

# Henry James and the Poetics of Duplicity



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Edited by

Dennis Tredy, Annick Duperray  
and Adrian Harding

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Henry James and the Poetics of Duplicity,  
Edited by Dennis Tredy, Annick Duperray and Adrian Harding

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

### A "CURIOUS DUPLICITY"

DENNIS TREDY

In Chapter 2 of Henry James's 1888 novella "A London Life"—one of the author's lesser known vehicles for his trademark International Theme, which focused on the impressions of innocent and bewildered Americans abroad, adrift on a sea of hard-to-fathom European sophistication and mores—Laura Wing looks out on the city of London and is overwhelmed by the sense of a "curious duplicity (in the literal meaning of the word)." In context, she is referring to the way the city seems to her to strangely intermingle a tone of "peace and decorum," and a prevailing "spirit" that is "contentious and impure," a vision amplified by the protagonist's discovery of adulterous and deceitful relations among those around her (*CTHJ* VII<sup>1</sup> 105). The use of the term "duplicity" by James's 'centre of consciousness' in this novella could be said to correspond more accurately to a *figurative* than to a "literal meaning of the word," for *duplicity* comes from the Latin *duplicitas* for "two-fold" and primarily refers to instances of doubling rather than those of deceit. The notion is on a par with several others—such as *meaning, truth or reality*—the concrete and definitive interpretation of which is difficult if not impossible to pin down, particularly in the works of Henry James. If one thing is certain, however, it is that figures of "duplicity" abound in the writings of Henry James—be they fiction or non-fiction, public or private, laudatory or critical—and that duplicity is one of the key literary and rhetorical strategies within the author's vast and infamous arsenal of techniques of 'ambiguity', a signature feature of the author's method more often associated with his penchant for open endings, for elusive signifiers and for systems of representation that allow for varied or even contradictory interpretations of his works.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Tales of Henry James*. 12 Vols. Ed. Leon Edel. London: Hart-Davies, 1962-64. Hereafter abridged as *CTHJ*.

The term ‘duplicity’ thus points by its very nature to a notion fraught with multiple connotations and to a collection of rhetorical strategies that come into play on multiple levels, and it is the purpose of this publication to stress the distinct ways James used duplicity as a multi-purpose representational tool.

Within James’s narratives, one of the most prominent uses of duplicity, in nearly every phase of James’s oeuvre, occurs within dialogues and plot-related events, and points to the more frequent connotation of duplicity as deceit or manipulation, in general, or lying, in particular. Much like Laura Wing, a great number of James’s protagonists have to face and deal with such duplicity, and a few of them even learn to dabble in if not master it themselves. In such cases, duplicity is a device that works in conjunction with James’s use of non-disclosure, blanks and the unsaid, all of which speak volumes and with which the point-of-view characters and/or narrators (as well as the readers) must grapple.

As stated above, an innocent “reflector” coming to terms with the often rampant deceit of his or her entourage was the major premise of James’s earlier works and their dominant ‘International Theme’. Take, for example, Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and her long struggle with the lies and Machiavellian manipulations of Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. That said, even as James moved away from the theme of American innocence abroad, the same struggle continues, as it does for Hyacinth Robinson in his tragic involvement with Paul Muniment and his fellow revolutionaries in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), or as it does for little Maisie Farange, who has to deal, in spite of her tender age, with the dizzying lies and deceit of her divorced parents and, to a lesser extent, of Sir Claude and her two governesses. Far from dissipating over time, this narrative set-up could be said to grow even stronger in later James, particularly in the three novels of the early 1900’s that constitute the author’s so-called ‘Major Phase’. Each of the three novels is based, in terms of narrative structure and dialogue, on the protagonist’s ability to perceive and eventually overcome the destructive duplicity of those around him. Thus we have Lambert Strether falling prey to Chad and Mme Vionnet’s secret affair and machinations in *The Ambassadors* (1901), Milly Theale’s slow demise before the secretly engaged Kate Croy and Merton Densher in *The Wings of a Dove* (1903), and, in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Maggie Verver, as well as her father, who fall prey to the duplicitous manoeuvres of their adulterous spouses, Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant. What is quite striking is the similarity of the narrative premise in the three works, for in all three cases it is adultery and pecuniary greed that motivates and dominates the duplicity the

protagonists have to face. Dealing with the lies and deceit of one's entourage could thus be seen as a common thread within the narratives of Henry James throughout his career, though the protagonists' ability to overcome that deceit does indeed vary. Some come across as ultimate victims with tragic fates (e.g., Hyacinth, Milly) or uncertain destinies (e.g., Isabel, Strether), and yet certain supposed 'victims' manage nevertheless to "square" their deceitful predators and even use such duplicity to their own advantage (e.g., Maisie, Maggie, and even Milly, though from beyond the grave).

