
to a genie at his beck and call. She is seen now as a "figure" that is
"placed in the imagination that detains it, preserves, protects, enjoys
it, conscious of its presence in the dusky, crowded, heterogeneous back-
shop of the mind very much as a wary dealer in precious odds and ends,
competent to make an "advance" on the rare object confided to him, is
conscious of the rare little "piece" left in deposit by the reduced,
mysterious lady of title or the speculative amateur, and which is already
there to disclose its merit afresh as soon as a key shall have clicked
in a cupboard door" (AN, pp. 47-48). The way James plays with his image
enables us to trace the artistic legerdemain by which Isabel changed
from something unfathomable in the "back-shop" of his mind to something
that could be revealed by the turning of a key. This suggests that he
was concentrating more on the effect she has on others than on exploring
her. Thus his attention turned to the need for a plot: "my pious desire
but to place my treasure right". (AN, p. 48).

The Portrait is essentially the story of Isabel Archer - more so,
even, than The Mill on the Floss is the story of Maggie Tulliver - and
the story of the preface is how James built a novel around her. There is
only one mention of Osmond in it and that is only a musing over the way
his name, with the names of other minor characters, came to James as he "waked up one morning in possession of them" (AN, p. 53). It came, like the others, as part of "the definite array of contributions to Isabel Archer's history" (AN, p. 53). (One could hardly imagine a stage in creation at which Emma Bovary was not inseparably associated with Charles.) How did James proceed to create "conditions" and a "tangle" of events which would bring out his heroine? According to the preface this was where his preoccupation with the novel's "structure" came in:

The point is, however, that this single small corner-stone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny, had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of 'The Portrait of a Lady'. It came to be a square and spacious house - or has at least seemed so to me in this going over it again; but, such as it is, it had to be put up round my young woman while she stood there in perfect isolation. That is to me, artistically speaking, the circumstance of interest; for I have lost myself once more, I confess, in the curiosity of analysing the structure. By what process of logical accretion was this slight 'personality', the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl, to find itself endowed with the high attributes of a Subject? - and indeed by what thinness, at the best, would such a subject not be vitiated? Millions of presumptuous girls, intelligent or not intelligent, daily affront their destiny, and what is it open to their destiny to be, at the most, that we should make an ado about it? The novel is of its very nature an 'ado', an ado about something, and the larger the form it takes the greater of course the ado. Therefore, consciously, that was what one was in for - for positively organising an ado about Isabel Archer (AN, p. 48).

As ever, James's playful appreciation of what he has done tempts one to see this humour as modest. In fact, there is much pride behind this concern with the novel's "structure"; The Portrait is "the most proportioned of his productions after "The Ambassadors"." (AN, p. 52). Because of this it is fair to raise a doubt about James's preoccupation: the "ado" sounds like a contrivance because he is not fully recognising that it is a crucial part of the way the novel's whole vision of life is determined. Why does Isabel appear in "perfect isolation"? This implies that the novelist's main interest was not in what Isabel sees in the "ado" around
her for its own sake, but in the way she sees it. The seeing takes precedence over the seen. This may appear to be an inevitable consequence of James's devotion to the idea of the finer consciousness. Yet it is not so, if one measures the fineness of a consciousness by its capacity to enter into the nature of life as it really is. For James thinks of Isabel as embarking on a "free exploration of life" (PL, I, p. 137) - what he aspires to himself as a novelist - and there is no reason to suppose that giving Isabel a subjectivity which is closely affined to egoism is compatible with his aim. The criterion against which to test the novel's "ado" is thus James's own statement at another point in the preface:

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth... than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it (AN, p. 45).

Does The Portrait live pp to its own ideals?

Tragedy may be said to give us the experience of the intenser humanness which is found when a self-becomes aware through suffering of its own finiteness in relation to the infinite vastness of the world which it inhabits. Our feeling about Isabel's own living will thus depend to a great extent on the depth and scope of the world which James gives her to live in.\(^{28}\) I shall keep coming back to this point as I try to probe my initial question about The Portrait through every aspect of the novel's "felt life". For the moment, another long quotation from the preface will help to clarify the issues already broached. James sees a dwelling on his heroine's "relation to those surrounding her" as the easy way out of his difficulties, "a bridge for evasion, for retreat and flight" (AN, p. 51).

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28. The comparisons for Isabel in the preface imply that HJ was thinking of her as a kind of tragic heroine but I think the point made here holds true even if one is not seeing her in this light.
He took the opposite course:

"Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness", I said to myself, "and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself. Make her only interested enough, at the same time, in the things that are not herself, and this relation needn't fear to be too limited. Place meanwhile in the other scale the lighter weight (which is usually the one that tips the balance of interest): press least hard, in short, on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater one. See, at all events, what can be done in this way. What better field could there be for a due ingenuity? The girl hovers, inextinguishable, as a charming creature, and the job will be to translate her into the highest terms of that formula, and as nearly as possible moreover into all of them. To depend upon her and her little concerns wholly to see you through will necessitate, remember, your really 'doing' her. (AN, pp. 51-52).

What this means for James is that "certain elements in any work are of the essence... others are only of the form" (AN, p. 53). I do not want to question the validity of his choice of subject - that would be impertinent - but only to examine its effects. His "lighter weight" is surely not a mere formal quantity but the weight of all the life that exists in the novel outside Isabel: the weight of the world. Flaubert dealt with Emma's "relation to herself" yet the purport of his novel was to explode any simple division between the outer and the inner life. The look of a landscape, the sounds of farm animals, the cut of Rodolphe's clothes all have as much weight in the total life of Madame Bovary as one of Emma's most intense emotions. James's words "satellites" and "contributive" suggest that his imaginings were nearer to Emma's than to Flaubert's. This makes it feasible to argue that the "lighter weight" of Isabel's "satellites", including Osmond, permits her a degree of immunity from their pressure which Emma is robbed of. Her inner life can be protected by limiting the humanity of those egos which conflict with it. In Antony and Cleopatra, which also dwells on the little world its hero
and heroine have built for themselves in defiance of the larger world, it is possible for Enobarbus to take us completely with him for a moment in his rejection of that little world as a dishonourable evasion of the larger one. Similarly, in Timon of Athens, the humble steward Flavius can finally force his misanthropic master to admit against his will the existence of "one honest man" in the world. This is because Enobarbus and Flavius are allowed to be wholly distinct from their masters: they are not fiscelles. In The Portrait we are never really allowed to enter into Osmond's feelings about Isabel's own shortcomings. All we get is her grievances against him in the much over-praised chapter 42 - the fireside vigil which James offers as "searching criticism" (AN, p. 57) - and those grievances are in a way the equivalent of Timon's tirades against mankind except that, unlike Timon's tirades, they are intended as the whole picture. The "felt life" of Timon of Athens expands from the tension between Timon's misanthropy and Flavius's fidelity; intensity comes from our being able to see both how right Timon is and how wrong he is at the same time. It is likely that Shakespeare only came to see this dramatic potential in Flavius by living through his own deepest experience - that fearful disgust with life which pervades the later tragedies - with an active criticism which enables him to grow into further experience. In this context the clash between Isabel and Osmond might be seen as generating a smaller degree of "felt life" which seems subject to the initial limits of James's sensibility rather than as a token of that

29. Timon of Athens, Act IV, scene iii.
30. See HJ's comments on Henrietta Stackpole and on Maria Gostrey in The Ambassadors: "Each of these persons is but wheels to the coach; neither belongs to the body of that vehicle, or is for a moment accommodated with a seat inside. There the subject alone is esconced..." (AN, p. 54).
sensibility's capacity for growth. There is a revealing remark in the entry on The Portrait in the Notebooks:

After a year or two of marriage the antagonism between her nature and Osmond's comes out — the opposition of a noble character and a narrow one. (31)

I shall try to explore this cut-and-dried view of the marriage later but for the present I would like to get out of the way the possible objection that it is not fair to compare James's art with Shakespeare's. We might compare it with George Eliot's in just the same way. In her essay on "The Antigone and its Moral" she takes up the Hegelian idea that tragedy is a conflict between right and right. Her view is typically moral, and we may wish to see tragedy as something which transcends morality, but she does give us the example of one of James's mentors offering a very different standard from his own:

... the struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs. Until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a wrong. (32)

We might say that the very way in which The Portrait was built up prevented James from locating his own tragic sense in any such dramatic clash of opposing egos. To start from Isabel alone was perhaps to court the danger of writing melodrama for tragedy? This is why the emphasis of the preface on "structure" is so crucial: it leads us back in a subtly self-regarding way to the novelist's art, not through that art to what it can do, when we have lived through it and face outwards from it, for our own understanding of life.

Leavis long ago pointed out all that Daniel Deronda can tell us

about *The Portrait* but I do not think it is otiose to use a brief comparison with *Middlemarch* at this point as a way of briefly describing the core of my uncertainty about James's novel. The relationship of Dorothea and Casaubon helps to make the point I was making through *Timon of Athens* in a way that focusses the general criticism that I want to pursue later in more detail. The passage quoted from the *Notebooks* alerts us to the way Osmond is a kind of ogre in a fairy-tale and is less of a human being than an emblem, what Ralph calls "the very mill of the conventional" (PL, II, p. 363). There is, of course, much to admire in James's picture of his egoism, his peculiar deadliness is often beautifully conveyed through his tone of voice, but it must remain abstract in proportion to the extent to which Isabel's own suffering is used to impede us from fully entering into his. He is too fixed in the attitude of seeming "to peep down from a small high window and mock at her" (PL, II, p. 172). *Middlemarch* helps bring this point out. There too a young woman in love with life is married to an egotist much older than herself but George Eliot's sympathies work very differently from James's. Here is one of the shifts she makes from her heroine's suffering to Casaubon's:

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea — but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. (33)

This may seem more sententious than James is but it really leaves our moral imagination freer to conceive a general thought about life. I will

quote some more:

Mr Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic; it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying. His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egotistic scrupulosity. (34)

A little later George Eliot says, quite simply, "For my part I am very sorry for him". Beside this I would set the following description of Osmond from chapter 42:

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 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. She had taken him seriously, but she had not taken him so seriously as that. How could she — especially when she had known him better? She was to think of him as he thought of himself — as the first gentleman in Europe. So it was that she had thought of him at first, and that indeed was the reason she had married him. But when she began to see what it implied she drew back... (PL, II, p. 172).

Where does the animus against Osmond come from? Why can't James afford to see him as impartially as George Eliot sees Casaubon? Why does the novel succumb to the temptation of making him slightly absurd here? Has Isabel ever really taken him "seriously" in George Eliot's way? I think one is forced to conclude that, if James cannot spare a thought from the seriousness with which Isabel is taking herself to see how pitiable Osmond's seriousness is, then the reason is that both he and Isabel, like Casaubon, are tainted with "that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy..."

34. ibid., pp. 205-206.
35. ibid., p. 206.
The static quality in Isabel's imagination comes out in the way James can describe her error in marrying Osmond by saying "she had not read him right". (PL, II, p. 168). She can judge him intellectually but it remains true that to see "through" a person is not to go all the way towards understanding him. Dorothea grows beyond her own ego to the recognition that the block which Casaubon's ego makes to her own living is really the index of his own independent principle of life. That Isabel fails to do the same thing may explain Osmond's strange power over her.

J.M. Newton points this out in a subtle way:

Dorothea, like Isabel, is trapped in a marriage she shouldn't have made but the character in George Eliot's novel who is surrounded for life by unpassable prison walls is obviously not Dorothea but Casaubon. And the same distinction ought to be clear in The Portrait of a Lady. (36)

But Dorothea can see Casaubon as a separate being and not simply as her husband, as Osmond is to Isabel. This is how George Eliot describes Dorothea's first sense of this fact after the wedding journey:

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects - that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (37)

I think this should make us see that whereas Casaubon becomes a man who is an egotist Osmond gets presented more thinly as a symbol of what egotism is. Isabel is not required to grow in the same radical way that Dorothea is. This makes my doubts quite clear: is it a characteristic of the Jamesian finer consciousness that it takes the world as an udder to feed its supreme self? If James can take us no further into Osmond's

egotism through Isabel than he does in chapter 42 it is surely because he is himself too involved in the egotism in Isabel. It is to that egotism that we must now direct our attention. 38

How can we call Isabel an egotist when James is so obviously pitting her nobility against Osmond's egotism to curry pity for her and hatred of him in the reader? This is the point at which I have to begin reading the novel against its own grain, to assume that James was saying one thing about Isabel on the surface and another underneath it, to see the art of The Portrait as subterfuge and what Lawrence, writing on another American novelist, called "duplicity". 39 This is not an easy or a pleasant thing for a critic to do but I think the justification for doing it here is that it makes James's novel seem more fascinating and more profound than the melodrama of victimised innocence which it becomes on a reading which always believes the author. In chapter 6 James writes of Isabel that:

Deep in her soul - it was the deepest thing there - lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little while it ended in alarms. If often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself... (PL, I, p. 63).

I shall be arguing that the ability to "give herself completely" is not "the deepest thing about her", that the deepest thing is nearer to being

38. I think one can still speak of an egotism in Isabel of which she is unaware despite the fact that HJ tells us that "you could have made her colour any day in the year by calling her a rank egotist". (PL, I, p. 63). Blushing is only embarrassment at being detected.

39. See the essays on Hawthorne in Studies in Classic American Literature (1964), pp. 78-194. Some kind of "duplicity" may, as Lawrence suggests be a general characteristic of the novel form, a consequence of the novelist's having to invent his own plots.
these "alarms". What I have to say will all be taken from the novel, it will simply lay stress on places where James will not. The first thing to do will be to try to discredit the familiar view that, in Mattheissen's words, when Isabel marries "she proceeds to do the wrong thing for the right reasons". I think she has far more in common with Osmond than that comes to.

In chapter 3, where James describes Isabel as a child listening to the noises of the children in the school across the street, he talks of this as "an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled". (PL, I, p. 26). Already Isabel's sense of freedom is separate from any engagement in living. In the next few chapters James makes a series of statements about her which reveal the contradictions which generate his confused judgement of her throughout the whole novel. There is an interesting passage on Isabel's turning her eyes away from the Albany street outside the house:

She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street: if the sidelights had not been filled with green paper she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side -- a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror. (PL, I, pp. 26-27).

The mind is most susceptible to romance at a distance from experience. This is why we tell fairy tales especially to young children. Isabel's inner sanctum is a contrast to Fanny Price's East Room in Mansfield Park; it is not a spiritual retreat from the pressure of living but a vantage point from which living can be imagined. It is plain that Isabel's kind of freedom is only a step away from the imprisonment she finds in Osmond's "house of suffocation" (PL, II, p. 172). Rather than consolidate

40. The Major Phase, p. 183.
this insight James prefers to build up another picture of Isabel which
contradicts it:

... she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly
staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund
of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity
between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of
the world. (PL, I, p. 39).

The one thing to make us doubt her capacity to plunge herself into living
here is that odd phrase "curiosity about life". The detachment is still
there to over-rule the "continuity". That "continuity" is really
dangerous and trammelling to the Jamesian free spirit soon becomes apparent
when we are given, as is Isabel, the life-style of a Ralph Touchett to
admire and cultivate:

His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was
none the less the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its
independance, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which,
naturally inclined to adventure and irony, indulged in a
boundless liberty of appreciation. (PL, I, p. 43).

Later Isabel, who by this time has become "our young lady" (PL, I, p. 201),
will say, "If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of ... its my personal
independence" (PL, I, p. 201). What seems irreverent and priggish in
this attitude, is however, usually presented as a spiritual richness.
Isabel is shamefaced about her introspectiveness but she always has the
satisfaction of transcending it by becoming an appreciator of life like
Ralph. There are moments when she seems not just to be flirting with life
but to be actually patronising all the world outside her self, which has
really become, in George Eliot's word, her "udder":

It often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself;
you could have made her colour, any day in the year, by calling
her a rank egoist. She was always planning out her development,
desiring her perfection, observing her progress. Her nature had,
in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of
perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening
vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an
exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of
one's spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful
of roses. But she was often reminded that there were other
gardens in the world than those of her remarkable soul, and that there were moreover a great many places which were not gardens at all - oily dusky pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery. In the current of that repaid curiosity on which she had lately been floating, which had conveyed her to this beautiful old England and might carry her much further still, she often checked herself with the thought of the thousands of people who were less happy than herself - a thought which for the moment made her fine, full consciousness appear a kind of immodesty. What should one do with the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for one's self? It must be confessed that this question never held her long. She was too young, too impatient to live, too unacquainted with pain. She always returned to her theory that a young woman whom after all everyone thought clever should begin by getting a general impression of life. This impression was necessary to prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others a subject of special attention.

England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as diverted as a child at a pantomime. (PL, I, pp. 63–64).

It is a fine passage because so many of the novel's assumptions are concentrated in it. We could call it searching criticism were it not for the sense of something precious in James's feeling for Isabel, in his irony as well as in overblown phrases like "shady bowers and lengthening vistas". Besides irony there is unconscious ambiguity. Why, for example, is it so uncertain why the "thousands of other people" are less happy than Isabel: is it because they do not have her money and leisure or because they lack her "fine, full consciousness"? We wonder how long her honey-mooning relish for "this beautiful old England" will keep her aware of the "misery of the world"41; she certainly seems untroubled by it when she is herself afflicted with misery, later on in Rome. Perhaps "misery" is to her something a superior spirit ought to see, like the Louvre or

41. It might make her feel momentarily guilty but the guilt is essentially something which clouds her happiness; it does not, for example, make her take Warburton's radicalism more seriously. Neither does the garden of Isabel's "spirit" seem the smaller because of the things that are excluded from it. While there is no reason to expect that Isabel should be a Dorothea Brooke there is also no reason for HJ to be quite so ambiguous about the shortcomings of her "remarkable soul".
the Vatican? One reacts against James's show of her strenuous self-analysis because the passage ultimately takes us back to its most vivid image of Isabel's "remarkable soul" as a garden: can you cultivate the self and bask in it with this romantic complacency and at the same time want to live and feel wonder for life? Her real wonder seems for herself and England, however beautiful, is a "pantomime".

The presence of something patronising in Isabel does not make one feel her to be insufferable, although there are moments when one feels that she should be seen to be more insufferable by James than she is. For example, when the unrequited Warburton says of her "mind" that "It looks down on us all: it despises us" (PL, I, p. 98). The point nearly goes home but James enjoys Isabel's superiority too much while he is softly puncturing it to make us regard Isabel's arrogance seriously. After all, James secretly despises Warburton himself and makes very little show of correcting Isabel's naive view of him as a "magnate" (PL, I, p. 127), rather than a man. Similarly, I think we are meant to admire Isabel's broad-mindedness when she says of Henrietta that "I'm afraid it's because she's rather vulgar that I like her" (PL, I, p. 114). James does not see more than the funny side of what is obnoxious in her condescension. If such incidents show him as being unwilling to endow his minor characters with enough fully independent life to resist Isabel (and both Warburton and Henrietta are charmed with her) then I believe that we must look to more than the idea that she is unconsciously snobbish to explain the omission. The root of her attitude lies in those "alarms" she felt at the thought of "giving herself completely"; the superiority and the bright young wit and only the mask she puts on in order to forget them.

42. It might be suggested that it is Osmond who wins Isabel because it is he who courts her with sexual restraint and who has a delicate perception of her fear of being proposed to, of being involved. Significantly, her acceptance of him is one of the things we are not shown, although it is surely quite as relevant as the well-documented refusals of her other suitors.
This is what comes out in her scene with Warburton in chapter 12. It is perhaps one of a series of glimpses into her deeper nature rather than part of a sustained study but the writing has a profundity that is not general throughout the novel. If James cannot push it further I think it is because Warburton, like others, is there mainly to strike sparks from Isabel and not to entangle her in a really human way. His love is not taken seriously enough for James to vouchsafe him any of his own perception into Isabel's fears so that he could deal directly with them. For Warburton is there as an English lord rather than a man, just as Caspar Goodwood too often has the job of being a representative of American energy rather than an individual. These points should make themselves through some long quotations from the passage which follows on from Warburton's proposal:

She would have given her little finger at that moment to feel strongly and simply the impulse to answer: "Lord Warburton, it's impossible for me to do better in this wonderful world, I think, than commit myself, very gratefully, to your loyalty." But though she was lost in admiration of her opportunity she managed to move back into the deepest shade of it, even as some wild, caught creature in a vast cage. The "splendid" security so offered her was not the greatest she could conceive. What she finally betook herself of saying was something very different — something that deferred the need of really facing her crisis. "Don't think me unkind if I ask you to say no more about this today."

"Certainly, certainly!" her companion cried. "I wouldn't bore you for the world."

"You've given me a great deal to think about, and I promise you to do it justice."

"That's all I ask of you, of course — and that you'll remember how absolutely my happiness is in your hands."

Isabel listened with extreme respect to this admonition, but she said after a minute: "I must tell you that what I shall think about is some way of letting you know that what you ask is impossible - letting you know it without making you miserable."

"There's no way to do that, Miss Archer. I won't say that if you refuse me you'll kill me, I shall not die of it. But I shall do worse; I shall live to no purpose."

43. I cannot see much evidence for Stallman's view (op.cit., p. 26) that Warburton is "Life Personified" at this point.
"You'll live to marry a better woman than I."
"Don't say that, please", said Lord Warburton very gravely.
"That's fair to neither of us."
"To marry a worse one then." (PL, I, pp. 134-135).

Her wit is pretty plainly a nervous way of liberating herself from the feeling that she is a "wild, caught creature in a vast cage". It is nonetheless Lord Warburton who is kept in fear of his life:

"I shall not keep you in suspense; I only want to collect my mind a little."

He gave a melancholy sigh and stood looking at her a moment, with his hands behind him, giving short nervous shakes to his hunting-crop. "Do you know I'm very much afraid of it - of that remarkable mind of yours?"

Our heroine's biographer can scarcely tell why, but the question made her start and brought a conscious blush to her cheek. She returned his look a moment, and then with a note in her voice that might almost have appealed to his compassion, "So am I, my Lord!" she oddly exclaimed. (PL, I, pp. 135-136).

This fear (is it a fear of her own mind or a fear of its being possessed through the possession of her body?) does not stop her a moment later from rationalising her refusal on the grounds that it "failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favour of the free exploration of life that she had hitherto entertained or was now capable of entertaining" (PL, I, p. 137). But self-doubt returns to close the chapter:

Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions? If she wouldn't do such a thing as that then she must do great things, she must do something greater. Poor Isabel found ground to remind herself from time to time that she must not be too proud, and nothing could be more sincere than her prayer to be delivered from such a danger: the isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place. If it had been pride that interfered with her accepting Lord Warburton such a bêtise was singularly misplaced; and she was so conscious of liking him that she ventured to assure herself it was the very softness, and the fine intelligence, of sympathy. She liked him too much to marry him, that was the truth; something assured her there was a fallacy somewhere in the glowing logic of the proposition - as she saw it - even though she mightn't put her very finest finger-point on it; and to inflict upon a man who offered so much a wife with a tendency to criticize would be a peculiarly discreditable act. She had promised him she would consider his
question, and when, after he had left her, she wandered back to the bench where he had found her and lost herself in meditation, it might have seemed that she was keeping her vow, but this was not the case; she was wondering if she were not a cold, hard, priggish person, and, on her at last getting up and going rather quickly back to the house, felt, as she had said to her friend, really frightened at herself. (PL, I, pp. 137-138).

If it is more likely to be her belief in the "free exploration of life" than this fear of being priggish that we remember from this chapter it is because there is something factitious in the way James presents her fears. It is as if Isabel were somehow obliged to fall in love with Warburton. Why should she feel guilty because she only likes him? If she asked herself the same questions when she is married to Osmond then they would have more bite but then she is no longer forced to ask them because her coldness to Osmond is merely her response to his gratuitous hatred of her. James is giving us the tools with which to analyse Isabel's behaviour but is he really encouraging us to do so? Or does Isabel come out of this chapter relatively unscathed, despite all James's irony and her own self-criticism, as the one young woman out of twenty who is capable of refusing an English lord? Perhaps Osmond is not the only person who reflects that the woman he marries should have done something remarkable like that? (PL, II, p. 6).

Earlier, when Ralph tells her she is not made to suffer as he talks about the ghost of Gardencourt, Isabel reflects that "if you don't suffer they call you hard". (PL, I, p. 57). Later, we are told that "she often wondered indeed if she ever had been, or ever could be, intimate with any one" (PL, I, p. 234). These thoughts correspond most to the impression she makes in her relations with Caspar Goodwood. Caspar is a kind of grim fate to her, an abstract embodiment of a feared sexuality that threatens her with a "diminished liberty" (PL, I, p. 143):
Sometimes Caspar Goodwood had seemed to range himself on the side of her destiny, to be the stubbornest fact she knew; she said to herself at such moments that she might evade him for a time, but that she must make terms with him at last—terms which would be certain to be favourable to himself. (PL, I, p. 143).

He is the most direct image in the novel of something outside Isabel which can intrude into her consciousness and frighten her. The above remark looks forward to the scene at the end where he finally kisses her. The whole relationship is conceived more in terms of Isabel's trying to preserve her spiritual virginity from him but he still appears as more like a sort of Bostonian rapist than a lover. He has a power over her which seems incongruous with the fact that she only finds him frightening, not attractive. Unfortunately for James's deepest insights, he cannot help finding Caspar's wooden devotion secretly silly and this allows Isabel to "place" him in her usual patronising way:

"...the strong man in pain" was one of the categories of the human appeal, little charm as he might exert in the given case. "Why do you make me say such things to you?" she cried in a trembling voice. "I only want to be gentle—to be thoroughly kind. It's not delightful to me to feel people care for me and yet to have to try and reason them out of it. I think others also ought to be considerate; we have each to judge for ourselves. I know you're considerate, as much as you can be; you've good reasons for what you do. But I really don't want to marry, or to talk about it at all now. I shall probably never do it—no, never. I've a perfect right to feel that way, and it's no kindness to a woman to press her so hard, to urge her against her will. If I give you pain I can only say I'm very sorry. It's not my fault; I can't marry you simply to please you. I won't say that I shall always remain your friend, because when women say that, in these situations, it passes, I believe, for a sort of mockery. But try me some day." (PL, I, p. 196).

If one tries to find a voice in which to read Isabel's words aloud I think the nature of her aloof defensiveness becomes clearer: it is the patronising kindness of the spiritual tease. Behind this lies James's own unrestrained desire in the plotting of this as of so many of his novels, to frustrate the strong at the expense of the weak. He needs Caspar's
absurd doggedness to distract us from this. Caspar can only turn the
tables on her for a moment:

He had never supposed she hadn't wings and the need of
beautiful free movements - he wasn't, with his own long
arms and strides, afraid of any force in her. Isabel's
words, if they had been meant to shock him, failed off the
mark and only made him smile with the sense that here was
common ground. "Who would wish less to curtail your liberty
than I? What can give me greater pleasure than to see you
perfectly independent - doing whatever you like? It's to
make you independent that I want to marry you?" (PL, I, p. 201).

Isabel can only just disguise her shrinkingness from herself with a
further proclamation of her desire to choose her fate, and the assistance
given her by the fact that James does so little to make Caspar a
plausible suitor. It puts her in the quandary of being both unable to
accept love and unable to refuse it too. At such moments she is apt to
lose her poise and her wit and change into a grotesque lack of tact:

"...I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to
live. I can find it out for myself."
"Find out how to live alone? I wish that, when you have,
you'd teach me!"
She looked at him a moment; then with a quick smile, "Oh,
you ought to marry!" she said.
He might be pardoned if for an instant this exclamation
seemed to him to sound the infernal note, and it is not on
record that her motive for discharging such a shaft had been
of the clearest. He oughtn't to stride about lean and hungry,
however, - she certainly felt that for him, "God forgive you!"
he murmured between his teeth as he turned away.
Her accent had put her slightly in the wrong, and after a
moment she felt the need to right herself. The easiest way to
do it was to place him where she had been. "You do me great
injustice - you say what you don't know." she broke out. "I
shouldn't be an easy victim - I've proved it."
"Oh, to me, perfectly."
"I've proved it to others as well." And she paused a moment.
"I refused a proposal of marriage last week..." (PL, I, pp. 197-
198). (44)

James knows a lot about Isabel here but he seems not to see how peculiarly
repugnant it must be for her to regain her credit with Caspar by boasting

44. See the later scene where she tells Warburton the same thing and
then feels the same qualms about it (PL, II, p. 116).
of the fact that she has refused Warburton! She had only put herself "slightly in the wrong" after all. This is why her tears at the end of the chapter when Caspar has left are a kind of self-escape, tears of vexation rather than tears of remorse. She can go on to take refuge from her incoherence in a delight in her power over men:

She leaned back with that slow, soft, aspiring murmur with which she often uttered her response to accidents of which the brighter side was not superficially obvious, and yielded to the satisfaction of having refused two ardent suitors in a fortnight. That love of liberty of which she had given Caspar Goodwood so bold a sketch was as yet almost exclusively theoretic; she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale. But it appeared to her she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory; she had done what was truest to her plan. (PL, I, pp. 205-206).

This is one of the few satisfactions to which she may be said ever to yield. Her plan disguises from herself the fact that she is living from her nerves without inner directedness. What we are asked to admire as the "free exploration of life" is turning out to be spiritually hand to mouth.

If Ralph finds so much to admire in her "plan" it is surely only because it is so similar to his own, sick man's cult of a "boundless liberty of appreciation"? His appreciation is, in fact, more discrimination than wonder because he is not obliged to participate in what he sees. As Leavis says, intending an odd kind of compliment, "He has a central position, and can place everyone". What Isabel learns from Ralph is not, therefore, essentially different from what she learns from Madame Merle. In fact, she has already shown herself as not needing to learn it from anyone at all. Madame Merle represents to her "a woman of strong impulses kept in admirable order." This commended itself to Isabel as an ideal combination" (PL, I, p. 220). How deep this lesson goes we may tell

45. Great Tradition, p. 166.
by the fact that Isabel's way of reacting to the exposure of Madame
Merle's duplicity later on is by a silence which keeps her own strong
impulses in admirable order. The lesson is summed up in a scene where
Isabel is admiring Madame Merle's prowess at being able so quickly to
place Henrietta:

"That's the great thing", Isabel solemnly pondered; "that's
the supreme good fortune: to be in a better position for
appreciating people than they are for appreciating you." And
she added that such, when one considered it, was simply the
essence of the aristocratic situation. In this light, if in
none other, one should aim at the aristocratic situation.
(PL, I, pp. 238-239).

And her falling in love with Osmond, as far as it gets shown, is largely
a matter of "appreciation": the only problem is that instead of both
mutually applying the faculty to the rest of mankind Osmond starts to
apply it to Isabel. Ralph, of course, does not see how much he has in
common with Madame Merle and Osmond (though Madame Merle herself does)
because he needs to romanticise Isabel's attitude into a desire for life.46

I think James clearly shows him to be mistaken in this, although it is
the way a fortune is contrived for Isabel, but the extent to which we let
Ralph determine our idea of Isabel is also the extent to which we are
likely to dislike her rather than pity her at difficult moments like the
ones she has with Caspar. In the following exchange Isabel may seem to be
being honest about herself but the perception is apt to get forgotten in
the novel as a whole because she aspires to the life-style which Ralph
is crediting her with:

"You want to see life - you'll be hanged if you don't, as
the young men say."
"I don't think I want to see it as the young men want to
see it. But I do want to look about me."

46. One thing which HJ never explains is what Ralph's relations with
Madame Merle have been in the past and why they have become strained.
Neither does he give Osmond a real motive for his intense dislike of
Ralph.
"You want to drain the cup of experience."
"No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself."
"You want to see, but not to feel", Ralph remarked.
"I don't think that if one's a sentient being one can make the distinction." (PL, I, pp. 187-188).

For Ralph "the cup of experience" is merely a fine phrase and when Isabel pretends to know that it is a "poisoned drink" she seems more fastidious than innocent. She soon makes it clear that Ralph is fostering illusions about her:

"You've answered my question", he said at last. "You've told me what I wanted. I'm greatly obliged to you."
"It seems to me I've told you very little."
"You've told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it."

Her silvery eyes shone a moment in the dusk. "I never said that."
"I think you meant it. Don't repudiate it. It's so fine!"
"I don't know what you're trying to fasten upon me, for I'm not in the least an adventurous spirit. Women are not like men." (PL, I, p. 188).

Ralph appreciates Isabel so much because she offers him the chance of leading a vicarious life. She is not to blame for this desire and she tries to put him off pursuing it. At this stage in the novel I think we could say that James has found in Isabel's character a complex and mysterious donne which he can go on to explore either from the point of view taken by Isabel here or by Ralph's. It is a real loss to literature that for most of the time from now on he takes Ralph's and even persuades Isabel to take it. But perhaps we have already found enough grounds for doubt in the opening chapters for us to expect that, however James managed it, things would go wrong as soon as Isabel is really confronted with a serious demand for her love? For it is Osmond's proposal that reveals the uncertainty in James's original conception of his "apparition". Ralph, who makes the marriage possible by the money he gives Isabel, assures Mrs Touchett that there is no danger to her from Osmond:
"She's making fools of us all. She'll please herself, of course; but she'll do so by studying human nature at close quarters and yet retaining her liberty." (PL, I, p. 350).

Ironically, Ralph's idea of an "adventurous spirit" boils down to the same thing as Isabel's shrinking curiosity about the "poisoned drink"; even more ironically, Isabel will marry Osmond with precisely this hope of studying human nature and "yet retaining her liberty". For Osmond is the exemplar par excellence of the "aristocratic situation" which she gradually comes to appreciate through Warburton, Ralph and Madame Merle. This, and not some noble and innocent mistake or the perfidy of Madame Merle, is what makes her marry him. Her deepest tragedy is perhaps that either Osmond is not aristocrat enough or that he refuses to let her share his situation. One of her saddest reflections in chapter 42 is at this disappointment:

Her notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude. (PL, II, p. 174).

She still has her main idea off pat. 47

The central problem of reading The Portrait is, then, that Isabel is suffering from a frightening sickness which is never accurately enough diagnosed as the sickness it is. Sometimes we are expected to pity the self-consciousness which makes her irreverent, estranged and morally undirected; sometimes James wants us to admire it. Although there is much brilliant analysis of it in the novel it seems to me to be only really sure and forceful when James is exposing just the intellectual fallacies of Isabel's

47. See J.M. Newton (op.cit., p. 10): "His subject is less how a young American woman might see an Osmond and long to live with him than how a young American of either sex might see an Osmond and long to live like him."
approach to life. The novel sounds most coherent when it is read as
a critique of the excesses of transcendentalism. In *The Opposing Self*
Lionel Trilling remarks that, "Somewhere in our mental constitution is
the demand for life as pure spirit." It is this feature of the American
imagination which Isabel's sickness is used to represent, and the
description of it which gives the novel its generality of application.
From it stems James's innovations in the novel, things like chapter 42
which is so exclusively concerned with Isabel's "relation to herself". I
will choose my first illustrations of it not from that chapter, however,
but from passages where Isabel's position is really subjected to criticism.

One of the key passages in the novel is Isabel's conversation with
Madame Merle about what constitutes a self. It is like a debate between
Emerson and Balzac, between the American and the European sides of James's
mind which were in such fertile tension in the study of Hawthorne. It is
central to my whole thesis and so, although it is familiar, it must be
quoted in full. Isabel has just told her friend about her "inevitable
young man", Caspar Goodwood:

"If you've had the identical young man you dreamed of, then
that was success, and I congratulate you with all my heart.
Only in that case why didn't you fly with him to his castle
in the Apennines?"

"He was no castle in the Apennines."

"What has he? An ugly brick house in Forty-third Street? Don't
tell me that; I refuse to recognise that as an ideal."

"I don't care anything about his house", said Isabel.

"That's very crude of you. When you've lived as long as I
you'll 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's no such thing as an isolated
man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of
appurtenances. What shall we call our "self"? Where does it begin?
where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to
us - and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself
is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for

48. "William Dean Howells and the Roots of Modern Taste", *The Opposing
things! One's self - for other people - is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps - these things are all expressive."

This was very metaphysical; not more so, however, than several observations Madame Merle had already made. Isabel was fond of metaphysics, but was unable to accompany her friend into this bold analysis of the human personality. "I don't agree with you. I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!"

"You dress very well", Madame Merle lightly interposed.

"Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society."

"Should you prefer to go without them?" Madame Merle inquired in a tone which virtually terminated the discussion. (PL, I, pp. 252-253).

This is one of the most dramatic pieces of comedy in the novel although both speakers put their ideas in a very thinly human way. Madame Merle's feline smoothness covers more sense than Isabel's conceit. Yet it is always a part of James's strategy to go some of the way with our potential criticisms of Isabel. Her crudeness and arrogance are simply the signs of her radical fidelity to the promptings of her own soul. We feel her to be superior to Madame Merle's implicit substitution of appearances for the inner spirit she denies. 49 Tony Tanner assumes this to be the upshot of the exchange but I think this is to see it too simply because James is less eager to put Isabel in the right here than he often is. 50 Socially, Madame Merle's philosophy is more civilised: it at least makes room for other people. Do Isabel's friends in no way express her? But what is dissatisfying about this philosophical exchange as a whole is that James

49. HJ's remark about his ficelles (quoted in footnote 30 above) might be taken as evidence that he has more sympathy with Isabel's position here.

50. "The Fearful Self: HJ's The Portrait of a Lady", The Critical Quarterly, VII (1965), 212-214. (This is an interesting article but its rather skeletonally philosophical approach to Isabel's "fear" perhaps tends to pass over the effect created by HJ's prose: the result is that Tanner gives us too much of a whitewash of Isabel.)
is getting his complexity from the presentation of a choice between untenable extremes. Neither view expressed corresponds to a really vital "continuity" between the self and its world, such as Isabel was credited with imagining at the start of the novel. Self and non-self are exaggeratedly separate. Isabel only seems to be asserting the life in her when she says: "Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me". The idea that the non-self is an arbitrary barrier suggests both a Whitman-like egocentricity and an accompanying need to protect the life of the self from intrusions from outside. This means that her zest for life may really be the opposite of what it pretends to be. The problem is that instead of taking this point up Madame Merle chooses to terminate the discussion. James seems to be teetering on the brink of conclusions he prefers not to draw. The whole passage prompts us to ask whether The Portrait ever manages to resolve the dilemma of this philosophical non-choice which Isabel and Madame Merle have raised. Is there any way of synthesizing the equally limited alternatives of American self-hood and European realism? It is a question which the point-of-view method raises but is perhaps unable to answer.

James rarely allows anyone to disagree with Isabel as cogently as Madame Merle does. We are never, for example, let into Osmond's objections to her ideas although there is obviously some ground for supposing him to have a case when he dismisses them as bad ideas (PL, I, pp. 363-364). And Ralph would rather place anyone than place Isabel. One person who is occasionally allowed to tell Isabel a home-truth or two is the comic Henrietta whom she usually patronises. Here is her most telling criticism.

51. It is worth making a passing reference to the already quoted letter of GF's in which he talks about reconciling the "deux hommes" in his nature (Corresp. vol. II, pp. 343-344).
"You're not enough in contact with reality – with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up."

Isabel's eyes expanded as she gazed at this lurid scene. "What are my illusions?" she asked. "I try so hard not to have any."

"Well", said Henrietta, "you think you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing yourself and pleasing others. You'll find you're mistaken. Whatever life you lead you must put your soul in it – to make any sort of success of it; and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you: it becomes grim reality! And you can't always please yourself; you must sometimes please other people. That, I admit, you're very ready to do; but there's another thing that's still more important – you must often displease others. You must always be ready for that – you must never shrink from it. That doesn't suit you at all – you're too fond of admiration, you like to be thought well of. You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views – that's your great illusion, my dear. But we can't. You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all – not even yourself."

Isabel shook her head sadly; she looked troubled and frightened. "This, for you, Henrietta", she said, "must be one of those occasions!" (PL, I, pp. 273-274).

It is the kind of thing Mr. Knightley might have said in a more delicate way. 52 Henrietta has, I think, put her finger on one of Isabel's most important and most sympathetic characteristics. She is given to the kind of self-criticism which makes her so dread the criticism of others that she cannot afford not to be kind to them: she has a deep need of their good opinion, just as deep a need as Osmond has. Her patronage of them is thus her way of dealing with the moral threat they constitute to her own opinion of herself. Her "alarms" are not just sexual but moral too: they are the "alarms" of the unprotected free spirit who cannot evade having to deal with the world beyond the self, with the selves of other people.

James catches beautifully the way Isabel's flippant wit is her constant.

52. The remarks about Henrietta in the preface (AN, pp. 54-55 & p. 57) suggest that by then HJ had forgotten how important a voice she can sometimes be. Another sign that he only used her as a mouthpiece for common sense as an exceptional thing is that the Henrietta of this passage has too much perceptiveness to have pressed Caspar Goodwood's claims on Isabel for as long as the Henrietta of the rest of the novel does.
resource when she is morally scared as she is by Henrietta: "This, for you, Henrietta... must be one of those occasions!" She can only afford to notice the advice-column note in what her friend says; the advice itself meets a mental block. James's only concession to the need to protect Isabel from this sort of sustained exposure here is to turn what Henrietta says off into one of those distasteful comic passages on her ludicrous amours with Mr Bantling. But she makes the point that Isabel's fear is at root a fear of "grim reality". It is a virtue of The Portrait that James can introduce this sort of common sense into his picture of Isabel in a way he never takes with Strather, Milly Theale or Maggie Verver. For a moment we get the kind of drama that Philinte gives us in Le Misanthrope. At this point he has complicated our response to her zest for life with the thought that it is compatible with harbouring the kind of illusion which will ultimately lead her to think less of life. Later, we will see how subtly James insinuates a disillusion with life that recalls Flaubert's without being expressed with Flaubert's candour and energy.

I am not arguing that James does not know what he is saying about Isabel but that he knows it too well to be able to afford to say it consistently throughout the novel. He knows her much better than Ralph does in the following conversation, which summarises the "alarms" I have been describing:

"You've too much power of thought - above all to much conscience", Ralph added. "It's out of all reason, the number of things you think wrong. Put back your watch. Diet your fever. Spread your wings; rise above the ground. It's never wrong to do that."

She had listened eagerly, as I say; and it was her nature to understand quickly. "I wonder if you appreciate what you say. If you do, you take a great responsibility."

"You frighten me a little, but I think I'm right", said Ralph, persisting in cheer.
"All the same what you say is very true", Isabel pursued. "You could say nothing more true. I'm absorbed in myself - I look at life too much as a doctor's prescription. Why indeed should we perpetually be thinking whether things are good for us, as if we were patients lying in a hospital? Why should I be so afraid of not doing right? As if it mattered to the world whether I do right or wrong!"

"You're a capital person to advise", said Ralph; "you take the wind out of my sails!"

She looked at him as if she had not heard him - though she was following out the train of reflection which he himself had kindled. "I try to care more about the world than about myself - but I always come back to myself. It's because I'm afraid."

She stopped; her voice had trembled a little. "Yes, I'm afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless."

"For weak people I've no doubt it's a greater happiness. For weak people the effort not to be contemptible must be great."

"And how do you know I'm not weak?" Isabel asked.

"Ah", Ralph answered with a flush that the girl noticed, "if you are I'm awfully sold!"

The charm of the Mediterranean coast only deepened for our heroine on acquaintance, for it was the threshold of Italy, the gate of admirations. Italy, as yet imperfectly seen and felt, stretched before her as a land of promise, a land in which a love of the beautiful might be comforted by endless knowledge. (PL, I, pp. 281-282).

The passage brings us up short with a ring of truth. Isabel's confession comes out of a moral numbness which chills us as if it were our own. We read James for these disturbing rufflings of the urbane surface of his prose when a real, if impoverished and helpless, humanity is peeping through: "I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless". As an invalid Ralph is absolved from having to recognise his own fear of life and this, presumably, is why he fails to follow what Isabel is saying. I quoted the last two sentences with their conventional Jamesian unction about Italy because they show how soon the smooth surface can reassert itself. They seem to cry out on Isabel's behalf for the Osmond who is the connoisseur of the beautiful and the devotee of Machiavelli, Victoria Corombona and Metastasio. Their banality is already raising a question
which will preoccupy us in the second half of the novel: is the kind of outside world beyond the self which they represent a sufficient one for James to use as a medium through which to go on plumbing Isabel's fear? My doubt is that from now on the fear will only appear at crucial moments and mainly at the end of chapters instead of becoming, as it should, the real subject of the novel. I explain this by concluding that James does not really know what to do with Isabel from here on except to make an "ado" around her. This is the inference to be drawn from her most important attack of fear, when Osmond proposes to her:

Her agitation - for it had not diminished - was very still, very deep. What had happened was something that for a week past her imagination had been going forward to meet; but here, when it came, she stopped - that sublime principle somehow broke down. The working of this young lady's spirit was strange, and I can only give it to you as I see it, not hoping to make it seem altogether natural. Her imagination, as I say, now hung back; there was a last vague space it couldn't cross - a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet. (PL, II, p. 19).

This "last vague space", I would say, is the space she must cross to go out of herself into a two-way relationship in which she will put all of her cards on the table. She has to unseal herself from what her self comes into relation with. If this means a conquest of her "fear" it would also depend on the other person's willingness to come out of his self too. So if we feel that Isabel never does cross this space in the rest of the novel we might blame James rather than her. In having her marry an Osmond he denies her nature the chance to expand, rather as Flaubert denies that chance to Emma Bovary. Perhaps he could only afford to let her marry on the condition that her husband should be an egotist? Marriage to a Warburton or a Goodwood would have created too many unresolveable problems and, besides, have sacrificed Isabel's opportunity of becoming a tragic heroine.
CHAPTER NINE

Isabel Archer's Romance of Tragedy

I have now described the substance of what I have to say about Isabel Archer and, I think, discussed the most interesting part of The Portrait of a Lady in doing so. For the rest of the novel James seems to me to be putting Isabel through her paces again rather than breaking any new ground. Hence, all those calculated re-appearances of Warburton and Caspar Goodwood and the inflating of the marginal subject of Pansy Osmond into a substitute for what should be the detailed description of what was new in Isabel's life after her marriage.¹ Before discussing the breakdown of relations between Isabel and Osmond, however, I want to look for a moment at the nature of Isabel's responses to the world around her, and especially to the Italy which is the "gate of admiration". This will enable to me to deal with a lot of what is most revealing in the later parts of the novel and, also, to go back to a few things in the earlier chapters which have not yet been touched on. I begin from a simple question. Is the Isabel we have seen so far really capable of a full and genuine appreciation of Italy? This question will lead on to another question. Does James manage to create the impression of an Italy to which the inevitable and right appreciative response is one of wonder? Does his Italy evoke a fully outgoing sense of its beauty or is it the Italy of the

¹. I may well be wrong about Pansy but, though I can see that she helps HJ to make a variety of smaller points and though he was hardly the novelist not to have a reason for plotting a novel in a certain way, I have never been able to find any adequate explanation for the importance she is accorded. Few readers can have felt that Isabel's obligation to her constituted a sufficient reason for her return to Osmond and, even admitting that it did, that return could only have been temporary since Pansy would obviously have married sooner or later - Osmond not being the man to keep his daughter on his hands for ever. So I can only guess that HJ pushed Pansy to the fore in order to evade and camouflage more important things.
tourist, the source of refined aesthetic titillations?