If such duplicity is common among James's protagonists and foils, it can also occur among James's narrators, thereby putting the reliability of the representation into question and forcing the reader, rather than the protagonist, to be the one who must somehow separate lies and self-delusion from truth. This is particularly the case in three works in which James opted for the use of first-person character-narrators, a narrative set-up that he claimed to avoid whenever possible, particularly in "long pieces," as it was "foredoomed to looseness" (*LC*<sup>2</sup> 1315). By "looseness" James seems to mean 'imprecision', or the near impossibility for the reader to "go behind" the narrator-reflector's possibly erroneous interpretations of events and to seek out any intentional or accidental duplicity, as there would be no authorial voice to set matters straight. However, in at least three key works written in the first-person, such 'imprecision' was exactly what James was after, a feature further emphasized by the mere fact that all three narrators are left unnamed. For example, in "The Aspern Papers" (1888), the reader must deal with the duplicity of an obsessive literary critic and biographer hot on the trail of missing personal papers from the poet he most reveres, the late Jeffrey Aspern. How can the reader accept the narrator's repeated denial of any impropriety when he witnesses the latter's cruel and misleading courtship of the frail Miss Tina in an attempt to get his hands on the coveted papers? And should the manipulation be seen as intentional or self-delusional? Similarly, how can a reader accept at face value any claims made by the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* (1901), a long work intended to be short and an excursion into the mind of a hyper-imaginative writer of fiction who manipulates guests at a weekend gathering at a country house so as to convince certain attendees, as well as the reader, that there is a mystic system of emotional vampirism at work, one that saps the vital energy of one guest so as to strengthen that same force in another? Finally, there is of course *The Turn of the Screw* (1898),

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<sup>2</sup> Henry James: *Literary Criticism, Vol. 2. French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*. New York: The Library of America, 1984. Hereafter abbreviated as *LC*<sup>2</sup>.

James's most popular and problematic tale of the governess's harrowing experience at Bly. In spite of the governess's insistent claims to be writing a faithful and factual account (e.g., "I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page," James, "The Turn of the Screw" 177), James took great pains to make sure the reader could not separate lies from truth and self-delusion from accurate observation or "go behind" the questionable first-person account, going as far as to set up a complex narrative frame that distances the reader from any figure of narrative authority who might point out moments of duplicity.

In the three examples cited above, the connotation of duplicity is indeed 'two-fold', for it involves both deceit (on the part of the narrator) and a doubling effect (on the part James, through his narrative structure). In all three cases, there are two distinct and contradictory readings of the tale that are possible, and *The Turn of the Screw* is by far the most notorious case of double-dealing on the part of James, as the contradictory readings (i.e., the governess is a saintly savoir fighting malicious ghosts vs. the governess is a deluded and dangerous persecutor of Miles and Flora) were intentionally built into the construction of the novella in equal measure, an "*amulette*" or a trap set by James for those readers "not easily caught" (LC2 1185). Of course, these are only the most obvious cases in which James allows for more than one reading of his works of fiction, and his allowance for multiple readings is usually far more subtle. The author's signature 'ambiguity'—which includes such devices as James's use of blanks, the unsaid and open endings—allows the reader to imagine more than one interpretation or reading of a given story and has fuelled often heated debate among Jamesian critics for over a century. And James further muddies the waters by consistently giving us focalizers and "centres of consciousness" who are caught on the threshold between two countries, two communities or two social classes, being both inside and outside the world they are describing for us, and thereby presenting us with observations as seen through a decidedly "double consciousness", much like the one admittedly ascribed to Strether in *The Ambassadors* in both the author's notebooks and in the novel itself (CNB<sup>3</sup> 505; *The Ambassadors* 22). Double vision and "double consciousness" intrinsically and nearly inevitably lead to double readings.