To begin from I shall take some passages where James seems to be totally uncritical of Isabel's response to Italy and try to see what they suggest about his own way of imagining a rich civilisation. I shall then compare these passages with some passages from Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Ruskin should help us to make the relevant criticisms of what James is doing simply because the comparison will make it plain that James's prose was influenced by his and, indeed, drawing on it in a dependent way, but that, despite this, James did not understand well enough what Ruskin had to say to be able to assimilate his influence.\(^2\) The first passage I want to quote describes Isabel's first visit to Florence under the joint tutelage of Ralph and Madame Merle; Madame Merle has just been telling Isabel that she ought to see as many men as possible so as to be able to despise most of them:

"You'll pick out, for your society, the few whom you don't despise."

This was a note of cynicism that Madame Merle didn't often allow herself to sound; but Isabel was not alarmed, for she had never supposed that as one saw more of the world the sentiment of respect became the most active of one's emotions. It was excited, none the less, by the beautiful city of Florence, which pleased her not less than Madame Merle had promised; and if her unassisted perception had not been able to gauge its charms she had clever companions as priests to the mystery. She was in no want indeed of aesthetic illumination, for Ralph found it a joy that renewed his own early passion to act as cicerone to his eager young kinswoman. Madame Merle remained at home; she had seen the treasures of Florence again and again and had always something else to do. But she talked of all things with remarkable vividness of memory - she recalled the right-hand corner of the large Perugino and the position of the hands of the Saint Elizabeth in the picture next to it. She had her opinions as to the character of many famous works of art, differing often from Ralph with great sharpness and defending her interpretations with as much ingenuity as good-humour. Isabel listened to the discussions taking place between the two with a sense that she might derive

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2. For HJ on Ruskin see the essay "Italy Revisited" in *Portraits of Places*, in *Art*, especially pp. 63-69. His urbane good-humour is ruffled by Ruskin's moralising and "nothing is more comical than the familiar asperity of the author's style..." (p. 67). For HJ, "Art is the one corner of human life in which we may take our ease" (p. 68). For Ruskin, he says, it is "a sort of assize-court, in perpetual session" (p. 68).
much benefit from them and that they were among the advantages she couldn't have enjoyed for instance in Albany. In the clear May mornings before the formal breakfast - this repast at Mrs Touchett's was served at twelve o'clock - she wandered with her cousin through the narrow and sombre Florentine streets, resting awhile in the thicker dusk of some historic church or the vaulted chambers of some dispeopled convent. She went to the galleries and palaces; she looked at the pictures and statues that had hitherto been great names to her, and exchanged for a knowledge which was sometimes a limitation a presentiment which proved usually to have been a blank. She performed all those acts of mental prostration in which, on a first visit to Italy, youth and enthusiasm so freely indulge; she felt her heart beat in the presence of immortal genius and knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim. But the return, every day, was even pleasanter than the going forth; the return into the wide, monumental court of the great house in which Mrs Touchett, many years before, had established herself, and into the high, cool rooms where the carved rafters and pompous frescoes of the sixteenth century looked down on the familiar commodities of the age of advertisement. Mrs Touchett inhabited an historic building in a narrow street whose very name recalled the strife of medieval factions; and found compensation for the darkness of her frontage in the modicity of her rent and the brightness of a garden where nature itself looked as archaic as the rugged architecture of the palace and which cleared and scented the rooms in regular use. To live in such a place was, for Isabel, to hold her ear all day a shell of the sea of the past. This vague eternal rumour kept her imagination awake. (PL, I, pp. 311-312).

We might well ask why what logic James imagined the young woman at the start of this passage, who thinks that as you know the world so your respect for it decreases, came to go into such raptures. The answer is that disrespect can be confined to "the age of advertisement"; Florence speaks only of the past and is thus a suitable subject for appreciation. Already we can see how James would have read his Ruskin. The passage seems to me one of the worst written in the novel, especially because of its peculiar kind of fine writing which is like an anaemic, dilettante version of the vigorous aesthetic passion of Ruskin - "her heart beat in the presence of immortal genius and knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim". The glow of tremulous emotion disguises for a moment the sentimental, second-hand
generalising of Isabel's experience and makes it seem grand. Florence remains essentially passive and unstartling and Isabel's sensitiveness stays devoid of wonder. James gives Isabel no scope to feel, in Ruskin's phrase, "the thirst of the human heart for the beauty of God's working - to startle its lethargy with the Meep and pure agitation of astonishment..." She responds in clichés which just a cursory glance through one of the nineteenth century Murray's Guides she would have used will show to be woolly-minded. Her one emotion which does ring true is her sense of how much good Florence is doing her: "the advantages she couldn't have enjoyed... in Albany". Hers is an acquisitive and vulgar finishing school culture. Art becomes a mere backdrop to her emotions of the source of a spiritual thrill. It makes her neither think nor grow and she never sees it as the expression of a community created to nourish its communal sense, for she is an irredeemable tourist. Hers is a cruder version of Osmond's aestheticism and yet James seems to vouch for it as being appropriate and adequate. These are the terms on which she is shown as having a "fund of life" which responds wholeheartedly to the world about her. That they are not really relevant to her experience is shown, I think, by the fact that in the second part of the novel, when she is living in Roma, James seldom finds time to mention her response to art. Of course, I have enjoyed this passage too but I think that basically to be able to enjoy it is to participate in a weakness in our own culture which we still share with Isabel. I can only recommend to the reader who still thinks James writes well here that he compare the passage with those in Proust which describe the church at Balbec or the paintings of Elstir.

4. For the fuller discussion of the weakness mentioned here the reader is referred to my review of Kenneth Clark's Civilisation in The Cambridge Quarterly, vol. VI, no. I (1972), 64-69. (There seems to me to be much in common between HJ's attitude to the past and Clark's.)
admiration reminds me of the scene where Swann winces at the way Odette goes into raptures over a painting she glimpses in a shop window as they drive by in a cab.

The passage of Ruskin I want to use as a contrast, not to say a purge, to this passage of James is not in all respects comparable but I think the reader will be able to seize on its general relevance here and ignore the remarks which go off in other directions. Ruskin is speaking about the heartlessness of lovers of the "lower picturesque". He is comparing a windmill drawn by one of its exponents, Stanfield, with a windmill drawn by Turner, who represents the "higher picturesque". Ruskin has a certain respect for Stanfield but he criticises the kind of love of the past and the poetic that Stanfield represents as basically unimaginative. It is the later part of the following discussion which puts one in mind of Henry James:

For, in a certain sense, the lower picturesque ideal is eminently a heartless one; the lover of it seems to go forth into the world in a temper as merciless as its rocks. All other men feel some regret at the sight of disorder and ruin. He alone delights in both; it matters not of what. Fallen cottage - desolate villa - deserted village - blasted heath - mouldering castle - to him, so that they do but show jagged angles of stone and timber, all are sights equally joyful. Poverty, and darkness, and guilt, bring in their several contributions to his treasury of pleasant thoughts... What is it to him that the old man has passed his seventy years in helpless darkness and helpless waste of soul? [i.e. the old man in Stanfield's picture]. The old man has at last accomplished his destiny, and filled the corner of a sketch, where something of an unshapely nature was wanting...

Yet, for all this, I do not say the lover of the lower picturesque is a monster in human form. He is by no means this, though truly we might at first think so, if we came across him unawares, and had not met with any such sort of person before. Generally speaking, he is kind-hearted, innocent of evil, but not broad in thought; somewhat selfish, and incapable of acute sympathy with others; gifted at the same time with strong artistic instincts and capacities for the enjoyment of varied form, and light, and shade, in pursuit of which enjoyment his life is passed, as the lives of
other men are for the most part, in the pursuit of what they also like, - be it honour, or money, or indolent pleasure, - very irrespective of the poor people living by the stagnant canal. And, in some sort, the hunter of the picturesque is better than many of these; inasmuch as he is simple-minded and capable of unostentatious and economical delights, which, if not very helpful to other people, are at all events not utterly injurious, even to the victims or subjects of his picturesque fancies; while to many others his work is entertaining and useful. And, more than all this, even that delight which he seems to take in misery is not altogether unvirtuous. Through all his enjoyment there runs a certain undercurrent of tragical passion, - a real vein of human sympathy; - it lies at the root of all those strange morbid hauntings of his; a sad excitement, such as other people feel at a tragedy, only less in degree, just enough, indeed, to give a deeper tone to his pleasure, and to make him choose for his subject the broken stones of a cottage wall rather than of a roadside bank, the picturesque beauty of form in each being supposed precisely the same; and, together with this slight tragical feeling, there is also a humble and romantic sympathy...

This seems to me a great piece of criticism, as humane as it is acute and philosophic. James is bigger than Stanfield but one can safely leave it to the reader to decide how much of what Ruskin says applies to the way Isabel takes Florence. Think only of her constant feeling while in Italy for the dark deeds of the past and the burden of suffering of which ancient architecture speaks to her. There, certainly, she is a devotee of the "picturesque" and what Ruskin later calls, in a magnificent phrase, the "light sensation of luxurious tragedy". Even some of the innocence and simple-minded belief in goodness which underlie James's subtlety finds its description in this passage. What Ruskin has to say about the tragic feelings of the "lover of the lower picturesque" is something I will come back to when I look, at the end of this chapter, at the unhappiness Isabel comes to feel in Rome.

6. ibid., vol. VI, p. 23. (NB. HJ frequently altered the word "picturesque" when he came to revise PL for the New York edition.)
7. One passage which suggests that HJ can only have half-understood his Ruskin is the one from "Italy Revisited" which was quoted above, in chapter 6.
Two further passages will perhaps confirm the point I am using Ruskin to make. Both of them show James's prose lapsing into pomposity in the attempt to find a Ruskinian grand style through which to express the spiritual experience he feels that Isabel ought to have as a superior tourist in Italy. In neither of them is it very easy to tell what she is supposed to be feeling, least of all visually. In the first of them she is attending vespers in St Peter's, like "all good Romans" (PL, I, p. 374):

She had not been one of the superior tourists who are 'disappointed' in Saint Peter's and find it smaller than its fame; the first time she passed beneath the huge leathern curtain that strains and bangs at the entrance, the first time she found herself beneath the far-arching dome and saw the light drizzle down through the air thickened with incense and with the reflections of marble and gilt, of mosaic and bronze, her conception of greatness rose and dizzily rose. After this it never lacked space to soar. She gazed and wondered like a child or a peasant, she paid her silent tribute to the seated sublime. (PL, I, p. 375).

James seems to me so much more interested in Isabel's sensibility than in what she is responding to that he succeeds in giving a clear impression of neither. The second passage comes a little later, just before Osmond proposes. It shows Isabel taking a break between the solicitations of Osmond and Warburton in the sculpture gallery of the Capitol. Incidentally, one thing that it shows is that the kind of ideal feeling for sculpture which we found in Roderick Hudson is something James did not manage to grow beyond:

They shook hands, and he left her alone in the glorious room, among the shining antique marbles. She sat down in the centre of the circle of these presences, regarding them vaguely, resting her eyes on their beautiful blank faces; listening, as it were, to their eternal silence. It is impossible, in Rome at least, to look long at a great company of Greek sculptures without feeling the effect of their noble quietude; which, as with a high door closed for the ceremony, slowly drops on the spirit the large white mantle of peace. I say in Rome especially, because the Roman air is an exquisite medium for such impressions. The golden sunshine mingles with them, the deep stillness of the past, so vivid
yet, though it is nothing but a void full of names, seems to throw a solemn spell upon them. The blinds were partly closed in the windows of the Capitol, and a clear, warm shadow rested on the figures and made them more mildly human. Isabel sat there a long time, under the charm of their motionless grace, wondering to what, of their experience, their absent eyes were open, and how, to our ears, their alien lips would sound. The dark red walls of the room threw them into relief; the polished marble floor reflected their beauty. (PL, II, p. 7).

The perceived beauty seems to lack energy and to become atmosphere, a sort of decorative background to Isabel's meditation which saves James from saying what she is really thinking and enables him to substitute a rather banal fancy as her response to the "solemn spell". The only way one can read such a passage is in the way one had to look at Stanfield's windmill. It must be designed for the lover of the picturesque, who has perhaps not been to Rome, and wants an author who will give him a second-hand version of it which does not contradict his expectations but will make him feel drawn into the magic circle of those who do know Rome. It is difficult to resist the offer the passage makes to us that we should feel, as we read it, as if we have been familiar with the Greek sculpture in the Capitol for as long as we can remember.

James's poetry of culture makes us ask what he had done with his heritage of Ruskin, Pater and Arnold. It is not, as the reader may be suspecting, a merely isolated blemish confined to a few purple passages. Art is central to The Portrait and Isabel's experiences in Florence and Rome are meant to be important ones in her development. One way of telling this is that the same prose is called on at other points in the novel to convey the poetry of love. In the same way we find him using language to create the mystique of a sensitive consciousness which seems sublimated into a good in itself at the expense of any instinctual life in wither people or places. The best illustration of this is a hedging passage which describes Isabel's feeling for Osmond during their engagement. It is one of the rare moments when we are allowed to enter
into her feelings when she is supposed to be loving and it begins with a reference to the Italy of the previous quotations:

It was in Italy that they had met, Italy had been a party to their first impressions of each other, and Italy should be a party to their happiness. Osmond had the attachment of old acquaintance and Isabel the stimulus of new, which seemed to assure her a future at a high level of consciousness of the beautiful. The desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her soul by the sense that life was vacant without some private duty that might gather one's energies to a point. She had told Ralph she had "seen life" in a year or two and that she was already tired, not of the act of living, but of that of observing. What had become of all her ardours, her aspirations, her theories, her high estimate of her independence and her imminent conviction that she should never marry? These things had been absorbed in a more primitive need - a need the answer to which brushed away numberless questions, yet gratified infinite desires. It simplified the situation at a stroke, it came down from above like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. There was explanation in the fact that he was her lover, her own, and that she should be able to be of use to him. She could surrender to him with a kind of humility, she could marry him with a kind of pride; she was not only taking, she was giving. (PL, II, pp. 71-72).

Is James shirking his obligation to go on trying to make Isabel humanly understandable? There surely is a need to explain how the young woman we have seen rejecting Warburton and Caspar Goodwood, the young woman who was frightened by Osmond's first proposal, comes to the feeling like this? We are not likely to be fobbed off with phrase-making about the "light of the stars". The one vestige of psychological insight is in the last sentence: Isabel can afford to marry Osmond because he, unlike a Warburton, lets her retain her pride at giving him something. I do not know whether this is a fresh perception or a vestige of the kind of analysis we get in the first part of the novel where James, if he doesn't always understand Isabel, is always making a bigger effort to understand her. For the idea I want to float now is that when Isabel gets to Italy James gives up exploring her and makes her a much less complex figure than she was, a figure of romance.
Two years after completing The Portrait of a Lady James wrote a moving letter to Grace Norton, who often evoked his best letters, in which, in comforting her troubles, he put down some of his own deepest beliefs. The letter gives us a fine version of what I think he was trying to say in the part of the novel which deals with the failure of Isabel's marriage and it should clarify the way in which he understood the tragic. It also suggests an explanation for what I described as his sublimation of the instinctual life:

You are not isolated, verily, in such states of feeling as this — that is, in the sense that you appear to make all the misery of all mankind your own; only I have a terrible sense that you give all and receive nothing — that there is no reciprocity in your sympathy — that you have all the affliction of it and none of the returns. However — I am determined not to speak to you except with the voice of stoicism. I don't know why we live — the gift of life comes to us from I don't know what source or for what purpose; but I believe we can go on living for the reason that (always of course up to a certain point) life is the most valuable thing we know anything about, and it is therefore presumptively a great mistake to surrender it whyle there is any yet left in the cup. In other words consciousness is an illimitable power, and though at times it may seem to be all consciousness of misery, yet in the way it propagates itself from wave to wave, so that we never cease to feel, and though at moments we appear to, try to, pray to, there is something that holds one in one's place, makes it a standpoint in the universe which it is probably good not to forsake. You are right in your consciousness that we are all echoes and reverberations of the same, and you are noble when your interest and pity as everything that surrounds you, appears to have a sustaining and harmonizing power. Only don't, I beseech you, generalize too much in these sympathies and tendernesses — remember that every life is a special problem which is not your's but another's, and content yourself with the terrible algebra of your own. Don't melt too much into the universe, but be as solid and dense and fixed as you can. We all live together, and those of us who love and know, live so most. We help each other — even unconsciously, each in our own effort, we lighten the effort of others, we contribute to the sum of success, make it possible for others to live. Sorrow comes in great waves — no one can know that better than you — but it rolls over us, and though it may almost smother

8. In many cases it would be wrong to use a letter to describe what is said in a work of art but, even though this letter only expresses a part of what PL is saying, it is such a powerful statement of what HJ believed that it inevitably evokes the thought of his art too.
It leaves us on the spot, and we know that if it is strong we are stronger, inasmuch as it passes and we remain. It wears us, uses us, but we wear it and use it in return; and it is blind, whereas we after a manner see. My dear Grace, you are passing through a darkness in which I myself in my ignorance see nothing but that you have been made wretchedly ill by it; but it is only a darkness, it is not an end, or the end. Don't think, don't feel, any more that you can help, don't conclude or decide - don't do anything but wait. Everything will pass, and serenity and accepted mysteries and disillusionments, and the tenderness of a few good people, and new opportunities and ever so much of life, in a word, will remain. You will do all sorts of things yet, and I will help you. The only thing is not to melt in the meanwhile. I insist upon the necessity of a sort of mechanical condensation - so that however fast the horse may run away there will, when he pulls up, be a somewhat agitated but perfectly identical G.N. left in the saddle. (9)

I read this eloquent passage as a statement of everything in the way suffering is taken which makes against what I understand by tragedy, as an expression of James's deep wish either to stay on this side of tragic experience or jump over it to the other shore too quickly. In this, it shares much with many Romantic responses to the tragic, Wordsworth's in Tintern Abbey for example. He is dealing with tragic experience in an untragic way. He won't really admit the presence of an end to consciousness or that our awareness of that end may by a chastening experience in which we can grow as well as feel nullified. This means that he puts all his intelligence to the task of convincing Grance Norton that her own anguish is private and not a passage into any sense of the commonness of the human lot. He tries to argue her out of that sense. What she needs is a "standpoint in the universe", not her knowledge that "no man is an island". This is why the reliance on self that he argues for is not of a tragic kind, although it may seem to be so. She can feel herself to be one of those who "love and know" but she must not "generalise" the feeling or try to "melt" into the "universe" in the way, say, of Nietzsche's Dionysian

spirit of tragedy. The "universe" must be denied so that the self can be "left in the saddle". If this vision is tragic it is so only in the way King Lear's "Come, let's away to prison" speech is tragic: it is a beautiful illusion of tragedy, not a staring into the tragic heart of the real. For all its apparent gentleness it tries to counter suffering with an intense reliance on will, an unbounded sense of the power of "consciousness". I believe that this is what James always fell back on if pushed by the spectacle of man at the end of his tether. It helps us to see why he should, in his novels, prefer what Ruskin calls the "light sensation of luxurious tragedy".

Before I go on to use this letter as a way into Isabel's own tragedy I would like to quote another passage from Karl Jasper's Tragedy is not Enough. I quote it for the sake of itself and also because it gives someone else's view of the tragic, lest mine should be felt to be too private to serve as a criterion for judgement. Jaspers is here expressing something like the Hegelian view of tragedy on which Bradley drew so much: 10

By watching the doom of what is finite, man witnesses the reality and truth of the infinite. Being is the background of all backgrounds; it dooms to failure every particular configuration. The more grandiose the hero and the idea he is living with, the more tragic the march of events and the more fundamental the reality that is revealed.

Tragedy is not intended to evaluate morally the justice of the doom of a guilty man who never ought to have become guilty. Crime and punishment are a narrower framework submerged in moralism. It is only when man's moral substance articulates

10. See, Shakespearian Tragedy: "When we are immersed in a tragedy... we do not judge. This is a point of view which emerges only when, in reading a play, we slip, by our own fault or the dramatist's, from the tragic position, or when, in thinking about the play afterwards, we fall back on our everyday legal and moral notions. But tragedy does not belong, any more than religion belongs, to the sphere of these notions; neither does the imaginative attitude in presence of it." (p. 24). Bradley and Jaspers prompt the question of whether HJ, in his treatment of Isabel and Osmond, could ever get beyond moral value-judgements of his characters.
itself into powers which collide that man grows to heroic stature; it is only then that his crime is reduced to a guiltless and necessary result of his character, and it is only then that his doom becomes his restoration, in which the past is included and redeemed. Tragic doom ceases to be meaningless accident and becomes necessity precisely because the absolute has from the outset condemned everything finite. Then the comprehensive reality of the whole process becomes clear - the process for which the individual sacrifices himself precisely because he is great. The tragic hero himself is at one with reality when he goes to meet his doom. (11)

It is my contention that the tragic questioning of the whys and wherefores of human existence is, in James, never given the "being" and "reality" of which Jaspers speaks for its subject. The comparison between James and Jaspers makes itself. All that needs adding - and this may seem otiose - is that the experience Jaspers describes involves not a melting into the universe in passive resignation but a transcendance of ego which is, at the same time, like a recognition of the essential nature of human identity as if for the first time. Renunciation is the direction taken by James's evasion of the tragic, as we shall see. 12

The way James's emphasis on the power of consciousness determines the use he makes of the point-of-view leads one to ask how we are to disengage James's response to Isabel's suffering from her own response to it. What ground for objectivity to live in does the novel give? A brief

11. *Tragedy is not Enough*, pp. 78-79.

12. Jaspers has a good description of the kind of participation in life from which RJ seeks to dissuade Grace Norton: "The spectator partakes only through identification. What might befall him, too, he experiences as if it had befallen him in fact. For he has merged his own identity with that larger self of man which unites him with every one else. I am myself inside the human beings represented in the tragedy. To me the suffering addresses its message: "This is you". "Sympathy" makes man human - sympathy, not in the sense of vague regrets, but as felt personal involvement: hence the atmosphere of humaneness found in great tragedy." (p. 75). The argument of this chapter is that the kind of "sympathy" RJ asks for Isabel depends on his preventing us from being this kind of "spectator", that is, one who would sympathise with Osmond too. GF, on the other hand, never calls on us to share Emma's feelings for Charles except in so far as we need to in order to understand her.
quotation from chapter 42 will justify this question. Isabel is thinking about the "gulf" that has opened up between her and Osmond:

It was a strange opposition, of the like of which she had never dreamed - an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other. It was not her fault - she had practised no deception; she had only admired and believed. She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. (PL, II, pp. 165-166).

We are told that "she was, after all, herself - she couldn't help that". (PL, II, p. 167). The strains are apologetic and self-justifying - "It was not her fault..." - but how do we fell if it is Isabel who is justifying herself or James who is justifying Isabel? This demands a weak response from us. Poor Isabel, married unwittingly to the contemptuous and contemptible Osmond! It is not a broad image of human folly and suffering, such as we find when Emma Bovary is living through those soul-destroying meals with Charles, but a bid for an immature pathos at the plight of the innocent victim. When Ralph sees her as representing Osmond he is "lost in wonder at the mystery of things" (PL, II, p. 126), and Isabel herself attributes her situation to "the eternal mystery of things" (PL, II, p. 138). The mystery is all too contrived. James is too fond of his heroine, too reliant on our being charmed by her, for the response to be a full compassion which can be extended to Osmond. This is the point at which a reader has most to do in burrowing under the surface emotions the novel evokes to bring up something of more substance. It is worth doing because, even without the objectiveness which is a fruit of intelligence, there is something else underneath the melodrama.

It is typical of James's novels that the people who are supposed to have an exceptional capacity for living never really seem to live. His
idea of life is expressed through Ralph and not Henrietta, Hyacinth Robinson and not Millicent Henning, Milly Theale and not Kate Croy. It might almost be said that he is interested in the desire to live because it can be frustrated, especially by a novelist inventing plots which corroborate his own fantasies. One way in which he can make us credit Isabel with the desire is that the other people in the novel seem to inhabit a world in which they are systematically frustrated. This goes for Warburton, Goodwood, Ralph, Rosier, Pansy, Madame Merle and Osmond as well as for Isabel. The frustration of the minor characters is always sexual and James especially enjoys frustrating a virile man in the prime of life, a Warburton or a Goodwood. There are moments when Goodwood is so repressed that he seems like a reincarnation of Dickens's Bradley Headstone. Frustration is the main ingredient of the "ado" James creates at the end of the novel and it is used with a strangely emotional repetitiveness. It is against the background of this "ado" that we must look at the way James begins to describe Isabel's active attempt to live after her proposal from Osmond. He works at first, and for a long time, by omissions. The courtship, her motives for marrying, the early months of marriage are all missed out, not shown, so that they may be told later with the right emphasis by Isabel or James and never Osmond. For example, at one point we learn from Madame Merle that Isabel "had a poor little boy, who died two years ago, six months after his birth" (PL, II, p. 84). Is he meant to be an emblem of the sterility of the marriage or a merely gratuitous morbid note? It is true that it would be hard to imagine Isabel as a mother (it is already difficult to imagine her as a wife) but

13. This may seem too bluntly put but is it as exaggerated as this remark of Marius Bewley's: "Henry James is the first great American novelist to have been consciously and explicitly concerned with 'life' in the way that D.H. Lawrence, for example, was concerned with it". The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel, (NY, 1963), p. 238.
odd that neither she nor Osmond should seem conscious of the little boy. It might seem that the death of a son in an otherwise childless and tense marriage would be precisely the turning point which would cause a breakdown of relations, particularly in a marriage where the husband is middle-aged. Yet all we are told, again by Madame Merle in the same scene with Rosier, is that Osmond and Isabel "think quite differently" (PL, II, p. 82). Such omissions might be defined by hard-line Jamesians as being in the interests of formal unity but they seem to me to be simply conveniences to a narrator who wants to choose from the experience he is describing and who has, here, a strong interest in helping Isabel to construct the haughty and diffident facade around her feelings with which she confronts Osmond. I do not myself find much interest in a form which can, at the crucial point in a novel, require the omission of the successive experiences of love, marriage, childbirth, parenthood and death. But it is through such omissions that James is beginning to make clearer what it is that Isabel wants out of life.

This is how James refers to Isabel's travels with Madame Merle after Osmond's proposal. They are taken up with the "free exploration of life":

The two ladies accordingly embarked on this expedition, and spent three months in Greece, in Turkey, in Egypt. Isabel found much to interest her in these countries, though Madame Merle continued to remark that even among the most classic sites, the scenes most calculated to suggest repose and reflection, a certain incoherence prevailed in her. Isabel travelled rapidly and recklessly; she was like a thirsty person draining cup after cup. (PL, II, p. 33).

The "cup of experience"? James always makes us work to discover Isabel's

14. HJ implies that something like this has happened in the case of the Countess Gemini when he makes a seemingly gratuitous reference to her having had three children, all of whom have died young. (PL, I, p. 356). He is not interested enough in her marriage to tell us more.
motivations for ourselves but here we find ourselves obliged to supply them too. At the start of the novel he tells us that "her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality" (PL, I, p. 24). Isn't this what he declines to show, as he declines to show what the "certain incoherence" is? It is only speculation but at this point I would refer back to her fantasy of "rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see" and Rosier's memory of her as a child at Neuchâtel, when she went "so near the edge" of the cliff (PL, I, p. 270). I think she goes on her journey because her fear of her fear of life makes her tempt providence and tantalise herself into boldness. Ultimately, as I hope to show, it is a kind of death-wish which confirms her earlier puzzling over whether "its not a greater happiness to be powerless".

There is an apposite dialogue where Ralph tries to persuade Isabel against marrying Osmond:

"You were the last person I expected to see caught."
"I don't know why you call it caught."
"Because you're going to be put into a cage."
"If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you", she answered.
"That's what I wonder at; that's what I've been thinking of."
"If you've been thinking you may imagine how I've thought! I'm satisfied that I'm doing well."
"You must have changed immensely. A year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life."
"I've seen it", said Isabel. "It doesn't look to me now, I admit, such an inviting expmase." (PL, II, pp. 56-57).

Nowhere is she more presumptuous or her presumption less exposed for what it is. She accepts Ralph's image of being caught in a cage. A few pages further on she defends Osmond in the following terms:

"He's not important - no, he's not important; he's a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent. If that's what you mean when you call him 'small', then he'a as small as you please. I call that large - it's the largest thing I know." (PL, II, p. 63).

Ralph is supposed to be objective and truthful here, although he is trying to persuade the woman he loves not to marry another man, but he
should not be so surprised at the way Isabel rationalises her decision.
He, after all, had helped to give her her notion of the "aristocratic
situation". It is her real tragedy that she feels like this and Osmond,
for all his malignancy, can only complement that tragedy. She would not
have been happy even if she had never met him. It is simply that Osmond
suits her and she suits him and it may even be that James was being untrue
to his deepest understanding of her when he made the marriage a failure.
The degree to which she is like him even in chapter 42, when James tries
to present her as most different from him, has seldom been noticed:

... there was more in the bond than she had meant to put her
name to. It implied a sovereign contempt for everyone but some
three or four very exalted people whom he envied, and for
everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own. That
was very well; she would have gone with him even there a long
distance; for he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and
shabbiness of life, opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity,
the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been
properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things and of
the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. (PL, II, pp.
172-173).

It was not against the "baseness and shabbiness of life" or its "vulgarity"
that Flaubert took arms but against its potential for misery. Misery,
though, is something that has to be felt to wound and no one can stay
"unspotted" by it. Isabel, however, is performing truly to Vernon Lee's
Jervase Marion. Why does she fail to get on with the like-minded Osmond?
Not because he is Osmond, but because he is not Osmond-like enough. The
passage goes on:

But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what
one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye,
in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to
extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On
the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a
standard. Osmond had talked to Isabel about his renunciation,
his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual
aids to success; and all this had seemed to her admirable. She
had thought it a grand indifference, an exquisite independence.
But indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had
never seen any one who thought so much of others. For herself, avowedly, the world had always interested her and the study of her fellow creatures been her constant passion. She would have been willing, however, to renounce all her curiosities and sympathies for the sake of a personal life, if the person concerned had only been able to make her believe it was a gain! (*PL*, II, p. 173).

Who is it in the novel who gets their "superiority" recognized by others?

The passage from chapter six has already been looked at, as have the passages where Isabel speaks of her "independence". We shall come soon to her "renunciation" and "indifference" for they are already incipient in her facade of worldly, reticent unconcern at her "Thursdays". Osmond seems to have stolen all the colours from her own palette, all the catchwords from her box of tricks. Her ideal life is simply the complete indifference which Osmond only fakes. She has refused Lord Warburton whereas he wants him as his daughter's husband. If he could refuse him too, and everything he represents, they would make their "personal life" exquisite, an *égoïsme à deux* whose nobility would be built on the "infinite vulgarity of things".15

The most natural part of Isabel's deference to Osmond springs from her old need to be thought well of. It is so that he will have no grounds of complaint against her that she is heedly to go so far towards meeting his demands over the Pansy/Warburton affair. She needs his approval that she is in the right even when it is Osmond's right she is in and she suspects it of being wrong. Thus:

15. It should be added that we in fact have no reason to suppose that Isabel is any more capable of aristocratic indifference than is Osmond. She later shows herself to be quite as much concerned about what other people think of her actions as he is. Her sense of propriety certainly plays some part in her final refusal of Caspar Goodwood for his offer explicitly entails her accepting his disdain for what other people think. It is far from clear whether or not HJ perceived this discrepancy. A possible interpretation is that Isabel married Osmond because she imagined that he might teach her to care less about what people think of her. Did she hope that by hiding behind his aloof mask she would be able to break out of the sterile circuit of her own self-consciousness?
Covert observation had become a habit with her; an instinct, of which it is not an exaggeration to say that it was allied to that of self-defence, had made it habitual. She wished as much as possible to know his thoughts, to know what he would say, beforehand, so that she might prepare her answer. (PL, II, p. 157).

Osmond becomes more a parodistic emblem of her conscience and self-doubt than an independent villain. He presents her with the kind of situation that Henrietta had predicted would try her to the utmost. Ironically, he too needs to be in the right. The most difficult thing for her to face is not that he does not love her, not even that she has been robbed of looking down on life, "with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity" (PL, II, p. 166), but that he hates her and withdraws his approval:

She knew of no wrong he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel; she simply believed he hated her. That was all she accused him of, and the miserable part of it was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime she might have found redress. (PL, II, p. 167).

Whether she had ever needed his love as much as his approval may be judged by what James says about the kind of lover he was and she liked him to be:

Contentment, on his part, took no vulgar form; excitement in the most self-conscious of men, was a kind of ecstasy of self-control. This disposition, however, made him an admirable lover... (PL, II, p. 68).

Where the "most self-conscious of men" drew the energy for his hatred of his wife from is not explained. Neither is the fact that his lucidity about himself, to which he often treats Isabel during the engagement, never has the chance to shine in the marriage. James can do his odiousness brilliantly but he is not concerned to supply much in the way of motives for it: his interest in Osmond comes down to his interest in the effect Osmond has on Isabel. Nonetheless, even for this, there is a residuum of unexplained malignancy in him and unexplained fear of him in her. As Yvor
Winters perceived, "the species of terror which Isabel comes to feel in regard to him is absolutely unexplained by any of his actions or by any characteristic described." His hold on her through her fears is obviously the crucial thing in the marriage but, because of all the parts of the marriage which James omits, it is never explained. In fact, I think we come nearest to understanding it at the end of the novel in Isabel's last encounter with Caspar Goodwood. Meanwhile, one can only feel that the pathos created by chapter 42 is disingenuous in that it is not designed to bring out the nature of Isabel's suffering but to disguise and romanticise it.

It is to work this disguise that James calls up all the technical resources at his command. They may be grouped under the headings of rigid structuring of the book's life and a cunning playing on the chord of suspense. This takes us to what is thinnest in the ending of the novel and I will try to discuss it briefly, with a minimum of examples. One of the things we mean when we say that James has a finer sense of form than his mid-nineteenth century English predecessors has to do with suspense. There is as much suspense in James as in Dickens - in a way the whole of The Wings of the Dove is built on our suspense at whether Milly will really die and, if so, when - but it is a different kind of suspense. Coincidence in Dickens may seem crude but at its best, in a novel like Little Dorrit, it is not an authorial manipulation of our sympathies so much as the whole novel's pointing us toward something mysterious and surprising in life: a kind of order in disorder which is yet not providence nor destiny. If it evokes impatience when someone turns out to be someone


17. See, for example, the way Miss Wade's morbid fatalism in chapter 2 of Little Dorrit is used as a premonition of what is to come. Great Expectations reminds us that in the hands of a really imaginative storyteller coincidence can appear with the rightness of the events of a myth. How else, after all, does Oedipus Rex work if not by coincidence?
else's long lost brother or aunt it can also evoke a wondering participation in the life of the book. The coincidences in James strike me as referring to much more to the skilful way in which the author has organised everything, to art rather than life. And yet there are coincidences in The Portrait which are as outlandish as most of Dickens's: the Osmond/Madame Merle/Pansy connection, the habit Isabel's former lovers have of reappearing, Ralph's incapacitating illness. We are simply asked to read them on a realistic level. They become schematic rather than mysterious. I have already mentioned the way in which the description of Osmond's villa in chapter 22 creates a kind of emblem rather than a setting for him: "It was the mask, not the face of the house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes... etc." The Dickensian habit of animating physical objects has become an emblematic reference to something the author knows that the reader does not yet know, a kind of allegorical notation which will later become more meaningful. It is there to admire on the second reading, part of the gradual unveiling of Osmond's character, the meticulous revelation of a known quantity. For it depends on Osmond's remaining fixed and seen from the outside and on the reader's being slowly put in the know. There is more potential for symmetry than for growth. Perhaps this is appropriate as a way of representing a world which the heroine at first only takes on its face value and has to slowly learn to sound but even that does not absolve it from the objection that it is a world which begins by seeming unfathomable only to become a world which can be known. Most of the architectural images in the novel, and the novel's own celebrated "architecture", seem to me to partake of this static and inorganic quality, only seeming to change with Isabel's perceptions but really staying fixed. Thus suspense places us in the position of seeing the consequences of Isabel's actions before she does herself. We are granted
an irony which makes us better judges than she is.

Besides the suspense of being cajoled into wondering what Isabel will do next there is the suspense which is an integral part of James's "ado". For example, we are allowed only dark doubts about what the real relation between Osmond and Madame Merle is. The way James manipulates their secret can be shown very simply. There is a conversation in chapter 49 when he makes them talk as if they did not know it themselves! Madame Merle realises that she has been "so vile all for nothing" (PL, II, p. 296), while Osmond plays with a cracked cup which is an emblem of her fatal flaw.

We do not yet know that Pansy is Madame Merle's daughter:

"It appears that I'm to be severely taught the disadvantages of a false position."

"You express yourself like a sentence in a copy-book. We must look for our comfort where we can find it. If my wife doesn't like me, at least my child does. I shall look for compensations in Pansy. Fortunately I haven't a fault to find with her."

"Ah", she said softly, "if I had a child--------!"

Osmond waited, and then, with a little formal air, "The children of others may be a great interest!" he announced.

"You're more like a copy-book than I. There's something after all that holds us together."

"Is it the idea of the harm I may do you?" Osmond asked.

"No; it's the idea of the good I may do for you." (PL, II, p. 296).

James is teasing us with such ambiguous suspense (Osmond and Madame Merle so nearly admit what really hold them together) because he imputes to his reader a curiosity, a wish for knowledge very similar to Isabel's own desire to "see life". Doing so, he finds it more convenient to draw a curtain over Madame Merle's own wrecked life and let us imagine the worst for her. The heroine is the one who really suffers from their liaison and formal considerations forbid any irrelevant largesse of sympathy. Perhaps

18. Our only idea of what their relationship has been is provided by the Countess Gemini in chapter 51. The lacunae are not made up for by the fact that HJ lets Isabel pity Madame Merle when she discovers that Pansy is her daughter. (PL, II, p. 321). The pity is a poor substitute for understanding, especially since HJ is careful not to let it get out of hand: he makes sure to let us know that the long-suffering and more obviously pathetic Pansy dislikes Madame Merle. (PL, II, pp. 337-338).
this is why the novel's early reviewers, who had been nurtured on George Eliot, found something cold in it? The coldness might be stated as a function of the way he takes the problem of evil, a problem at the heart of Dickens's reliance on suspense and coincidence too. In The Portrait evil often seems to be subordinated into the role of initiating the plot and helping the novelist to map it out in a way that will bring out more clearly the fineness of the central consciousness. It is not taken, as it is in Dickens, as a fact about life in its own right. Perhaps the main limitation of Osmond is that although he is largely endowed with all the mannerisms of evil-ness and although James makes him highly plausible in his tone and the way his mind works we do not get down to any spring of pure evil in him. He stays melodramatic or functional. L.P. Hartley has an acute passage on this aspect of James in his Clark Lectures on Hawthorne:

But though Henry James was so sensitive to evil that even in the case of his minor characters he keeps a sort of chart of their moral temperatures, evil is only one aspect of his multiple awareness. He uses it mainly for aesthetic purposes, to enrich the texture of his books, to induce suspense, to make us take sides with this character against that, to engage our feelings ever more deeply with the plot he is unfolding. He seldom makes it the dominant characteristic of any of his personages, he socialised, and only once does he show it, as it were, in isolation. The nearest he gets to doing this is in The Turn of the Screw... But with Hawthorne evil was always a thing in itself... (19)

In other words, evil in James is not a tragic mystery.

Just a few more examples of James's restrictive use of form and symmetry will help to fill in the picture. Chapter 43 comes at a crucial moment but it is more concerned with the odd attentions of Warburton to Pansy and her love for Rosier than with Isabel herself. Warburton and Pansy may, despite the attention they get, both be described as ficelles. In other words, as characters of a limitedly interesting humanity. James

uses them in preference to any more intimate source of conflict to bring out the deadlock between Isabel and Osmond. Yet because they are fidelles he makes little attempt to preserve their psychological verisimilitude or to take us into their situation as they themselves see it. Warburton has to change from a fine upstanding Briton to a man who is radically immature and is cultivating a decidedly affected interest in very young virgins. James seems quite willing to sacrifice his integrity for the sake of his plot and in order to go on implying that he is still in love with Isabel and, therefore, still frustrated. At one point Isabel thinks that "British politics had cured him". (PL, II, p. 114). He becomes a kind of collie dog. James only allows a man one passion and that should be unrequited. It is harder to say whether Pansy's story is touching or precious but it does seem equally tangential. It is hard to feel very concerned whether she gets Rosier in the end or not. Is she not there simply to give the kind of illustration of Osmond's malignity which James has not supplied from his relations with Isabel? These questions are more serious ones because part of the reason for Isabel's final decision to return to Rome is that she has promised Pansy that she will go back. Do we feel Pansy as ever being a sufficient motive for her return or is she just its pretext? The plot may have symmetry but it does not work as a complete articulation of what James is trying to say either about Isabel or about life as a whole. Pansy is neither there for her own sake nor as a real illuminator of Isabel's behaviour. But the biggest blemish on the plotting of the last part of the novel is probably the way James contrives the successive reappearances of Warburton and Goodwood as a build-up to the final meeting with Ralph on his death-bed. The justification of their returning to go through the motions of the "strong man in pain" again is a devious one. They help to fill up Isabel's
Roman life and provide matter for her otherwise blank "Thursdays", when she receives those members of Roman society to whom Osmond is willing to condescend. This saves James from having to indicate that there was any fresh life in Rome for Isabel after her marriage. It fills the time and cuts out any alternatives. In this way James is able to make the "narrow alley" of life with Osmond a more plausible dead-end for a young woman in her late twenties. The onus for the failure of her desire to "see life" is thus put elsewhere: there is no new life for her to see. The whole scheme can be disguised as a strategy for telescoping the novel towards its conclusion and the contrivance thus becomes symmetry. There is no need for it even to appear as coincidence:

It seemed to Isabel that she had been very clever; she had artfully disposed of the superfluous Caspar. She had given him an occupation; she had converted him into a caretaker of Ralph. She had a plan of making him travel northward with her cousin as soon as the first mild weather should allow it. Lord Warburton had brought Ralph to Rome and Mr. Goodwood should take him away. There seemed a happy symmetry in this, and she was now intensely eager that Ralph should depart. (PL, II, pp. 259-260).

Thus the stage is set for a big scene with the dying Ralph and everything has been arranged for the emotional key to be introduced:

She had a constant fear that he would die there before her eyes and a horror of the occurrence of this event at an inn, by her door, which he had so rarely entered. Ralph must sink to his last rest in his own dear house, in one of those deep, dim chambers of Gardencourt where the dark ivy would cluster round the edges of the glimmering windows. (PL, II, p. 260).

When Isabel has helped James arrange it all they can both give way to their streak of Tennysonian sentiment.

The point I want to make about this kind of form is that it acts as a barrier to our engagement in Isabel's suffering and substitutes for it the relish of an irony that allows us to feel complacently knowing. It is important to see that this is very different from the kind of form that
we find in Madame Bovary. It makes Isabel a cynosure whereas Emma becomes our representative. Despite the portentousness of some of it the structuring of the end of Madame Bovary does become by analogy a mirror of the vice-like grip which the world has on Emma. Flaubert may go too far in his scene with the blind beggar but not simply because he is in search of a purely formal coherence to his work. He is searching for a way of expressing his genuine sense of the irrevocableness of life and the common doom of death, while having no religious or mythical correlatives through which to project these feelings. Thinking forward to Ibsen, to a play like Rosmersholm, one might suggest that in the nineteenth century only a reliance on an intensely systematic ordering of life in art could enable writers to express the sense of life we associate with the Greek words Nemesis and Moira. A feeling of determinism was the price paid by the artist who was absorbed in the tragic-religious interrogation of the meaning of existence in a secular age. It seems to me that James owed more to the aesthetic than to the tragic aspect of the form of writers like Flaubert and Ibsen. The second volume of The Portrait is directed by the author's conscious desire to pattern experience. One feels no outside pressure from life making him organise his material in the way he does: it is his own choice and perhaps, ultimately, the expression of his protest against the chaos of experience rather than a reflection of its tragic nature. In a letter to his nephew in 1899 James once wrote:

Thank God, however, I've no opinions - not even on the Dreyfus case. I'm more and more only aware of things as a mere or less mad panorama, phantasmagoria, and dime museum. (21)

20. See the essays on Ibsen in The Scenic Art; also Egan's HJ: The Ibsen Years.
It hardly needs saying that this state is not the same thing as *impassibilité*.

The suggestion I want to float about the end of the novel is that it differs from the end of *Madame Bovary* in that James works for a pathos which only makes us pity Isabel but not say, as we say when we see Emma hurrying to her fate, that, "There, but for the grace of God, go I". The way we see through Osmond with the help of Ralph is an index of this. Our perceptiveness is more flattered than our hold on our own humanity is challenged. Osmond is no mystery to us and our tears for Isabel are just pity, not *lacrimae rerum*. We may feel sorrier for her but we are allowed to keep our distance. Virginia Woolf has a good description of the way James's pathos is always like this: she speaks of his "gesture as of one shrinking from the sight of distress, combined with an irresistible instinct of pity drawing him again and again to its presence..."22 I want now to come to Isabel's final sufferings and to answer my initial question about whether the novel is tragic. In doing so I shall try to draw all the disparate threads of this chapter together. I shall ask the reader to particularly recall what was said about Ruskin and James's love of the "picturesque" and about the long letter to Grace Norton. As a prologue to my conclusion which will help us to keep in mind the importance of the contrast between *The Portrait* and *Madame Bovary* I will quote a further passage from Jaspers. He is describing how in the nineteenth century tragic dramas were showpieces in which the spectator's role was "shrivelled to aesthetic detachment":23

> It is essential that I not only watch and derive "aesthetic" edification from the tragedy, but also participate in it with my innermost self and act out its insight because of its direct

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23. *Tragedy is Not Enough*, p. 87.
importance to me. The whole content is lost if I think myself safe, or if I look upon the tragic as something alien to myself, or as something that might have involved me but that I have now escaped for good. I would then be looking at the world from the safety of a harbor, as if I were no longer risking body and soul on its troubled seas in search of my destiny. I would see the world in terms of grandiose and tragic interpretations: the world is so made that everything great in it is doomed to perish, and it is so made for the delight of the unconcerned spectator.