It could be said that, by doubling down on the doubling effect, as it were, James consciously turned what he called his "house of fiction", with its innumerable "windows" looking out differently on the same "human

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<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*. Ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Subsequent references will appear as CNB.

scene" (*LC2* 1075), into a house of mirrors, and in such a structure it is only natural that the reader should stumble upon another type of 'double'—the *doppelgänger*—yet another manifestation of James's poetics of duplicity. In James's ghostly tales, for example, these doubles are literally "manifestations", though it is left to the reader to decide if they are to be perceived as ghosts *per se* or as the manifestations of a troubled mind. "The Jolly Corner" and *The Turn of the Screw* are the most obvious cases in point. In the former, Spencer Brydon is confronted by the ghost of the man he would have become had he never left New York for Europe, and in the latter, the ghost of Miss Jessel seems to be a mirror image of the narrator, just as both Quint and Miles could be doubles for the absent Master with whom the governess is so infatuated. However, James's use of doubles is not limited to the ghostly, nor is it limited to mirror images set up between characters within a work. It can, for example, concern doubles that appear as characters in different works, as is the case with Christina Light, the prematurely world-weary beauty from *Roderick Hudson* (1875), who is resurrected, only slightly altered, eleven years later as the eponymous heroine of *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). In addition, the doubling effect can transcend the fictional plane, giving us characters that are *doppelgängers* for actual people, giving us, to cite only the most noted examples, Jeffrey Aspern as a literary stand-in for Percy Bysshe Shelley and Milly Theale as a double for James's beloved and ill-fated cousin, Minny Temple. Jamesian scholars and critics have long sought other "real" figures that his characters could be doubles for, and this could be seen as an unavoidable consequence of James's admitted creative method of taking a "germ" from the real world—people he encountered, incidents he witnessed or real-life intrigues he overheard or stumbled across—and cultivating (i.e., "dramatizing") them into characters and plots for his works of fiction. This was particularly the case in his numerous works in which the plot revolves around artists and writers, and James would express profound frustration at the need many readers felt to try to discover who his characters "were" in real life, who they were 'doubles' for. In his Preface to "The Lesson of the Master" for the New York Edition, James tries to dissuade readers from such an enterprise, and does so by insisting that, whatever the inspiration, his characters and intrigues were to be seen as coming from "the depths of the designer's own mind", and that in spite of initial connections they were removed from reality by means of what he called "operative irony"—a projection of "a possible other case", a separate composition and destiny from that of the initial model, in which any tie to "actuality is pretentious and vain"—in other words, 'futile' (*LC2* 1228-29). Still, in spite of James's warning,

the search for real-world doubles for James's characters has never subsided, and the hunt continues.

Perhaps the most interesting use of 'doubles' in James does not concern doubling between characters or between characters and people James had met or heard about, but instead regards characters who could be seen as *doppelgängers* for James himself. Especially in James's works of the late 1890's, when the author, after his humiliating experience with the London stage, attempted to keep his authorial presence safely in the wings and allow his centres of consciousness to take centre-stage in terms of "authority" over the representation, we often glimpse characters who could be seen as doubles for James and who seem to embody tongue-in-cheek references to the author's own literary methods. Take, for example, the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, carefully observing the guests at the country-house gathering so as to imagine new connections and unseen intrigues—is it not a parable for James's method of gathering "germs" and cultivating them into fiction, as stated above? The same could be said of the writer-narrator of the Prologue to *The Turn of the Screw*, who announces that he will not be able to intervene in the disturbing first-person narrative to help the reader make sense of it and who is turning over all "authority" over the representation to the governess. And what of Mr. Longdon in *The Awkward Age* (1899)? Is he not a stand-in for James, quietly overseeing and accompanying the young female protagonist on her road to selfhood, just as the author seemed to do throughout his works of the period (Fleda, Maisie, Nanda, the telegraphist in "In the Cage", etc.)? Similarly, it is difficult, if not impossible, not to see Spencer Brydon, the Europeanized American returning to New York who encounters the ghost of the man he would have become had he remained in the U.S., as a *doppelgänger* for James himself. The theme of the "unlived life" and of the road not travelled had long plagued James [note, for example, James's ironic remark made to Hamlin Garland in 1906: "If I were to live my life over again, I would be an American!" (Donadio 66)], and when the tale was written James had recently returned from a long overdue and eye-opening trip to the U.S., the bewilderment of which he testifies to in *The American Scene* (1906). Note also that Spencer sees the ghost of his unlived self as a successful business man in New York, reminding us of one of James's fantasies described in his Preface to *Daisy Miller* for the New York Edition, in which he imagines himself in New York "[riding] the *nouvelle* down-town" to Wall Street as if on horseback, being cheered and revered by the businessmen there, rather than being trapped in the more feminine surroundings of the drawing rooms uptown, where the only other male presences he encountered were "music-masters and French

pastry-cooks" (*LC2* 1274-75). Finally, Brydon's ghostly encounter has its own double in Chapter 25 of James's first autobiography, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), in the famous passage in which he describes himself as a boy in the *Galerie d'Apollon* in the Louvre, wherein young James is pursued a ghostly figure but manages to "turn the tables" and witness the "visitant" flee "for his life" (*SB*<sup>4</sup> 348). How can we not then see Spencer as a stand-in for James, with such doubling coming into play on so many levels?