To accept this view is to paralyze existential activity. The function of disaster is, then, not to rouse us but to make us accept the world as we find it. And because the world is what it is, I cannot change it and should be glad not to become involved in it myself. But I like to watch disaster from a distance: it is all very well for tragedy to occur at some other place as long as I myself am left imppeace. As a spectator I share the sensations, I derive self-satisfaction from the presumed nobility of my emotions, I take sides, pass judgement, allow myself to be shocked - and in reality I stay at a safe distance. (24)

Such tragedy is the opposite of a play like Macbeth but a virtual parallel to James's advice to Granee Norton to hold on to her "standpoint in the universe". The passage might have been written as a description of our feelings in reading chapter 42 of The Portrait of a Lady.

I do not know how to tell whether Isabel returns to Gardencourt to see Ralph again or whether she goes to escape from a husband of whom she is afraid and she needs the repose afforded by the scenes of her innocent entry into the world. It is, anyway, at this point that her desire for death rises to the surface of the narrative. My interpretation may seem

24. ibid., p. 88.
25. See PL, II, p. 294 for her fear of Osmond. The fear seems to be occasioned by Osmond's low opinion of her and her ideas and, given her need to feel that others will approve of her actions, it is easy to see how the disapproval of the person closest to her is, besides being such a new experience, the most acutely painful thing that could have happened to her. For beneath all Isabel's pertness and self-complacency there is an undercurrent of radical uncertainty as to who she is, an insecure hold on her own identity. Her desire to appear superior is perhaps a sad search for an image of her self by which she can live? This is not to say that she is doing no more than role-playing; she has an equal need to resist the images other people give her. She is the helpless victim of the contradictory need which makes her subvert the expectations about herself that she wishes to create, a kind of unconventional conformist. It is as if she were protecting some pure self which she yet never manages to find.
extreme but I would propose it on the grounds that any interpretation
is bound to carry through the perceptions that James himself prefers to
spin webs of ambiguity around; it is therefore bound to collide with the
apparent meaning of the novel. He did not always like the perceptions
he had; sometimes he preferred others. I think there is real insight
at the point when he tells us this:

I have mentioned how passionately she needed to feel that
her unhappiness should not have come to her through her
own fault. She had no near prospect of dying, and yet she
wished to make her peace with the world - to put her spiritual
affairs in order. (PL, II, p. 247).

Still the twin needs for self-justification and for withdrawal from the
world. Did she ever really wish to embrace suffering in her "free
exploration of life"? The idyllic prospect which death is to her becomes
clearer as she journeys towards Gardencourt to see Ralph:

Nothing seemed of use to her to-day. All purpose, all
intention, was suspended; all desire to save the single
desire to reach her much-embracing refuge. Gardencourt
had been her starting-point, and to those muffled chambers
it was at least a temporary solution to return. She had
gone forth in her strength; she would come back in her
weakness, and if the place had been a rest to her before, it
would be a sanctuary now. She envied Ralph his dying, for if
one were thinking of rest that was the most perfect of all.
To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more -
this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a
marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land. (PL, II,
p. 342).

The imagined release is authentically Jamesian and the writing is moving
as well as mannered. Isabel may be being visited by a temptation to give
in but Ralph too says to her "I wish it were over for you" (PL, II, p. 361).
They both dream of a seductive and luxurious stoicism as the answer to
their suffering. One is reminded of that bizarre and sentimental later
story The Great Good Place. The special nature of the feeling is such that
the reader can still preserve his distance while sympathising. Isabel is
still a unique individual whom we go on analysing: the "terrible algebra" is hers and not ours. We never can stop analysing her. Her desire for death is wistful and private, not the expression of a common human instinct which we find in Emma's suicide or in Timon's lines:

My long sickness
Of health and living now begins to mend,
And nothing brings me all things. (26)

To Isabel the boon of "nothing" would be nothingness. What she is tempted by is the very extinction of her "illimitable power" of "consciousness", rather than death itself. But she decides to go on living.

I will quote the whole of the next paragraph describing her thoughts about death because it is one of the most important passages in the novel and one of the few passages in the second half which have the intensity of the best parts of the earlier chapters:

She had moments indeed in her journey from Rome which were almost as good as being dead. She sat in her corner, so motionless, so passive, simply with the sense of being carried, so detached from hope and regret, that she recalled to herself one of those Etruscan figures couched upon the receptacle of their ashes. There was nothing to regret now - that was all over. Not only the time of her folly, but the time of her repentance was far. The only thing to regret was that Madame Merle had been so well, so unimaginable. Just here her intelligence dropped, from literal inability to say what it was that Madame Merle had been. Whatever it was it was for Madame Merle herself to regret it; and doubtless she would do so in America, where she had announced she was going. It concerned Isabel no more; she only had an impression that she should never again see Madame Merle. This impression carried her into the future, of which from time to time she had a mutilated glimpse. She saw herself, in the distant years, still in the attitude of a woman who had her life to live, and these intimations contradicted the spirit of the present hour. It might be desirable to get quite away, really away, further away than little grey-green England, but this privilege was evidently to be denied her. Deep in her soul - deeper than any appetite for remuneration - was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost enlivening, in the conviction. It was a proof of strength - it was a proof she should some day be happy again. It couldn't be she was to live only to suffer; she was still young, after all, and

26. Timon of Athens, Act V, scene i.
a great many things might happen to her yet. To live only to suffer – only to feel the injury of life repeated and enlarged – it seemed to her that she was too valuable, too capable, for that. Then she wondered if it were vain and stupid to think so well of herself. When had it ever been a guarantee to be valuable? Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things? Wasn't it much more probable that if one were fine one would suffer? It involved then perhaps an admission that one had a certain grossness; but Isabel recognised, as it passed before her eyes, the quick vague shadow of a long future. She should never escape; she should last to the end. Then the middle years wrapped her about again and the grey curtain of her indifference closed her in. (PL, II, pp. 342-343).

A lot of the effect of the prose here gets dissolved for us when we realise that Isabel is not at close quarters with the real but is simply pursuing her own fanciful idea of the future. If it is tragedy it is of her own subjective making. It might seem that her sense that life will "be her business for a long time to come", contradicts or triumphs over her previous desire for death as "the vision of a cool bath". In fact, she only accepts the idea of life because she sees it as a living death. She will never escape from Osmond. This premonition is not really a fear because it is in excess of the circumstances. The "middle years" she imagines wrapping her about are a fine phrase which ignores the simple fact that Osmond is much older than she is: her marriage, even without divorce, is not for life. Much of the passage is taken up with the feeling that she is too fine to be made only to suffer. I think she reconciles herself to the prospect of suffering as a proof of her fineness: self-esteem makes her ready to will her own fate. One cannot rid oneself of the feeling that she and James both derive some satisfaction from the bleakness of her future life, and this is what makes them prefer it to death. When we are told that her will to live is "deeper than any appetite for renunciation" we reply that "an appetite for renunciation" is precisely what that will to live amounts to. Nowhere, here or later, is
there any recognition that, to believe in it, we should need to be shown what life Isabel would have to desire. For Roman society — even with Pansy Osmond in it — counts for nothing as a reason for going on living. Neither the "injury of life" nor its promise are fully there. The idea that nobleness makes a person prone to suffering is, on its own, too slight to sustain a sense of tragedy. It is comforting to our egos and the pathos which results is pleasurable because of a gentle self-indulgence in the pity: "Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things?" Nothing evokes any fear from us and we can give ourselves, without confronting ourselves, to a "light sensation of luxurious tragedy".

The tragic crisis of the novel ought to be Isabel's last meeting with Ralph. I shall quote a little from it although it seems to me to be so bad — the worst prose in the novel — that it might, were it less central, be better to ignore it altogether. Ralph is about to breathe his last and Isabel speaks: they are supposed to be happy in "the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together" (PL, II, p. 362):

"I don't want to think — I needn't think. I don't care for anything but you, and that's enough for the present. It will last a little yet. Here on my knees, with you dying in my arms, I'm happier than I have been for a long time. And I want you to be happy — not to think of anything sad; only to feel that I'm near you and I love you. Why should there be pain? In such hours as this what have we to do with pain? That's not the deepest thing; there's something deeper."

Ralph evidently found from moment to moment greater difficulty in speaking; he had to wait longer to collect himself. At first he appeared to make no response to these last words; he let a long time elapse. Then he murmured simply: "You must stay here."
"I should like to stay — as long as seems right."
"As seems right — as seems right?" He repeated her words.
"Yes, you think a great deal about that."
"Of course one must. You're very tired", said Isabel.
"I'm very tired. You said just now that pain's not the deepest thing. No — no. But it's very deep. If I could stay——"
"For me you'll always be here", she softly interrupted. It was easy to interrupt him.
But he went on, after a moment: "It passes, after all; it's passing now. But love remains. I don't know why we should suffer so much. Perhaps I shall find out. There are many things in life. You're very young."

"I feel very old", said Isabel.

"You'll grow young again. That's how I see you. I don't believe - I don't believe ---" But he stopped again; his strength failed him. She begged him to be quiet now. "We needn't speak to understand each other", she said.

"Oh, Ralph, I'm very happy now", she cried through her tears. "And remember this", he continued, "that if you've been hated you've also been loved. Ah but, Isabel - adored!" he just audibly and lingeringly breathed.

"Oh my brother!" she cried with a movement of still deeper prostration. (PL, II, pp. 363-364).

Not much needs saying, except to ask what is this "love" which Isabel and Ralph suddenly fall into? The curious thing about the passage is that it seems to be making use of many of the basic ideas of tragedy and yet to be merely maudlin. Does tragedy ask why there should be pain in so languid an accent? The pain of life is deeper than this and the "something deeper" in ourselves is the reverse of vague heroism. The dreadful moment when Isabel says "with you dying in my arms, I'm happier than I have been for a long time" makes us think that the occasion is not tragic but just a way of pardoning Isabel and giving Ralph his hard-earned consolation prize.

I prefer not to speak as if tragedy was made out of a certain combination of certain moral ingredients which can be defined out of the context of any specific tragic work. I would therefore prefer to summarise my position by comparing a passage from The Portrait with a non-philosophic description of the tragic which, I think, says more about tragedy than do most philosophers. The passage is from Montaigne's essay "De la Tristesse" and the word tragedy is not used in it although it is what it is about. Montaigne is describing an ancient painter who was
trying to represent the mourning of the people who witnessed the
sacrifice of Iphigenia according to the degree of interest she had for
each of them:

... ayant espuisé les derniers efforts de son art, quand
se vint au père de la fille, il le peignit le visage
couvert, comme si nulle contenance ne pouvait représenter
celui de deuil. Voyla pourquoi les poètes feignent cette
misérable mere Niobe, ayant perdu premierement sept fils, et
puis de suite autant de filles, sur-chargée du péril, avoir
esté en fin transmue en rocher,

Diriguisse malis,
pour exprimer cette morne, muette et sourde stupidité qui nous
transit, lors que les accidens nous accablent surpassans nostre
portée.

De vray, l'effort d'un desplaisir, pour estre extreme, doit
estonner toute l'ame, et lui empescher la liberté de ses
actions: comme il nous advient à la chaude alarme d'une bien
mauvaise nouvelle, de nous sentir saisis, transis, et comme
perçue de tous mouvements, de façon que l'ame se relaschant
après aux larmes et aux plaintes, semble se desprendre, se
demesler et se mettre plus au large, et à son aise,

Et via vix tandem voci laxata dolore est. (27)

This beautiful and robust description of the spiritual impact of
sufferings which are intense enough for us to feel that the whole weight
of the world is passing through our bodies tells us something about the
affliction, the numbed shock, the wonder and the release of tragedy. It
is the experience which makes a tragic hero able to complete his fate
with words like those of Racine's Mithridate: "C'en est fait, madame,
et j'ai vécu". Isabel does not end like this. She is not pierced
through by the world like Niobe, the core of her being made vulnerable;
rather, she assimilates her world into a tragic backdrop against which
to act and feel picturesquely. Compare the Montaigne with this passage
from The Portrait, which is the consummation of Isabel's love of Italy
and her broadest experience of the human lot she shares. She has just

27. Œuvres Complètes de Montaigne, 6e. Albert Thibaudet & Maurice Rat
(1962), p. 16.
discovered that "Madame Merle had married her". (PL, II, p. 286). She takes a drive to be alone with herself in a Rome which reminds her of the weight of suffering which is history:

She had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence, for in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright; she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew objective, so that as she sat in a sun-warmed angle on a winter's day, or stood in a mouldy church to which no one came, she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. Small it was, in the large Roman record, and her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater. She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. This was what came to her in the starved churches, where the marble columns, transferred from pagan ruins, seemed to offer her a companionship in endurance and the musty incense to be a compound of long-unanswered prayers. There was no gentler nor less consistent heretic than Isabel; the firmest of worshippers, gazing at dark altar-pictures or clustered candles, could not have felt more intimately the suggestiveness of these objects nor have been more liable at such moments to a spiritual visitation. (PL, II, pp. 286-287).

There is no need to spell out the contrast with Montaigne's thought. James's Rome offers us no medium through which the universal can be reflected onto Isabel's plight. It is just a seductively melancholy picture.29

The way the ruins of Rome get incorporated into Isabel's grief rather than impinging on them reminds us of something that any reader of James is likely to feel sooner or later: that his novels lack a real sense of human community. I do not mean this as a comment on the society they depict: they lack too the kind of ideal community which we can imagine embracing all the characters at the end of Madame Bovary despite their separateness from each other. It is not a community of institutions

29. See the interesting discussion of this passage in the previously cited article by Q.D. Leavis in The Hudson Review.
or a thriving society they lack but a community of experience. Leavis took the point that needs to be made about Isabel's Rome:

James paid the penalty of living too much as a novelist, and not richly enough as a man. He paid the price, too, of his upbringing - of never having been allowed to take root in any community, so that for all his intense critical interest in civilisation, he never developed any sense of society as a system of functions and responsibilities. (30)

The point was made earlier when I remarked at the way James shared Isabel's habit of seeing Lord Warburton as just a "magnate" and not enough as a man for him to seem a real member of a community. It can be made of James's England as well as of his Italy. Take, for example, Ralph's views on Warburton's politics, his amusement at the real moral quandary Warburton is in when he tries to reconcile his social views to his social position:

"What I mean is that he's a man with a great position who's playing all sorts of tricks with it. He doesn't take himself seriously."
"Does he regard himself as a joke?"
"Much worse; he regards himself as an imposition - as an abuse."
"Well, perhaps he is", said Isabel.
"Perhaps he is - though on the whole I don't think so. But in that case what's more pitiable than a sentient, self-conscious abuse planted by other hands, deeply rooted but aching with a sense of its injustice? For me, in his place, I could be as solemn as a statue of Buddha. He occupies a position that appeals to my imagination. Great responsibilities, great opportunities, great consideration, great wealth, great power, a natural share in the public affairs of a great country. But he's all in a muddle about himself, his position, his power, and indeed about everything in the world. He's the victim of a critical age; he has ceased to believe in himself and he doesn't know what to believe in. When I attempt to tell him (because if I were to know very well what I should believe in) he calls me a pampered bigot. I believe he seriously thinks me an awful Philistine; he says I don't understand my time. I understand it certainly better than he, who can neither abolish himself as a nuisance nor maintain himself as an institution." (PL, I, pp. 86-87).

We have no context in the world in which Warburton moves to give substance

to Ralph's assertions yet we are expected to believe in them and savour their wit. This England is a "pantomime" and a lord is simply an expatriate's dream, as the Pope is to Osmond. In an English novel, by Jane Austen or George Eliot or Trollope we should have known all about the local peasantry, the foibles of the vicar and the names and addresses of all the eligible young men and women for twenty miles around Gardencourt. 31 In The Portrait we know only Gardencourt and Lockleigh which, on their own, create a sense of being in a social limbo. Later, James is content to have Warburton wander in and out of the novel as an illustrious statesman who is the bête noire of The Times without telling us anything about the part politics plays in his make-up. No wonder that the unfortunate lord complains to Isabel that she will not take him seriously: he is too picturesque to be human. He is part of an aesthetic view of society which is a far cry from Balzac. Isabel likes to be in places where things have happened, places which are "full of life" (PL, I, p. 30), rather than in places where things are happening.

In Ralph and Isabel expatriation has been a way of liberating the pure spirit from its social conditions, of giving care à blanche to the

31. That is, all those things which HJ listed in his description of what was missing from Hawthorne's America. And when HJ gives us a thumbnail sketch of the vicar at Lockleigh (Warburton's brother) he takes it straight from his memory of Adam Bede. The failure is not simply a sociological one; since our interest is in the way Isabel's sensibility develops, and since being abroad is one of the main experiences which develop it, we need to know what she is responding to in her new surroundings and not just how she responds to them. If Europe becomes an impalpable romantic atmosphere then Isabel's enthusiasm for it will inevitably seem more superficial than HJ meant it to be. The England of PL is unsatisfactory not because HJ has failed to provide enough social detail but from a lack of thought and this is a failure of art since it is too unclear whether it is Isabel or HJ who is indulging in thoughtless fondness for it. Paradoxically, it sometimes seems as if Henrietta is, despite her prejudices, more interested in what England is like than is Isabel and it is through Henrietta that we sometimes get glimpses of the society which the English novelists had described. One could say that it would be Isabel rather than Henrietta who would have too many preconceptions about England to understand a modern English novel like Our Mutual Friend.
consciousness. In it we find the explanation of the thinness of poetical sentiment which is found in much of the writing which describes English and Italian civilisation. The condition is well described by R.P. Blackmur:

Because of the loss of the cultural establishment we have put a tremendous burden on the pure individual consciousness. It seems to us that in order to hang onto the pure individual we must burden his consciousness beyond any previous known measure. (32).

Such a burden is not imposed without a corresponding loss in scope. At the end of The Portrait James has to explain Isabel's behaviour solely in personal terms which are necessarily applicable only to her.33 When he wants to give her a sense of social responsibility as well as of responsibility to herself it seems to come at second-hand:

It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony. Marriage meant that in such a case as this, when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband... What he thought of her she knew, what he was capable of saying to her she had felt; yet they were married, for all that, and marriage meant that a woman should cleave to the man with whom, uttering tremendous vows, she had stood at the altar. She sank down on her sofa at last and buried her head in a pile of cushions. (PL, II, pp. 315-316).

We do not really feel that the sanctity of marriage, either as Isabel or as Osmond sees it, is so central a concern of the novel as this. It is merely the ready-to-wear convention which enables James to explore Isabel's fear and pride further while giving them a noble appearance. For it is perhaps because Isabel has so little sense of community that she, like Osmond, is such a stickler for its forms and lives in fear of flaunting them:

"One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. One can't change that way", Isabel repeated.

32. The Lion and the Honeycomb, p. 286.-

33. The pert remarks which Isabel makes to the circle of expatriate Americans in Paris could almost be applied to herself by the end of the novel. (PL, I, p. 266).
"You have changed, in spite of the impossibility. I hope you don't mean to say you like him."
Isabel debated. "No, I don't like him. I can tell you, because I'm weary of my secret. But that's enough; I can't announce it on the housetops."
Henrietta gave a laugh. "Don't you think you're rather too considerate?"
"It's not of him that I'm considerate - it's of myself!" Isabel answered. (PL, II, p. 250).

This is one reason why there can be no divorce for her; the other is the final appearance of Caspar Goodwood, speaking with a voice which really does comes from outside society and ignores its sanctions.

Isabel's last meeting with Caspar does not solve any of the novel's problems, because the mystery it leaves us with in her personality was also the donnée of the novel, but it does bring the various strands together with a concentration which had not looked possible at the moment of Ralph's death. Isabel is sitting in the garden at Gardencourt (on the same bench at which Warburton had proposed!) in an attitude of "a singular absence of purpose" (PL, II, p. 374). Caspar comes up and frightens her with a sense of danger in the pressure he puts on her. "The twilight seemed to darken around them." (PL, II, p. 376). His words in the darkness reduce her to a state of passivity: "a sort of stillness in all her being" (PL, II, p. 376). He has come to tell her some truths about herself: "It's too late to play a part; didn't you leave all that behind you in Rome?" (PL, II, p. 378). He knows the truth about her marriage and he has come to offer her freedom from it. Isabel realises that she had never been loved like this before: "this was the hot wind of the desert, at the approach of which the others dropped dead, like mere sweet airs of the garden" (PL, II, p. 379). His passion is not just sexual; it is a matter of all his instincts, including the moral. He is appalled at the thought of her returning to Rome which, to him, is a renunciation of life. It is not easy to say what should be made of the famous passage...
which follows but any reading of the novel must at least quote it—and at length:

"You must save what you can of your life; you mustn't lose it all simply because you've lost a part. It would be an insult to you to assume that you care for the look of the thing, for what people will say, for the bottomless idiocy of the world. We've nothing to do with all that; we're quite out of it; we look at things as they are. You took the great step in coming away; the next is nothing; it's the natural one. I swear, as I stand here, that a woman deliberately made to suffer is justified in anything in life—in going down into the streets if that will help her! I know how you suffer, and that's why I'm here. We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? What is it that holds us, what is it that has the smallest right to interfere in such a question as this? Such a question is between ourselves—and to say that is to settle it! Were we born to rot in our misery—were we born to be afraid? I never knew you afraid! If you'll only trust me, how little you will be disappointed! The world's all before us—and the world's very big. I know something about that." (PL, II, pp. 379-380).

Caspar expects Isabel to be true to the American spirit in her and to take her Jamesian belief in the power of consciousness to its logical conclusion. 34 His is the voice of those instincts which are usually submerged in James's world. Yet it is a heavy and lowering voice, too insistent to be exhilarating. Isabel perhaps feels a more acute pain here than any Osmond ever inflicted on her. This is precisely because Caspar offers to make real what had been her favourite dream: "The world lay before her—she could do whatever she chose. There was a deep thrill in it all..." (PL, II, p. 31). It is the dream Osmond failed to bring true. Here is her response:

Isabel gave a long murmur, like a creature in pain; it was as if he were pressing something that hurt her. "The world's very small", she said at random; she had an immense

34. "To whom under the sun do we owe anything?" Caspar is like one of those characters who struggle to achieve being beyond the bounds of society, of whom Lawrence writes in the Study of Thomas Hardy. Isabel perhaps showed signs of being one too when she refused Warburton and married Osmond but by now she has changed: she plays Osmond to Caspar's Isabel.
desire to appear to resist. She said it at random, to hear herself say something; but it was not what she meant. The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out, all around her, to take the form of a mighty swa, where she floated in fathomless waters. She had wanted help, and here was help; it had come in a rushing torrent. I know not whether she believed everything he said; but she believed just then that to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to her dying. This belief, for a moment, was a kind of rapture, in which she felt herself sink and sink. In the movement she seemed to beat with her feet in order to catch herself, to feel something to rest on. (PL, II, p. 380. My italics.)

Sex, it seems, is death, the abdication of consciousness. This is what is really meant by saying that Isabel seeks death and not life. For Isabel to live now Caspar must be sacrificed and she just manages to tell him to go. He virtually assaults her with desperate kiss which is like "white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed" (PL, II, p. 381). His whole being seems to take possession of hers and she feels like a drowning person, "following a train of images before they sink" (PL, II, p. 391).

But when darkness returned she was free. She never looked about her; she only darted from the spot. There were lights in the windows of the house; they shone far across the lawn. In an extraordinarily short time - for the distance was considerable - she had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door. Here only she paused. She looked all about her; she listened a little; then she put her hand on the latch. She had not known where to turn; but then she knew now. There was a very straight path. (PL, II, p. 381).

She finds a moral reason for coming in from the dark. 35

35. Rebecca West's blunt though muddled view of the ending of the novel is still worth pondering. Like most common-sense reactions to NJ (including William James's) it is an odd mixture of crudity and cogency: "... there could be nothing less delicate than to marry a person for any reason but the consciousness of passion. And the grand climax of her conduct, her return to Osmond after the full revelation of his guilt has come to augment her anguish at his unkindness, proves her not the very paragon of ladies but merely very lady-like. If their marriage was to be a reality it was to be a degradation of the will whose integrity the whole book is an invitation to admire; if it was to be a sham it was still a larger concession to society than should have been made by an honest woman. Yet for all the poor quality of the motives which furnish Isabel's moral stuffing, The Portrait of a Lady is entirely successful in giving one the sense of having met somebody far too radiantly good for this world." (NJ, p. 70). She contradicts herself because the novel has contradicted itself first?
It is perhaps only because James can write at such a distance from his own deepest perceptions that he can find the deep-seated images which well up in Isabel's mind in this remarkable passage and give it a symbolic force. On the level of the imagery it presents its meaning successfully. If we try to relate it to James's more conscious concerns in the rest of the book it leaves us in a state of puzzlement. It seems like a mere exorcism of the instincts because we are never shown anything in Caspar which permits us to see him as a possible partner for Isabel and we know that she has too little real love for him for her to be caught in a serious conflict between right and right here. We cannot conclude that Isabel prefers Osmond to Caspar when it comes down to it and it is not even a general reading of the novel that her fear is at the root of everything. If we are left guessing it is not at something mysterious in life to which the novel points but at something in the novel that has not been fully plumbed or diagnosed. We end on the brink of discovering it but we still need to speculate as we have all along. My own interpretation is no more than speculation and the shadowy meaningfulness of the scene with Caspar remains shadowy. A critic cannot write the novel the novelist has been unable to write himself. We end with the sexual mystery of Isabel's nature and it has been precisely the sexual side of her marriage that James has avoided talking about. Why did he keep Caspar waiting in the wings so long and so awkwaddly if it were not that he knew something had been left unexplained? I doubt whether a really
coherent interpretation of The Portrait of a Lady is possible, even now. 36

I want to end this chapter with a few general thoughts about James and a series of quotations which are worth studying as a help to taking these thoughts further. I think that what has transpired from the close reading of The Portrait has a relevance to all James's later novels because The Portrait is, to me, the first novel in which he is fully himself. The later novels are beyond the scope of this thesis and what follows must serve only as a starting point for an approach to them.

A certain intellectual duplicity seems to be the condition for James's imagination's being able to release his most personal preoccupations into the sphere of his art. My sense of The Portrait is of half-articulated depths which are revealed as much by being concealed as by being confronted. Maxwell Geismar says, in his crudely cogent attempt to demolish James, he was "aware of everything except his own inner springs of creative action". 37 My main critical point is that the novel's fascination lies in its inability to hold its full meaning surely within itself, that its art does not give us the experience of a deep imaginative intelligence coming to grips with itself and is, consequently,

36. My own sense is of a mandarin virtuosity controlling the surface of the novel with apparent rationality and yet always leaving room for half-conscious imaginative plunges into more obscure psychological undercurrents which remain only partly explicable. Imagination and reason seem to be in disjunction so that the most significant insights seem rather to float up to the surface for brief moments than to be fully articulate. There is another way of understanding HJ's attitude to his subjects which is perhaps a more fruitful one. Du Bos gives an illuminating version of it: "A propos de James, Pater et Flaubert, je disais à Z. que... c'est par la peur de la vie qui est centrale chez tous trois qu'ils ont si fort agi sur moi - et bien entendu à cet égard James par dessus tout, parce que chez lui la peur de la vie se double de la peur du sujet, je veux dire de la peur à force de respect agenouillé d'approcher le sujet, dont cependant il souhaite parler." Journal, vol. III, p. 45.

37. HJ and his Cult, p. 47.
not a tragic art. The fear of the subject is at bottom a fear of self and this is also what Isabel shows. It contrasts with the acknowledged similarity that exists between Flaubert and Emma which testifies to Flaubert's ability to get down to the things in his own self which he held in common with other selves. The generality and the impersonality of Madame Bovary came, not from detachment, but from facing the self. James holds back from his self and misses the general. William James had a better sense of this holding back than most of his brother's critics and he sees the pathos in it which Vernon Lee had missed:

Harry is a queer boy, so good and yet so limited, as if he had taken an oath not to let himself out to more than half his humanhood in order to keep the other half from suffering, and had capped it with a determination not to give anyone else credit for the half he resolved not to use himself. Really, it is not an oath or a resolve, but helplessness. (38).

William would have understood why Isabel returned to Osmond. The form of James's novels may be seen as his way of countering the tendency of his imagination to be drawn towards subjects which threatened to expose the unused half of his "humanhood". It was a mastery which compensated for his "helplessness". Maurice Blanchot gives a good description of the way the fear of the subject lead James to a need to dominate it from the outset so as to wrest from it its disturbing suggestiveness:

James redoute de commencer: ce commencement où l'oeuvre est toute ignorance d'elle-même, est la faiblesse de ce qui est sans poids, sans réalité, sans vérité, et pourtant de religion nécessaire, d'une nécessité vide, inéluctable. De ce commencement, il a peur. Il lui faut, avant de se livrer à la force du récit la sécurité d'un canevas, le travail qui clarifie et passe le sujet au crible. (39).

Hence the "architecture".

In old age James came to recognise the disjunction between his art

38. Quoted by Edel in The Treacherous Years, p. 304.
and his living that Blanchot implies. Edel quotes a letter to Morton Fullerton in 1900, a reply to a letter from Fullerton asking James what had been his "point de départ" in life:

The part from which I set out was, I think, that of the essential loneliness of my life — and it seems to be the port also, in sooth, to which my course again finally directs itself! This loneliness (since I mention it!) what is it still but the deepest thing about one? Deeper about me, at any rate, than anything else; deeper than my 'genius', deeper than my 'discipline', deeper than my pride, deeper, above all, than the deep counterminings of art. (40).

There is an honesty behind that word "counterminings" which James may not often have achieved and which was perhaps beyond him when he wrote

The Portrait. These "counterminings" have nowhere been better described than in Gide's letter to Charles Du Bos about James and, though I do not agree with everything Gide says, he has always to be considered. I think, in fact, that he misses the imaginative groping into experience which James's cerebration left him free to engage in on the side:

Sans doute je le louerai de prendre appui toujours sur les mêmes données d'un problème. Cet habile réseau, tendu par son intelligence, ne captive que l'intelligence, l'intelligence du lecteur, l'intelligence des héros de ses livres. Ceux-ci ne semblent jamais exister qu'en fonction de leur intellect; ce ne sont que des bustes ailés; tout le poids de la chair est absent, tout l'élément poilu, feuillu, toute la ténébre sauvage...

Autre chose: ces personnages ne vivent jamais qu'en relation les uns des autres, qu'en fonction de ces relations; ils sont désespérément mondains; j'entends par là que rien de divin ne les habite, et que l'intelligence explique toujours tout ce qui les fait agir ou trembler. Je ne le sens point tant, lui l'auteur, snob, que profane; oui, profane incurablement. A dire le vrai, il ne m'intéresse pas du tout, ou plutôt, c'est son métier qui m'intéresse, son métier seul, sa prodigieuse virtuosité. Mais ici encore il y aurait beaucoup à dire, à redire: ce besoin de tout dessiner, cette conscience même, ce scrupule de ne rien laisser dans l'ombre, cette minutie dans l'indication, tout cela me fatigue et m'exède; ses récits sont sans couleur, sans parfum; je ne sens presque jamais, derrière aucune de ses figures éclairées de partout, ce cône d'ombre inexplorable où l'âme souffrante se cache; mais ses personnages n'en ont nul besoin;

40. Quoted by Edel in The Treacherous Years, p. 331.
This is acute and damaging but it makes James too much of a monster for his art to have any human interest at all. It goes with Vernon Lee as good negative criticism. The "prodigieuse virtuosité" is too isolated for us to see how anything can be propelling it. And if we think back to Isabel and Caspar it seems truer to say that the "ténèbre sauvage" was not omitted from his novels but repressed in them. Rather than end with Gide, for whom James is only a "maître-cuisinier", it is fairer to end with a remark of Virginia Woolf's. She had been young at the time James had become "the Master" and she had been able to see that so gargantuan a subtlety as his had its roots in more than mere "méthiculosité":

... to be as subtle as Henry James one must also be as robust; to enjoy his power of exquisite selection one must have "lived and loved and mused and floundered and enjoyed and suffered", and, with the appetite of a giant, have swallowed the whole.

Yet, if he shared with magnanimity, if he enjoyed hugely, there remained something incommunicable, something reserved...

It is judicious but it is not the last word. When all is said and done, Henry James always recedes back into that dim twilight world from which we hear his voice through the darkness.

41. "Lettre à Charles Du Bos", Nouvelle Revue Française, XXXIII (1929), p.760. The most doubtful aspect of what Gide says is the idea that HJ rationalises successfully and that this is what he aims to do. This makes him seem very innocent. In fact, he often complained that other novelists, especially French ones, over-rationalised. See, for example, the letter to Paul Bourget quoted in chapter I above, or this comment on Fromentin's Les Maîtres d'Autrefois: "He can say so much so neatly and so vividly, in his admirable French style, that he loses all respect for the unsayable - the better half, we think, of all that belongs to a work of art." The Painter's Eye, pp. 117-118.

42. Gide, (op.cit.), 762.

43. The Death of the Moth, p. 100.
A certain factitiousness no doubt accompanies most efforts at literary comparison and the comparer had best admit it. In trying to find critical rather than historical terms with which to discuss Flaubert and James I may have allowed myself to be too influenced by the fact that I think Flaubert the greater novelist of the two. I have looked in vain in James for qualities I admire in Flaubert and perhaps the result has been that my search has blinded me to qualities in James that are only there because these I have sought are absent. It is impossible, perhaps undesirable, to resist the process whereby comparison involves preferences and preferences involve subjective judgements. Yet a study of this length should not terminate simply in the vindication of its own hypothesis. If it has not succeeded in making its hypothesis seem tenable by this stage it never will, and this chapter does not propose to spend much time in arguing for Flaubert against James, especially when it is clear that we are lucky enough to have either and can, to a great extent, have both. A conclusion is not the place for concessions to polemics. My reader will be more interested in asking whether there is not, after all, some truth in what James says of Flaubert, something valuable in James's novels which is not to be found in those of his predecessor. For example, is James simply mistaken about L'Education Sentimentale? I shall end by trying to follow this question through a little, though there is no space here, and no need, to follow it through to a conclusion - the only appropriate conclusion being one, like that of Rasselas, in which "nothing is concluded". As Flaubert himself was fond of reiterating, "l'ineptie consiste à vouloir conclure". (Corresp., vol. II, p. 239).
James's objection to *L'Education* is essentially an objection to Frédéric Moseau. He cannot understand why Flaubert chose him for his main character and he considers him as an inadequate reflector of the novel's varied life:

We meet Frédéric first, we remain with him long, as a moyen, a provincial bourgeois of the mid-century, educated and not without fortune, thereby with freedom, in whom the life of his day reflects itself. Yet the life of his day, on Flaubert's showing, hangs together with the poverty of Frédéric's own inward or for that matter outward life; so that, the whole thing being, for scale, intention and extension, a sort of epic of the usual (with the Revolution of 1848 introduced indeed as an episode), it affects us as an epic without air, without wings to lift it; reminds us in fact more than anything else of a huge balloon, all of silk pieces strongly sewn together and patiently blown up, but that absolutely refuses to leave the ground. The discrimination I here make as against our author is, however, the only one inevitable in a series of remarks so brief. What it really represents - and nothing could be more curious - is that Frédéric enjoys his position not only without the aid of a single "sympathetic" character of consequence, but even without the aid of one with whom we can directly communicate. Can we communicate with the central personage? or would we really if we could? A hundred times no, and if he himself can communicate with the people shown us as surrounding him this only proves him of their kind. (NN, p. 66).

One might say that we do not "communicate" with Gulliver when we read Swift, that James wants to evade the novel's satire of Frédéric, were it not that he complains quite consciously of Flaubert's unmitigatedly ironical view of his hero and regards him as "ironic to a tune that makes his final accepted state, his present literary dignity and "classic" peace, superficially anomalous" (NN, p. 66). James is surely right to ask us to see Frédéric as more than the butt of satire and to challenge us to see the novel as a failure if it only allows us to see him satirically. Yet is James's the only sense we can give to the word "communication"? Does our "communication" with a character in fiction have to be based on a sympathy that is admiring, consoling, self-projecting? does it depend on our natural affinity with the kind of mind we would like to be? The kind of recognitions
which the reader of fiction is asked for are often less flattering ones than this and an increased understanding of human weakness may be one of the ways the novel has of stimulating our imaginations to grow. In short, the whole point of Flaubert's choosing Frédéric as his hero is that he is precisely the kind of person with whom we would rather not "communicate" if "communication" is to mean our experiencing fellow-feeling with him. This is one of the things which the tone of Henry James's objection to him goes to prove.

James is quite right too to argue that our general sense of the life in the novel is affected by our seeing it through Frédéric's eyes; it is always implicit that his life is, by extension, a pattern of what life is like for all of us, an "epic of the usual". It is as such that the novel is often praised — by Guy de Maupassant, for example:

Il est l'image parfaite de ce qui se passe chaque jour; il est le journal exact de l'existence; et la philosophie en demeure si complètement latente, si complètement cachée derrière les faits; la psychologie est si complètement enfermée dans les actes, dans les attitudes, dans les paroles des personnages, que le gros public, accoutumé aux effets soulignés, aux enseignements apparents, n'a pas compris la valeur de ce roman incomparable. (1)

Maupassant's version of the novel makes it no less, and no more, than the artistic rendering of the unreduced, unfiltered, undigested substance of life as it always is: "l'image parfaite de ce qui se passe chaque jour". It is unquestionable, beautiful and pointless: all we can do, and this is what irked James, is to take it as it is. For Rémy de Gourmont, among others, "C'est peut-être le livre par excellence, le livre pour les forts, car il contient bien de l'amertume et son goût de néant porte au

1. "Préface", Lettres de GF à George Sand (1884), p. XXI. It might be added that sometimes GF's points are all too "soulignés"; for example, in the way Rosanette announces her pregnancy to Frédéric and even in the famous concluding conversation between Frédéric and Deslauriers. He always wants to rub salt in the wound.
coeur". Is reading it, therefore, no more than exercise in how much we can stand? It's sole consolation that it enhances our sense of our own stoicism? If we read L'Education simply as Maupassant reads it then it seems to me that we are really deriving from it a sense of superior knowledge of life and what life can bring which associates us, on a moral plane, with Maupassant's complacent disdain for "le gros public". It helps us to cultivate the notion that we already know the worst, a notion which is basically self-protecting and untragic. If James felt that this was the implication of the novel then, I think, he was right to resent it, just as one would resent any work of art which presumed to set down limits to what life is. It is an imaginative strength which compels James to argue that life is more various and can be apprehended in many other ways. One sign of this strength is his superior sense of the particular: it is he who refers to a "provincial bourgeois of the mid-century" and Maupassant, the naturalist, who descants on "l'existence". This is not to say that Maupassant is the truer critic, of course, for we know that Flaubert was writing "l'histoire morale des hommes de ma génération" (Corresp., V, p. 158). James may not have understood this fully, I shall argue in a moment that he didn't, but his criticism still takes us further into the novel. It does so by virtue of the fact that, for him, such a picture of life is unacceptable and intolerable, beyond any sense of the dignity of truth which might accrue from participating in its realism. It is Frédéric's feeling and it is surely Flaubert's too, for Flaubert was not

2. "Flaubert et la Bêtise Humaine", Promenades Littéraires, in 7 vols (1912-1929), vol. IV, p. 206. A similar point is made in George Saintsbury's fine essay on GF: "Of compromises and conventions Flaubert knows nothing. He dares in especial to show failure, and I think it will be found that this is what few novelists dare, unless the failure be of a tragic and striking sort". The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury, 1875-1923, in 4 vols. (1923-1924), vol. IV, p. 59. (There are interesting criticisms of these views in the previously cited article by G.S. Strickland.)
a Spartan, one of the people whom Gourmont calls "les forts". The novel is unbearable and it is meant to be. There may be moments when it invites us to congratulate ourselves on our own toughness, our strange stomachs - the most obvious one is the regrettable lapse into morbid grotesquery which signals the death of Rosanette's and Frédéric's little boy - but the core of the book is a unique and unresolveable sense of pain: only by misreading could we feel that, say, Frédéric's last meeting with Madame Arnoux invites us to feel tough. The laconic "Et ce fut tout" which ends that chapter is really a lyrical expression of pure regret: that was all that happened and yet how much that little means and why are such small events so overpowering? We are not meant to feel Olympian at such moments, although if we want to feel the illusion that we are the novel will be much easier for us to get through. But, as it is, reading is always acutely painful because Flaubert's prose casts us as a different kind of all-seeing observer, incapable of sustaining our own detachment, invested with a sensibility which is constantly made to quiver like an open wound which something has sharply brushed against.

The pain of which I am speaking might be thought of as the pain of feeling pity. This is how George Moore, in what is in many ways an excellent account of the novel despite its display of his characteristic

3. Why else did GF complain so bitterly that, "La beauté n'est pas compatible avec la vie moderne". (Corresp., V, p. 260). GF told George Sand that he felt completely out of sympathy with his so-called "école", Zola, Maupassant, the Goncourts: "A priori, je les repousse toutes. Ceux que je vois souvent et que vous désignez recherchant tout ce que je méprise et s'inquiètent médiocrement de ce qui me tourmente. Je regarde comme très secondaire le détail technique, le renseignement local, enfin le côté historique et exact des choses. Je recherche par-dessus tout la beauté, dont mes compagnons sont médiocrement en quête. Je les vois insensibles, quand je suis ravagé d'admiration ou d'horrure. Des phrases me font pâmer, qui leur paraissent fort ordinaires". (Corresp., VII, p. 281). Only style makes the subject matter of L'Education tolerable at all. Without style GF could not contemplate it. Style is not created by "les forts".

4. One is weary of hearing about the novel's hardness for it is one of the most emotional of all novels. At the end of this chapter I say more about its residuum of romantic feeling.
vices, saw it. For instance, in this passage about the Maréchale:

By no adventitious aids does Flaubert strive to engage our sympathy. He merely helps us to understand. When we do not understand we do not sympathise; pity is the corollary of knowledge, and all living things are pitiful: the saint as well as the courtesan. See truly and all differences disappear. Assassin, thief, leafer, madman, are all equally worthy of pity. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged". We see her living as she was born to live; there have always been courtesans, and presumably there always will be, and she works out her destiny instinctively, as you and I do. Pity the poor little Maréchale and poor Mile. Vatnaz, her friend, pity them all, even Arnoux, the ever unfaithful husband; everything that lives is to be pitied. (5)

However disarmed we may find ourselves at receiving a sermon from George Moore there is an obvious truth in this. It is one of Flaubert's strengths that he never indulges in individual hostilities against his characters, that he makes us accept all of them. Moore is right to single out Arnoux for even at the end of the novel Arnoux, who has brought his wife nearer and nearer to ruin, can still be the endearing rogue whose vitality is valued for what it is: at the dinner given by Monsieur Dambreuse during the revolution Madame Arnoux herself realises that he has been the only man present whose sentiments are honest. Frédéric, who has every reason to hate Arnoux, is constantly forced to admit as much. There is in such turnabouts a reverence for life which is compatible with satire but more than satire and it should be clear, if we think of what short shrift Osmond gets in The Portrait of a Lady, that Flaubert could not have given us the kind of human awareness of which Moore speaks if he had felt as James did when he asked, "Can we communicate with the central personage? or would we really if we could? A hundred times no, and if he himself can communicate with the people shown us as surrounding him this only proves

5. "A Tragic Novel", Cosmopolis, VII (1897), 46. Setting aside, if one can, its extreme exuberance, this is one of the most sensitive accounts of L'Education in English.
him of their kind". Not, in other words, of James's kind.6

All this, however, begs the question of whether Frédéric Moreau really is the "abject human specimen" James describes him as being. If we do feel that he is "abject" then this is perhaps because Flaubert's masochistic irony has been laid on so thickly that it becomes difficult to reconcile with the idea of Frédéric's possessing intelligence and sensibility. This obscures one of the novel's points, a point which James himself, given Flaubert's material, would have known how to make much clearer: that Frédéric is by no means the unexceptional, spineless version of l'homme moyen sensuel that he is often taken to be. For we can at least grant to him the possession of sensitivity, delicacy, and a forlorn but dogged impulse towards the spiritual, a refusal to settle for the second-best life that the world offers him. It is only because these qualities are not sustained by any moral energy that he can be called "abject" — in fact, without them, like Arnoux, he would in some ways be much less abject. It is part of Flaubert's point that he and Deslauriers discover in themselves the loss of that energy of desire which makes desire realisable that Balzac, earlier in their hapless century, had celebrated in his Rastignac. In this respect Flaubert's irony is really an aggressive way of dissociating himself from the thought that such desire is foredoomed to disillusion. It is only by resisting the irony, by reading between its too definite lines, that the real poignancy of the novel can be felt. We are, it is true, invited to make a compact with the irony and repose in the belief that Frédéric is merely "abject" but

6. There is an instructive comparison to be made between the way Arnoux is treated and HJ's treatment of a character like Selah Tarrant in The Bostonian. Both are rascals but GF has more respect for the life in Arnoux than HJ has for the life in Tarrant. He regards him too much in the way Olive Chancellor does. The result is that he is seen de haut en bas as a shabby, miserable quack when he might easily have been a splendidly Jonsmian comic figure. One shudders to think how HJ would have condescended to a Sairey Gamp: the creator of Homais was much nearer in spirit to the creator of Pecksniff and Podsnap.
Flaubert certainly knew that when he put so much of his own emotional history into him he meant more than this. What unfit Frédéric for living purposefully in his world may be in part an affectation of contempt for its bourgeois triteness - a common bourgeois feeling - but is, at its best, a kind of radical innocence, a desire for beauty which is unable to compromise itself even when it seems unrealisable. It is this desire which makes Frédéric utterly reject the thought of never seeing Madame Arnoux again, even when it leads him to the apparent abjectness of again lending money to Arnoux.

James would, I think, have tried to isolate such desire and such need for "romance", have made the consciousness which experienced it in some way separable from the world which blighted it, but this was not Flaubert's way. The salient feature of Frédéric's aspirations is that they are inextricable from everything in him which ties him to the earth. He listens both to a sacred and a profane music:

La fréquentation de ces deux femmes faisait dans sa vie comme deux musiques: l'une folâtre, emportée, divertissante, l'autre grave et presque religieuse; et, vibrant à la fois, elles augmentaient toujours, et peu à peu se mêlaient; car, si Mme Arnoux venait à l'effleurer du doigt seulement, l'image de l'autre, tout de suite, se présentait à son désir, parce qu'il avait, de ce côté-là, une chance moins lointaine; et, dans la compagnie de Rosanette, quand il lui arrivait d'avoir le cœur ému, il se rappelait immédiatement son grand amour. (ES, p. 207).

This is why Madame Arnoux is not only an ideal but also a real sexual object, why she is both "le point lumineux où l'ensemble des choses convergeait" (ES, p. 12), and a respectable and rather prudish bourgeois. The delicacy of the picture of Frédéric's desire for her, the way it

7. The standard account of GF's relations with Madame Schlésinger, which were the point of departure for Frédéric's relations with Madame Arnoux, is contained in three books by Gérald-Gailly: F. "Les Fantômes de Trouville" (1930); L'Unique Passion de F. (1932); Le Grand Amour de F. (1944). Explicit evidence that GF was thinking of himself is to be found in Durry, F. et ses Projets Inédits, passim.
aspires beyond the sexual and yet always is sexual, together with the
sense of her physical presence, is one of the finest things in the novel.
"Chacun de ses doigts était, pour lui, plus qu'une chose, presque une
personne". (ES, p. 391). For an abject specimen he can communicate a
surprising intensity of longing. Quotation is only palely suggestive —
L'Education being one of the hardest novels from which to select particular
passages — but some indication of this intensity is called for:

Elle ne faisait rien pour exciter son amour, perdue dans
cette insouciance qui caractérise les grands bonheurs. Pendant
toute la saison, elle portait une robe de chambre en soie brune,
bordée de velours pareil, vêtement large convenant à la
mollesse de ses attitudes et de sa physionomie sérieuse.
D'ailleurs, elle touchait au mois d'août des femmes, époque tout
à la fois de réflexion et de tendresse, où la maturité qui
commence colore le regard d'une flamme plus profonde, quand la
force du cœur se mêle à l'expérience de la vie, et que, sur la
fin de ses épanouissements, l'être complet déborde de richesses
dans l'harmonie de sa beauté. Jamais elle n'avait eu plus de
douceur, d'indulgence. Sure de ne pas faillir, elle s'abandonnait
à un sentiment qui lui semblait un droit conquis par ses chagrins.
Cela était si bon, du reste, et si nouveau! Quel abîme entre la
grossièreté d'Arnoux et les adorations de Frédéric!
Il tremblait de perdre par un mot tout ce qu'il croyait avoir
gagné, se disant qu'on peut rassaisir une occasion et qu'on ne
rattrape jamais une sottise. Il voulait qu'elle se donnât, et
non la prendre. L'assurance de son amour le délectait comme un
avant-goût de la possession, et puis le charme de sa personne lui
troubait le cœur plus que les sens. C'était une bêtitude
indéfinie, un tel envirement, qu'il en oubliait jusqu'à la possi-
bilité d'un bonheur absolu, Loin d'elle, des convoitises
furieuses le dévoraient.
Bientôt il y eut dans leurs dialogues de grands intervalles de
silence. Quelquefois, une sorte de pudeur sexuelle les faisait
rougir l'un devant l'autre. Toutes les précautions pour cacher
leur amour le dévoilaient; plus il devenait fort, plus leurs
manières étaient contenues. Par l'exercice d'un tel mensonge, leur
sensibilité s'exaspéra. (ES, pp. 391-392).

Their voluptuous modesty, both consecrating and undermining their love,
is conveyed by a rare blending of lyricism and precision. The tone of the
prose is purged of irony. It is above all, I think, this kind of poetry
that James must have passed over when he read the book. This may sound like
a mere assertion but if there was one quality which Flaubert had and James
lacked it was sensuousness. The Princess Casamassima - who in many ways plays a similar role in relation to Hyacinth Robinson to the one Madame Arnoux plays in relation to Frédéric - is only a dazzling, disembodied atmosphere by comparison.  

An indifference to passages like the one just quoted would help to explain the main criticism which James makes about Frédéric. James sees Madame Arnoux as Flaubert's "one marked attempt, here or elsewhere, to represent beauty otherwise than for the senses, beauty of character and life". (NN, p. 67). The "otherwise" in this phrase we must reject, for part of her beauty is a beauty of "the senses"; if it were not, Frédéric would not have been attracted to her at all. It might also be suggested that Flaubert is always careful to keep the prosaic elements of Madame Arnoux in focus, since it is of the nature of Frédéric's feeling that it should dwell on real objects in spite of itself: she is a figure of reality, not of "romance", and the reader is not supposed to be in love with her to the extent of idealising her. But James's objection is rather an objection to Frédéric again than an objection to Madame Arnoux herself:

Almost nothing that she says is repeated, almost nothing that she does is shown. She is an image none the less beautiful and vague, an image of passion cherished and abjured, renouncing all sustenance and yet persisting in life. Only she has for real distinction the extreme drawback that she is offered us quite preponderantly through Frédéric's vision of her, that we see her practically in no other light. Now Flaubert unfortunately has not been able not so to discredit Frédéric's vision, in general, his vision of everyone and everything, and in particular of his own life, that it

8. A rather distasteful aspect of the masculine elitism which is discussed below with reference to The Bostonians is the patronising way HJ writes about people who are either sexually attractive or sexually attracted to other people. This tendency is found as early as the vaudeville Baron in Madame de Mauves. We find it in the treatment of Countess Gemini, of Mrs. Luna's pursuit of Basil Ransom, even of Millicent Henning in The Princess Casamassima though she at least seems to have a body. These characters are all seen as comic and they are comic because they are sexual. One would not expect HJ to appreciate what GF creates in Rosanette Bron or Madame Dambreuse.
makes a medium good enough to convey adequately a noble impression. Mme Arnoux is of course ever so much the best thing in his life — which is saying little; but his life is made up of such queer material that we find ourselves displeased at her being "in" it on whatever terms; all the more that she seems scarcely to affect, improve or determine it. Her creator in short never had a more awkward idea than this attempt to give us the benefit of such a conception in such a way; and even though I have still something else to say about that I may as well speak of it at once as a mistake that gravely counts against him. It is but one of three, no doubt in all his work... (NN, p. 68).

This is subtle and, if we accept its premises, unanswerable: how could a Frédéric Moreau give us an adequate reflection of a "noble impression"? The question that James begs, though, is that Madame Arnoux is there to create just a "noble impression". It seems to me that she is both more and less than this. One reason for our seeing her through Frédéric's eyes, for example, is that it helps us to remember that his romantic imagination may make her a far more divine creature than she actually is. The novel also asks us to see her through the eyes of the jealous Rosanette, who insults her and to whom she is only "une personne d'un âge mûr, le teint couleur de réglisse, la taille épaisse, des yeux grands comme des soupiraux de cave, et vides comme eux!" (ES, p. 589). My point is that by wanting to idealise her James in fact wants to identify his impression too much with Frédéric's and that to do so is to forget that she is also an ordinary woman of flesh and blood and that ordinary women can evoke this sort of devotion. That is why Flaubert dares to show us her white hair at the end, why the sight of it is not just a final désillusion
but a seal on her humanity.  

The passage of time is, of course, the essential idea of  
*L'Education Sentimentale* and it is because Flaubert never forgets that it is that George Moore could speak so eloquently about the way the novel's "conception dominates the particular, and draws it into the universal scheme". Where James found the book monotonous Moore speaks of its "philosophic tide of incident", the way "everything is in a state of change, yet nothing really changes; the book is as changeful and as immoveable as life itself". I think one has to ask whether the kind of richness that James hoped might be revealed in life by a fiction possessed of an adequate central consciousness had anything at all in common with what is revealed by *L'Education*. To define the novel's sense of time is difficult, nearly impossible, and to illustrate it would take too long. Perhaps the best example is found in the pages which close the second part of the novel, the great scene which describes Frédéric's long wait for Madame Arnoux in the rue Tronchet, her failure to come because of the illness of her child, and the beginnings of the revolution.

9. How different HJ's sense of sexuality was from GP's may be suggested by imagining what HJ's response was to the sort of conversation he heard when he visited Flaubert during his stay in Paris in 1875-1876. He joked about it to tease the even more American Howells but he can hardly have been in his element in the boulevard du Temple. An idea of these conversations can be gleaned from the Goncourts; for example: "On feuille du souvenir les chefs-d'oeuvre, on se perd dans les horizons du passé, on parle, on pense tout haut, on rêve aux choses ensevelies, on retrouve et on tire de sa mémoire des citations, des fragments, des morsaux de poètes pareils à des membres de dieux! Puis de là, on s'enfonce dans tous les mystères des sens, dans l'inconnu et l'abîme des goûts bizarres, des tempéraments monstrueux, les fantaisies, les caprices, les folies de l'amour charnel sont créusés, analysés, étudiés, spécifiés. On philosophe sur de Sade, on théorise sur Tardieu. L'amour est déshabillé, retourné; on dirait les passions passées au speculum". Journal, vol. I, p. 1070. HJ may well have had an urbane smile for the slightly school-boyish imaginations of these comfortable nineteenth century Parisians but he would not have had the same ability to jump so quickly from the sacred to the profane himself.


When we realise that his dreams only go to fill a gap in time we can perhaps concentrate just on what he feels rather than on the quality, or lack of quality, of his own particular consciousness:

Alors, il y eut un grand silence. La pluie fine, qui avait mouillé l'asphalte, ne tombait plus. Des nuages s'en allaient, balayés mollement par le vent d'ouest.

Frédéric se mit à parcourir la rue Tronchet, en regardant devant lui et derrière lui.

Deux heures enfin sonnèrent.

"Ah! c'est maintenant! se dit-il, elle sort de sa maison, elle approche"; et, une minute après: "Elle aurait eu le temps de venir." Jusqu'à trois heures, il tâcha de se calmer. "Non, elle n'est pas en retard; un peu de patience!" Et, par désespoir, il examinait les rares boutiques; un libraire, un sellier, un magasin de deuil. Bientôt il connaissait tous les noms des ouvragers, tous les harnais, toutes les étoffes, les marchands, à force de le voir passer et repasser continuellement, furent étonnés d'abord, puis effrayés, et ils fermèrent leur devanture.

Sans doute, elle avait un empêchement, et elle en souffrait aussi. Mais quelle joie tout à l'heure! Car elle allait venir, cela était certain! "Elle me l'a bien promis!" Cependant, une angoisse intolérable le gagnait.

Par un mouvement absurde, il rentra dans l'hôtel, comme si elle avait pu s'y trouver. À l'instant même, elle arrivait peut-être dans la rue. Il s'y jeta. Personne! Et il se remit à battre le trottoir.

Il considérait les fentes des pavés, la gueule des gouttières, les candélabres, les numéros audessus des portes. Les objets les plus minimes devenaient pour lui des compagnons, ou plutôt des spectateurs ironiques; et les façades régulières des maisons lui semblaient impitoyables. Il souffrait du froid aux pieds. Il se sentait désouder d'accablément. La répercussion de ses pas lui secouait la cervelle. (ES, pp. 399-400).

These are feelings that anyone might have; Madame Arnoux has them at the same time as she watches the progress of the illness of her sick child. For her too "les heures se succédèrent, lourdes, mornes, interminables, désespérantes" (ES, p. 404). Time is intolerable and must be filled by something. Frédéric's response to Madame Arnoux's failure to meet him therefore comes with a dreadful finality which shocks us, as it shocks him too, with far more than the mere sense of his being "abject": he keeps his back turned on the momentous - and ephemeral - political changes which are in train, rescues the frightened Rosanette and finally seduces...
her in the room in the rue Tronchet which he had prepared for Madame Arnoux. He needs to protest, by this profanation of his love, against the way it seems to be "begotten by despair upon impossibility". At this moment we are less concerned by his spiritual quality than by something tragic in life, and, feeling that, we can only forgive him. There is a sense in which Madame Arnoux, by suggesting the ideal, has to be vague and unrealisable and Frédéric has inevitably to find her image slipping from his mind at many moments in his life. The wonder is rather that she still makes a persistent image for him to the last. But perhaps even this is a sign of his ordinariness and everyone retains from the march of the years a gram of their original innocence?

Edmund Wilson, in The Triple Thinkers, offers an explanation of James's dissatisfaction with L'Education Sentimentale which we need to consider and which will also take us on to some of James's own novels:

The hero of L'Education Sentimentale is a perfect Henry James character: he is sensitive, cautious, afraid of life; he lives on a little income and considers himself superior to the common run. But Flaubert's attitude to Frédéric Moreau is devastatingly ironic. (12)

Wilson infers that "James's antagonism to Flaubert has something to do with the fact that the latter's all-permeating criticisms of the pusillanimity of the bourgeois soul has touched Henry James himself".  

If it has, James disguises it well, for he lets us see no signs of his having the least fellow-feeling with Frédéric. We might conclude that Wilson's speculation assumes a less innocent James than the James we actually know, the James who, for example, let Ralph Touchett provide

13. The Triple Thinkers, p. 118.
Isabel Archer with a fortune to cultivate her sensibility on. Yet the real objection to what Wilson says is that James would not have accepted that there was any final truth in that phrase about "the pusillanimity of the bourgeois soul". For him, bourgeois civilisation could bring forth good as well as evil and its conditioning was not so ineluctable. This point can be enforced by comparing Flaubert's novel with The Princess Casamassima. Wilson himself, in an acute description of the social implications of L'Education, provides a place from which to start:

... Flaubert's novel plants deep in our mind an idea which we never quite get rid of: the suspicion that our middle-class society of manufacturers, businessmen, and bankers, of people who live on or deal in investments, so far from being redeemed by its culture, has ended by cheapening and invalidating all the departments of culture, political, scientific, artistic, and religious, as well as corrupting and weakening the ordinary human relations: love, friendship, and loyalty to cause - till the whole civilisation seems to dwindle. (15)

This may be the point at which to say that one would not expect James to have had a very clear notion of what Flaubert was doing in Jacques Arnoux or Rosanette Bixon. Yet to say that would be to forget how sensitive James was to the growing commercialisation of culture, the many-

14. Bewley writes interestingly about HJ's innocence of economics: "During the greater part of his career James had a tendency to assume that the wealth he so copiously provided for his more finely registering characters was uncontaminated. The wise with which he made the assumption, so far from being a snobbish withdrawal from his American past, was a measure of how generously, and how long, he read - in his European remoteness - economic innocence into American motives". "HJ and the Economic Age", The Eccentric Design, p. 257. But Europe was not so remote and HJ's generosity did not extend to the English monied classes, who are the object of satire in the novels and tales throughout the 80s and 90s. By the time he returned to America in 1905 and wrote The American Scene (1907) his eyes were opened to the real nature of the new fortunes - there is a change from Adam Verver to Abel Gaw - and in his autobiography he confessed that, "nothing of the smallest interest, by any perception of mine, as I suppose, I should still blush to recall, had taken place in America since the war". The Autobiography of HJ, ed. F.W. Dupee (1956), p. 559. (Contains A Small Boy and others; Notes of a Son and Brother; The Middle Years.)

headed Hydra of the press, the age of cant and publicity satirised in The Bostonians. 16 We need to remember that the creator of Strether was also the author of all those unillusioned tales of writers and artists lost in the modern world, that he was working on The Ivory Tower when he died. It may be that he seems sometimes to have failed to see how civilisations were dwindling because he also saw — and he was not necessarily wrong in doing so — how civilisation could flourish.

For George Moore, Frederic Moreau was the victim of "the tragedy of leisure", "the tragedy of everyone who inherits five hundred a year and upwards" but, for James, wealth and leisure are rather blessings than seeds of tragedy. 17 This is how Hyacinth Robinson, poor, a bookbinder, the child of a Frenchwoman who had been seduced by an English lord, sees wealth. Endowed with the appetite and the taste to enjoy the finer things of civilisation, poverty can have no dignity to him. It is not even life, just a vantage point on the unenterable sweet-shop window of life:

He was liable to moods in which the sense of exclusion from all he would have liked most to enjoy in life settled on him like a pall. They had a bitterness, but they were not insidious — they were not moods of vengeance, of imaginary spoliation; they were simply states of paralysing melancholy, of infinite sad reflection, in which he felt how in this world of effort and suffering life was endurable, the spirit able to expand, only in the best conditions, and how a sordid struggle in which one should go down to the grave without having tasted them was not worth the misery it would cost, the dull demoralisation it would involve. (18)

James is careful to make it clear that Hyacinth is not consumed with envy here, that he only feels like this because of his innate spiritual

16. See also The Reverberator (1888), and such things as HJ's unbending contempt for the West End theatre, the literary reviewers and the successful part of the self-advertising career of Oscar Wilde.


distinction and that his feeling is not the common feeling of people
in his position. 19 We only have to look in the same novel at Captain
Sholto - not to mention the Princess herself - to see how clearly James
could also chart the ways in which wealth and leisure can involve "dull
demoralisation" too. What Hyacinth's position, especially after his
visits to Medley and to Europe, helps him understand is something far
different from mere hedonism or class ambition: it is a paradox which
Flaubert, precisely because his irony is so devastating, his contempt
for modern life so comprehensive, sees much less clearly. Lionel
Trilling's excellent essay on The Princess Casamassima puts this paradox
in a nutshell:

It is easy enough, by certain assumptions, to condemn
Hyacinth and even to call him names. But first we must
see what his position really means and what heroism there
is in it. Hyacinth recognises what very few people wish
to admit, that civilisation has a price, and a high one.

19. "Everywhere, everywhere he was the ulcer of envy - the greed of a
party hanging together only that it might despoil another to its
advantage". (PC, II, p. 142). This is a comment on the demoralised
soul of the revolutionists because Hyacinth is an aesthete. If her
were less responsive to the charm and polish which culture gives to
the rich he would see more clearly that it could serve equally well as
a comment on their exploiters. He never goes as far as to deduce that
when people are brutalised they are likely to have brutal feelings and
that they learn their acquisitiveness from their exploiters. The novel
still leaves it open to the reader to deduce this despite its own
flexible brand of romantic humbug: it is just the speciousness of
Hyacinth's thought which prompts us to take it further. The upshot is
that the novel has raised a crucial problem for any revolution: the
exploited rise up against their exploiters in an effort to possess the
culture which has been denied them and are then faced with the problem
of how to destroy their oppressors while preserving for themselves what
is of permanent value in their culture. Hyacinth is right to see that
Hoffendahl's solution, of cutting Veronese paintings into equal strips
is absurd and that Veronese's art could not simply be dismissed as
"bourgeois". Where HJ blurs the issue is in making Hyacinth naturally
responsive to culture since the crux of the problem is that the
exploited classes are struggling to possess something which their
exploiters have never given them the opportunity of appreciating. Hyacinth
has his perceptions because he is not an ordinary working-man but the
fact that he is not ordinary means that the emphasis falls on him as an
individual and this saves HJ from thinking the perceptions through.
Civilisations differ from one another as much in what they give up as in what they acquire; but all civilisations are alike in that they renounce something for something else. (20)

Hyacinth's tragedy is one of divided allegiance; he is caught between his sense of the injustice of society and his sense of the beauty which, as he sees it, can come out of that injustice. It is a more complex quandary than simply to see culture on the right hand and squalor and misery on the left. His mixed parentage works in him in a more mixed way than that and when James writes that "he seemed rooted in the place where his wretched parents had expiated" (PC, I, p. 101) he does not simply mean that Hyacinth is faced with an impossible choice. To him it is partly misery which has made beauty possible and it is important to remember that it is his mother who is French and that it is France, in this novel, which is most associated with the finer culture. Hyacinth's is a classic tragic predicament - or, one is quick to add, it would be if it were possible to believe as much in Hyacinth's own revolutionism as it is possible to believe in his aestheticism. The flaw in the novel is that the light, self-conscious, sensitive, exquisite Hyacinth is unable to sustain the full weight of the contradiction he is forced to live. In spite

20. "The Princess Casamassima", The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (1951), p. 83. Trilling sees the novel as a tragedy in that he finds in Hyacinth "an opposition to motives in which the antagonists are in such a balance of authority and appeal that a man who so wholly perceives them as to embody them in his very being cannot choose between them and is therefore destroyed." (p. 80). I argue below that this conflict is imposed on Hyacinth from without by the romantic tale of his birth and that he himself is not big enough to sustain its full weight. I do not believe that he is meant to be; - if he were it would be much harder for HJ to convince us that life offers him only a blank dead-end from which suicide is the only escape. There is no tragic exhilaration in his death because he is too much the expendable victim of society who allows himself to be crushed by its contradictions, a case of a failure of will. (Yvor Winters also sees Hyacinth's predicament as being intended to be tragic: "The initial tragic error of Hyacinth Robinson... is conceived as a free choice made in ignorance of the essential knowledge which would have prevented it." In Defence of Reason, p. 307.)
of everything he really finds it far too easy to make his choice between civilisation and revolution, even though the choice leads him to self-destruction. What destroys him is not so much the agony of feeling two opposing things equally as the agony of being by situation destined to feel one thing when, by taste, he really feels another. James makes clear how limited he is — in comparison to Paul Muniment, for example — by his self-consciousness and narcissism but we cannot quite believe that he is as much of an ambiguity as James wants us to think him. His real bent is only too unambiguous. He is only forced to live out the contradictions of his birth because James has his innocence vanquishing his irony to the extent that he lets himself take an obscurely lurid anarchist vow. In a way, then, the criticism which The Princess Casamassima seems to call for is very like the criticism James himself made of L'Education Sentimentale: Hyacinth is too weak a vessel for the complexity the novel seeks to project; if the novel fails, in spite of all the brilliant and prophetic secondary characters in it, it is because it lacks, in Hyacinth, the strong centre it needs to bind it together.

With a genuine taste for art and for "romance" it is not surprising

21. Early on in the novel HJ makes it clear that we cannot see him as a "character": "His own character? He was to cover that up as carefully as possible; he was to go through life in a mask, in a borrowed mantle; he was to be every day and every hour an actor." (PC, I, p. 77). He is the same in death: "something black, something ambiguous, something outstretched." (PC, II, pp. 381-382). He might be seen as struggling against his own "inauthenticity", to use Trilling's word. (Incidentally, Trilling's recent book, Sincerity and Authenticity (1972), contains an acute discussion of Emma Bonary's "inauthenticity" which has some similarity to the discussion of her above. See pp. 100-104.)

22. The difference is that HJ constantly stresses Hyacinth's superiority and, for all his ironical comments on Hyacinth's insatiable desire for people to think well of him, he has a secret complicity with Hyacinth's opinion of himself. I don't find any irony in the following statement about Hyacinth's pluckiness when Schinkel nervously gives him his "billet": "He was more and more aware now of all the superiority still left him to cling to." (PC, II, p. 335).
that Hyacinth is used to formulate a completely opposite notion of
civilisation from Flaubert's while starting from broadly similar facts.
Instead of feeling, as Wilson says Flaubert does, that culture is
tarnished by the veniality of modern society, Hyacinth comes to feel that
modern society is redeemed by culture. Perhaps Flaubert is really
less sweeping in his satire than Wilson says - for if the Paris of
L'Education is ruled by the corruptions of Arnoux and Monsieur Dambreuse
it is surely in some way redeemed by Madame Arnoux? - but Wilson is
largely accurate. What makes James's view different is that instead of
dwelling on the bourgeoisie as Flaubert does - and is historically right
to do - he tends to polarise society into a working class and an
aristocracy. High culture is, rather incongruously in the age of Dickens,
associated with the aristocracy and it is significant that James has a
way of mixing it up with Renaissance Venice which has the effect of
excluding nineteenth century culture itself. But the result is not simply
an historical anachronism since all this political romancing also brings
its own perceptions with it, however buried they may be in double-thinking.
We are told of Hyacinth that:

23. In some ways a more complex view is expressed in a slightly later
tale, A London Life (1888). Laura Wing, the American heroine, is torn
between her love for the beauty of Melloes, her brother-in-law's
English country house, and her disgust for the squalid morality of
its occupants. To her, Melloes is a source of moral as well as aesthetic
values whereas to its possessers its influence is deadened by its
actuality: like Hyacinth at Medley, she idealises a culture from which
she feels distant. Thus Laura's main perceptions of her sister Selina's
wickedness occur at the opera and in a museum. She wonders how her two
nephews will turn out, whether they will be any better than their
father: "Would they be wonderfully ripe and noble, the perfection of
human culture? The contrast was before her again, the sense of the
same curious duplicity (in the literal meaning of the word) that she
had felt at Plash - the way the genius of such an old house was all
peace and decorum and the spirit that prevailed there, outside of the
schoolroom, was contentious and impure. She had often been struck with
it before - with that perfection of machinery, which can still at
certain times make English life go on of itself with a stately rhythm
long after there is corruption within it." (CT, VII, pp. 104-105).
He saw the immeasurable misery of the people, and yet he saw all that had been, as it were, rescued and redeemed from it: the treasures, the felicities, the splendours, the successes of the world. This quantity took the form sometimes to his imagination, of a vast, vague, dazzling presence, an irradiation of light from objects undefined, mixed with the atmosphere of Paris and of Venice. (PC, II, p. 194).

In one way this is simply cruel and "the people" would be quite justified in seeing these "treasures" not as being "rescued and redeemed" from their misery but as the fruits of pillage and exploitation. Yet this view would ignore the paradoxical fact that they are "treasures" and have to be valued as such. By however circuitous and romantic a route James is facing the radical with a real problem about the place of art in an egalitarian society. In his long letter from Venice Hyacinth puts the problem in an epigram; he says that Hoffendahl, the anarchist to whom he had made his vow, "would cut up the ceilings of the Veronese into strips, so that every one might have a little piece". (PC, II, p. 130).

This may seem specious because it is not as if present arrangements reserved Veronese just to those with the taste to appreciate him; yet James has put his finger on a problem which we know had helped to worry Ruskin into madness and which Trotsky was still trying to solve years later when he wrote Literature and Revolution. He is one of the first to make the criticisms of democracy which are now so familiar to the student of the allegedly reactionary strain in modernism. In this he has much in common with Flaubert although he reached his perception by another route.

One's mind casts back to the scene in the Education where Frédéric and Hussonnet watch the revolutionary mob sacking the Tuileries: so violent is their desire for destruction that they cannot comprehend that the things they are destroying now belong to them. There is a sense in which,

24. Olive Chancellor, in The Bottonians, is constantly tormented by the vulgarity and philistinism of the people whom her feminism obliges her to associate with.
in spite of Edmund Wilson, one can see both Flaubert and James as part of a larger history in which culture seemed inevitably forced to associate itself with the forces of reaction.

The novel in which James's Arnoldian horror of mass civilisation comes out most clearly is probably The Bostonians. Its hero, Basil Ransom, is a dispossessed Southern aristocrat with Carlylean views. His ambition is to be a noble conservative and his main aim in the novel is to rescue the heroine, Verena Tarrant, from the snares of what he sees as the canting, unthinking, vulgar agitations of feminism. He wants to wean her from the influence of his cousin, neurotic, militant Olive Chancellor, to the saner joys of conventional domesticity. To him American society is decaying as a result of "the most damnable feminisation":

"The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is - a very queer and partly very base mixture - that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!" (25)

25. The Bostonians, 2 vols. (first published 1886), vol. II, pp. 137-138. The novel should always be read with a copy of John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869) ready to hand. Mill makes the classic criticism of Ransom's kind of appeal to Nature and Instinct: "I do Not therefore quarrel with them (anti-feminists) for having too little faith in argument, but for having too much faith in custom and the general feeling. It is one of the characteristic prejudices of the reaction of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth, to accord to the; unreasoning elements in human nature the infallibility which the eighteenth century is supposed to have ascribed to the reasoning elements. For the apotheosis of Reason we have substituted that of Instinct; and we canât everything instinct which we find in ourselves and for which we cannot trace any rational foundation. This idolatry, infinitely more degrading than the other, and the most pernicious of the false worships of the present day, of all of which it is now the main support, will probably hold its ground until it gives way before a sound psychology, laying bare the real root of much that is bowed down to as the intention of Nature and the ordinance of God". On Liberty; Representative Government; the Subjection of Women; These Essays by John Stuart Mill (1971), p. 430.
So he tells Verena. He is not, it is plain, the typical Henry James hero yet he is regarded in an essentially uncritical way. The way James flatters his prejudices assures us of his sharing most of them. The Bostonians is a very entertaining novel, full of delicate and blithe satire, especially good on what is comic in Mrs. Burrage and Mrs. Luna (its grasp of New England reformers is more shaky), but there is perhaps something slack and unprobing in its comedy. This is because James's sympathy with Ransom prevents him from ever initiating a genuine debate over the merits of feminism. Olive Chancellor's hysterical seriousness is constantly manipulated in order to discredit the movement (James makes the banal mistake of incarnating it in blue-stockings and old maids), rather as the wayward, adventure-seeking Princess Casamassima tends to discredit revolutionary politics. Olive is a brilliant piece of covert psychological penetration and the novel always becomes more humanly interesting and intense when she appears but James is careful not to let her have any intellectual confrontation with Ransom. She is simply scared of him. This means that he only has to cope with Verena, who may be beautiful and bright but, as far as solid ideas go, is really a kind of ultra-charming ventriloquist's dummy. The soul of the movement is Olive and Ransom avoids her just as she avoids him. This saves Ransom the trouble of discussing his views. When he hears Verena speak at Mrs. Burrage's we are told, quite guilelessly, that, "He took for granted the matter of her speech was ridiculous; how could it help being, and what did it signify if it was? She was none the less charming for that, and the moonshine she had been plied with was none the less moonshine for her being charming." (Bost., II, p. 54). His nearest approach to her ideas is an unreasoned mockery of them and "if he should become her husband he should know a way to strike her dumb." (Bost., II, p. 121). On such
convictions his reputation as an intellectual, supposedly ahead of his banighted time, is built. James is, in fact, unfair to him and his pretensions by writing him a blank cheque on the reader's credulity.

I mention Ransom here because he is a good example of the dangers of James's kind of conservatism: the presence in it of a complacency which tends to take the sting out of his keener satirical observations of his age and reduce them to the sort of near-slapstick we get with Matthew Pardon the journalist and Selah Tarrant the charlatan. For there is a strain of fantasy in the way James regarded the world of the Bostonians which we would not find in the bleaker and more honest view of reality which Flaubert gives us in L'Education. This fantasy makes the novel more dissatisfying even if it makes it lighter and easier to read.

We cannot escape the suspicion that James is inviting us to bury our heads in the sand, that he has concocted a plot which enables him to pretend that the elements in society which he is writing about can be spirited out of sight. It is, for example, disingenuous to make one of the big scenes in an account of the rise of feminism the death of the kindly, self-deceiving Miss Birdseye — it is disingenuous whatever he thinks of feminism. James constantly patronises Miss Birdseye's idealism and it is surely a failure of taste to use her death both for a comic elegy over a past New England and as a source of cloying pathos. It provides a means of distracting us from the future which he was supposed to be writing about. In this way feminism comes to be represented by a dying survival from the past, a helpless neurotic and a deserter from the ranks:

"Good-by, Olive Chancellor", Miss Birdseye murmured. "I don't want to stay, although I should like to see what you will see."
"I shall see nothing but shame and ruin!" Olive shrieked, rushing across to her old friend, while Ransom discreetly quit the scene. (Bost., II, p. 217).
This fantasy culminates in the sensationalism of the novel's final scene in the Boston Music Hall where Ransom asserts his manhood by rescuing Verena from the large crowd before whom she has engaged herself to speak on women's rights. It is a characteristic Jamesian vindication of the rights of private life over public life, a premonition of Nick Dormer's resignation from politics to become an artist in The Tragic Muse, and it is not its least characteristic note that James says two different things in it. 26 If the heroism is all Ransom's the pathos belongs to the prostrate and haggard figure of the defeated Olive and it is to Olive that our sympathy goes. This sympathy alerts us to a simple question which James prefers to leave unanswered. He ends on the high-note of Verena rescued from the public; we are left asking ourselves what happens to this public at the end of the novel. We cannot believe that this vast assembly of feminist sympathisers simply vanishes into thin air, somewhere between the last page of the novel and the binding. The Bostonians ends in an act of exorcism, it does not have a resolution. 27

I have not argued in this way about The Bostonians simply as a way

26. An interesting chapter of nineteenth century intellectual history could be written around Nick Dormer's decision to see art and public life as incompatible, a decision which effectively puts the audience for art, the people for whom the artist creates, out of the question. How different such an artist is from a figure like Daniel Doyce in Little Dorrit who sees his research as fruitless and unconsummated as long as it is unrecognised by society! - yet Doyce is just as convinced of the rightness of his work as Nick Dormer is of his. In Middlemarch Will Ladislaw is a rather pointless dilettante until he finds a social outlet for his gifts. In the way art and culture are increasingly seen as the preserve of the few HJ is definitely post-Whistlerian rather than Victorian.

27. Rebecca West has an intelligent comment on the novel's attitude to the public and its "nagging hostility to political effort": she sees this as "the survival of an affectation which was forced upon the cultured American of his youth. The pioneers who wanted to raise the small silvery song of art had to tempt their audiences somehow from the big brass band of America's political movements". HJ, p. 72.
of discounting what James has to say about society. It would, I think, be wrong to conclude from the kind of happiness which is granted to Ransom and Verena that, in Theodora Bosanquet's words, James's "Utopia was an anarchy where nobody would be responsible for any human being but only for his own civilised character". That is far from being even Ransom's own position. The point to make is that consciousness - even when it might seem asocial like Ransom's - cannot be isolated from social fact because it is itself the product of social fact. Thus James is concerned to underline how Ransom's ideas originate in his sense of the defeat of the South. He goes out of his way to stress Ransom's Southerness in spite of the fact that he is manifestly ignorant of the South himself and has only a few stock notions to describe it with. As James develops as a novelist it becomes harder for the reader to make arbitrary divisions between where inner consciousness stops and objective social reality begins. The one can become the other. In The Princess Casamassima social conflicts are interiorised in Hyacinth and this is not simply a demonstration of the fine assimilativeness of the intellectual hero but a comment on society itself. James's thinking may sometimes seem to be vitiated, as it is at the end of The Bostonians, by a failure to distinguish clearly between what is private and what is public but this failure entails a gain as well as a loss in perception. James's emphasis on the individual consciousness helps him to see more clearly than Balzac or Flaubert do that society is not simply outside people but that it is a constituted part of their identity. Hyacinth's feelings of being lost in society are more complex than Emma Bovary's and it is, in fact, much more difficult to see him as being set apart from his world, much clearer that it is

precisely in his feelings of exclusion that he belongs to it. It is worth putting up with the romantic rigmarole of his birth in order to have this perception. Hyacinth may try to transcend this social conditioning but it is nonetheless indelibly written into the whole fabric of his mind. It is a point which a later Marxist critic than Edmund Wilson makes the crux of his reading of James:

Consciousness in James, to put it another way, is the almost exclusive object and subject of consciousness... in the larger works it's a thing in itself, and of course it reveals a great deal. Not a solipsist fiction. On the contrary. That's where the separation, the wrenching apart of 'individual' and 'society' comes in to confuse us. Since consciousness is social its exploration, its rendering as a process, is connecting, inevitably. (29)

We might want to add that a novel like The Tragic Muse shows James wanting to make that "separation" himself, that it is only in spite of himself and, as it were, behind his own back that he sees that such a "separation" is impossible, but the case of Hyacinth Robinson does point us in the direction of one of the ways in which James became a subtler analyst of society in the years after The Portrait of a Lady.

Hyacinth Robinson, then, is a reminder of the advantages of having a sensitive consciousness at the centre of a novel, a reminder that they are specifically advantages to the realist. He makes us return to L'Education Sentimentale with a fresh question: is Flaubert's inveterate irony a barrier to the achievement of similar perceptions through Frédéric Moreau? It seems to me that this is the point at which one wants to refer to James's doing things of which Flaubert, for all his profundity, is incapable. One thing which takes the edge off the tragedy of L'Education and turns it to pity or depressingness is the fact that Frédéric is not given a sufficiently alive and probing imagination for us to feel the full

disillusion of his generation. There is something mechanical and predictable in the long string of his defeats right from the opening of the novel. His dreams are rather ground down with his own connivance than shattered by reality. Therefore, the disillusioning power of reality comes to seem less strong than it is for a more elastic character like Stendhal's Fabrice del Dongo: Frédéric so clearly lacks Fabrice's imagination. More than that, Flaubert does not want him to have it and does his utmost to prevent Frédéric's getting a real chance to realise his dreams. It is typical that Madame Arnoux should fail to turn up on the one occasion when she has agreed to give herself to Frédéric, typical too that she should finally come to his rooms when she is old and Frédéric middle-aged. Many novelists would have seized the psychological chance which her turning up the first time would have offered. For, as it is, Frédéric's love for her is preserved intact because it is preserved from fruition: Flaubert prefers to avoid the question of whether Madame Arnoux would also have turned into an empty dream if she had let Frédéric make love to her. A punch is pulled which prevents Frédéric from having to cope with the full impact of reality and this bleakest of all novels is seen to have salvaged a remnant of adolescent romanticism from its seemingly pervasive disillusion. This is why Flaubert gives Frédéric a dream of Arnoux's death only to bring Arnoux vividly to life the next moment. He wants to present possibility as impossible. Many novelists would have killed him off, as George Eliot disposes of Grandcourt and Casaubon and Lawrence of Banford in The Fox, in order to give the characters who are alive the opportunity of living. So L'Education perhaps comes to feel just a little too inevitable and we can detect moments at the end, for instance in the famous scene in the forest of Fontainebleau, where

Flaubert seems to be trying to paper over the void at the heart of Frédéric's character, a void which he himself has wished to put there, by exquisite descriptions of external reality. The 1848 revolution is brilliantly described but Flaubert is too content to have Frédéric's inert romanticism as a pretext for turning away from politics to a lyrical sense of history:

Les résidences royales ont en elles une mélancolie particulière, qui tient sans doute à leurs dimensions trop considérables pour le petit nombre de leurs hôtes, au silence qu'on est surpris d'y trouver après tant de fanfares, à leur luxe immobile prouvant par sa vieillesse la fugacité des dynasties, l'éternelle misère de tout; et cette exhalaison des siècles, engourdisante et funèbre comme un parfum de momie, se fait sentir même aux têtes naïves. Rosanette baillait déméruement. Ils s'en retournèrent à l'hôtel. (ES, p. 462).

This is one of those moments in Flaubert when style, however beautiful, ceases to be sufficient. There was something else for an artist to do and one detects a hint of self-indulgence in the music of this prose which is itself "engourdisante et funèbre", lacking in urgency and in secret complicity with the past. The "mélancolie" of the "résidences royales" is really a hangover from romanticism; it shares, and is content to share, Frédéric's own failure to grasp the nettle of the present. In this sense, James clearly has a case for criticising Flaubert for his choice of Frédéric as his hero for Frédéric's weakness does rub off on his creator.

James's strength, then, in contrast to Flaubert's, lies in a quality of imagination which is free, plastic and creative and issues in an art which has a distinctive bent towards irony and comedy. Its more elastic vision of social possibilities is inseparable from the fact that James chooses as his protagonists characters whose imagination has the power, and also sometimes the weakness, to transcend the factual. The point can be simply made by a short reference to a tale James wrote at the end of the nineties, In the Cage. The heroine of this tale is employed
as a telegraphist in a Mayfair post office and it is her chief occupation to study high society through the telegrams which its members send each other. At the same time she is engaged to Mr. Mudge, a young grocer's assistant in Chalk Farm, who is as flatly prosaic as his name. Her vantage point at her "sounder", coupled with a lively imagination, gives her both a field of observation on life and the protection of a refuge from it. She proceeds to turn her clients, and two especially, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen, into figures of a romance of her own making. Her imagination takes off from reality and James is content to let it go, since it is analogous to the imagination of the novelist. (It is no accident that the girl's job is to "count words as numberless as the sands of the sea".)

Reality, as in another work of this period, The Sacred Fount, is completely open to the interpretative mind. James is playing with a different kind of irony from Flaubert's; the irony of the tale is not simply that the girl creates her make-believe world from a pack of idle and sybaritic aristocrats. What happens is very different from what happens in the scene at la Vaubyessard in Madame Bovary where we see the peasants' faces peering through the window at their masters dancing. James is not intent on simply bringing us down to earth. For his telegraph girl is quite aware of the discrepancy between the people of her imagination and the people she actually serves in the post office. In fact, she is obsessed with the real people only because she hates them. "They're too real! They're selfish brutes", she says. (CT, X, p. 164). Her feeling is much more than mere snobbery, though she is snobbish about Mr. Mudge and we never really see why she marries him save as a way of controlling her fancy. Despite appearances, she is no

toady. When Mrs. Jordan asks her if she doesn't like her clients she replies that, "What I 'like' is just to loathe them." (CT, X, p. 169).

Instead of her dreams collapsing in the face of the rather sordid reality of their lives that reality is precisely what vindicates them. The fact that their lives are sordid simply testifies to the vivacity of the imagination which could transform them into something almost beautiful. 32

The aristocrats become common as the girl becomes distinguished, the dream-world is not outside and beyond the poor girl in her cage in Mayfair, as it is outside Emma Bovary when she goes to the theatre, it is the creation of her own mind. The irony works in the opposite sense from Flaubert's.

A backward glance to the preface to The Princess Casamassima assures us, moreover, that the girl's imagination works in the same way as James's own does. 33 This is what makes her brief snatches of dialogue with Captain Everard such classical examples of the way James asks us to read between the lines, the silences of conversation:

Everything, so far as they chose to consider it so, might mean almost anything. The want of margin in the cage, when he peeped through the bars, wholly ceased to be appreciable. It was a drawback only in a superficial commerce. With Captain Everard she had simply the margin of the universe. (CT, X, p. 173).

32. One of the most acute things ever written about HJ is contained in a little note by T.S. Eliot in 1924 in Vanity Fair: "His romanticism implied no defective observation of the things he wanted to observe; it was not the romanticism of those who dream because they are too lazy or too fearful to face the fact; it issues rather from the imperative insistence of an ideal which tormented him. He was possessed by the vision of an ideal society; he saw (not fancied) the relations between the members of such a society. And no one in the end has ever been more aware - or with more benignity, or less bitterness - of the disparity between possibility and fact." (Quoted by Krook, Ordeal of Consciousness in HJ, p. 2.)

33. HJ is talking about the obscurity of the political movements he describes in the novel, about the way the novelist has to invent by guessing at what lies behind a small number of facts: "What it all came back to was, no doubt, something like this wisdom - that if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but that if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal." (AN, p. 78).
Perhaps it is pragmatism run mad, the expression of a strangely passive view of the world as being so variously significant that it becomes no more than a meaningless phantasmagoria, but what gives it substance and vitality is the fact that it is also the expression of an extraordinarily developed instinct to play with reality. There is a comic freedom in the way the actual is made redundant by what the imagination superimposes upon it: "if nothing was more impossible than the fact, nothing was more intense than the vision." (CT, X, p.179). Whereas in Flaubert imagination itself sometimes seems to be discredited James can preserve the girl's imagination as a value at the same time as he is exploding the stuff it works with. This is because she herself does too; her "romance" is not simply blindness to reality, it is a conscious evasion of it which helps her to endure and find nourishment in her humdrum work. In this sense she is both the repository of James's faith in human nature in the story and also a vehicle for social criticism: it all comes back to:

... the queer extension of her experience, the double life that, in the cage, she grew at last to lead. As the weeks went on there she lived more and more into the world of whiffs and glimpses, and found her divinations work faster and stretch further. It was a prodigious view as the pressure heightened, a panorama fed with facts and figures, flushed with a torrent of colour and accompanied with wondrous world-music. What it mainly came to at this period was a picture of how London could amuse itself; and that, with the running commentary of a witness so exclusively a witness, turned for the most part to a hardening of the heart. The nose of this observer was brushed by the bouquet, yet she could never really pluck even a daisy. What could still remain fresh in her daily grind was the immense disparity, the difference and contrast, from class to class, of every instant and every motion. (CT, X, pp. 152-153).

For James, it is the inability of Frédéric Moreau to make us hear any such "world-music" that accounts for the fact that L'Education Sentimentale had "a kind of leak in its stored sadness... by which its moral dignity escapes." (NN, p. 67).

We cannot, however, leave In the Cage with a simple tribute to its
own "moral dignity" for the tale has other, less attractive features. It would be possible to dismiss it as a trifle light as air, a kind of fantastic charade, a piece of ingenious trumpery but that would be literal-minded because it is precisely its lightness which makes its charm. But the very image of the cage gives rise to questions which it is not clear how James would answer. The cage is not simply a prison of self since it is also an occasion for a kind of vicarious imaginative living which we are invited to share. One of the advantages it confers is a sense of superiority, of looking down on the world, which recalls Isabel Archer's dream of the "high places of happiness" and Jervase Marion looking down on life from his aloof apartment in Westminster. The cage offers the kind of freedom which Flaubert imagined when he dreamt of watching life from the summit of one of the pyramids - except that James seems more assured in offering it as a secure habitation rather than a temptation. In the end, the telegraph girl's desire to know more and more about the people she studies comes to seem frighteningly inhuman, rather like the curiosity of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* and the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*. It becomes uncertain whether her desire for knowledge is to be valued or whether it is meant to reflect back on something possessive in her imagination, some corrupt need to have the sensation of power. When Captain Everard comes to her at the end to ask her to trace a telegram on which his and Lady Bradeen's future and reputation hang she is terrifyingly objective. One wants to underline, because James doesn't, that these people are making fools of themselves because they are at least in love whereas the girl, as her feelings for Mr. Mudge prove, is so clearly incapable of understanding what that means:

It came to her there, with her eyes on his [Captain Everard's] face, that she held the whole thing in her hand, held it as she held her pencil, which might have broken at that instant in her tightened grip. This made her feel like the very fountain
of fate, but the emotion was such a flood that she had to press it back with all her force. That was positively the reason, again, of her flute-like Paddington tone. "You can't give us anything a little nearer?" Her "little" and her "us" came straight from Paddington. These things were no false fate for him - his difficulty absorbed them all. The eyes with which he pressed her, and in the depths of which she read terror and rage and literal tears, were just the same he would have shown any other prim person. (CT, X, p. 221).

In the end, the Captain seems more human than she does. When she finds the message he is looking for his happiness seems more creative than hers, corrupt though it is: her exultant sense of her own power is both ugly and frightening. Perhaps James intended us to feel this about her? She is certainly an increasingly ambiguous figure as the tale progresses but, if she is meant to become a kind of monster by the end, what were we to do with the fact that she is also used to celebrate the power of the imagination? James has probed too far and, as so often, the fascination of what he does is directly related to his failure to unite all his perceptions into a coherent whole: ideas splinter each other apart. It may be a sign of this uncertainty that the girl is always allowed the safety of her cage when life threatens to intrude on her too directly: neither she nor James is interested in her real life. What matters, and is presented as valuable, is the alternative life she manages to lead. In other words, the corollary of her power is an extreme passiveness, a refusal to venture into action. It is this passiveness which explains the fact that she ends by settling for Mr. Mudge: the ordinariness of her future saves her from taking risks while giving her the maximum amount of time to withdraw into an imaginary world of her own. What she needs is the kind of immunity from experience which the cage gives her. In the last resort, we can still say that Frédéric Moreau is stretched further and, like Captain Everard, like the heart-broken fellow-mourner whom John Marcher encounters in the cemetery at the end of The Beast in the Jungle.
is exposed to more life. He may be less imaginative but he is ultimately more human. And so too is Flaubert.

This brief discussion of In the Cage could lead us on to the consideration of many other of James’s later novels and they would no doubt force me to revise many of the ideas which have been put forward in this thesis. But this study must stop here and it is best for it to stop with the prospect of a fresh horizon rather than the dead-end of a conclusion. Much remains to be said about James and perhaps even more about Flaubert, half of whose work has had to go virtually unmentioned, but quite enough has been said for any ideas put forward here to be applied freely by the reader to their other works. Not only those other works but the ones which I have discussed too, remain inevitably, and thankfully, beyond the clutch of criticism: it is back to them that this conclusion must refer. They will reveal all those things about themselves which have not been mentioned or seen here.
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