If this brief overview has been an attempt to highlight some of the main tenets of James's poetics of duplicity—such as noted duplicitous characters and narrators, the presence of doubles and *doppelgängers*, duplicitous narrative techniques and double narrative set-ups—it only scratches the surface of the extensive techniques of duplicity at work within James's fiction. What is more, as the connection to James's first autobiography above indicates, there is still the question of duplicity on the part of James within his works of non-fiction, from his biographies and autobiographies to his reviews and paratextual material to his letters and notebooks. With so much of his writings for scholars to pore over, it is not surprising that a great number of contradictory statements on the part of James can be pointed to as possible signs of his duplicity. Take, as one example among many, antithetical assessment of French realists, from Balzac and Flaubert to Zola, Goncourt and Daudet? How should we interpret the fact that in the 1870's, for example, James would laud Edmund de Goncourt as "the best" of the French school in an 1876 letter to William Dean Howells and then, in an 1877 review of the Frenchman's work in *The Nation*, write him off as "intolerably unclean"? Similarly, what is to be made of James's high praise for Alphonse Daudet in his 1870 essay in light of his calling his future French acquaintance "dreary & disagreeable" and "intrinsically weak" in an 1876 letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry (*LIL*<sup>5</sup> 67, 71; *LC2* 404)? To what extent could such contradictions be considered ambivalence on the part of James, or a changing view of the writer in question over time, or perhaps simple graciousness in regards to a particular reader or correspondent? At what point does this become duplicity? When looking for such traces of duplicity in James's non-fiction, many scholars would also point to certain aspects of his autobiographical works and the way James seems to have altered certain 'facts' or 'truths'. Was it duplicity, for example, to rewrite one of the

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<sup>4</sup> *A Small Boy and Others*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913. Hereafter abbreviated as *SB*.

<sup>5</sup> *Henry James: Life in Letters*. Ed. Philip Horne. London: Penguin Classics, 1999. Hereafter abbreviated as *LIL*.

reprinted letters from his father to Emerson in a much stronger tone than the original, or to combine two of his trips to Europe into one for his autobiography? Is this just part and parcel of the subjective retelling inherent in any autobiographical undertaking? And what is one to make of his notorious rewriting of some of his brother William's letters for their inclusion in his *Notes of a Son and a Brother*? The changes James made were indeed serious enough to cause a family scandal and upset his nephew Harry James, who would publish a collection of his father's 'authentic' letters in 1920. Was this simply 'poetic licence'? If so, when does poetic licence become embellishment, and embellishment duplicity? On November 18, 1913, James would send an apologetic letter to his nephew on this matter, a letter in which James admits his nephew "was right to be offended," but in which he also famously calls attention to his own right to a subjective rendering of the facts: "I did instinctively regard it at last as all *my* truth, to do what I would with" (*LHJ2*<sup>6</sup> 559). If 'truth' is thus in the eye of the beholder, then the same could be said of 'duplicity'.

The purpose of this volume is thus to explore James's myriad uses of what we have called the poetics of duplicity in both his fiction and his non-fiction. The notion is one, as we have seen, that comes into play on and across many levels, and, consequently, this publication is divided into five sections, each dealing with one of the main facets of Jamesian duplicity as outlined above:

- Part I: Duplicitous Subtexts
- Part II: Duplicitous Characters
- Part III: Duplicitous Representation
- Part IV: Duplicitous Self-Representation
- Part V: Duplicitous Judgements

It is thus on one of these five aspects of Jamesian 'duplicity' that each of the contributors to this volume has chosen to further our understanding of this key element of the author's signature 'ambiguity'. In the first part of this volume, entitled 'Duplicitous Subtexts', two of the most prominent and internationally recognized scholars of Henry James, Jean Perrot and Sergio Perosa, each uncover key literary sources used by James in some of his best known and most extensively studied works—proof that a century of careful criticism and close readings have not unearthed all of the secrets and literary trickery carefully buried in James's fiction. In Chapter 1, Jean Perrot, Professor Emeritus of *Université de Paris XIII* and a recognized

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<sup>6</sup> *The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II*. Ed. Percy Lubbock. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920. Hereafter abbreviated as *LHJ2*.

authority on certain key works by James, including *The Turn of the Screw*, gives his findings as to what the mysterious and undisclosed “private source,” which James cryptically alludes to in his Preface to the New York Edition of the disturbing tale of the governess, might very well be. Though largely forgotten by today's readers, and completely overlooked by a century of Jamesian criticism, the source-text Perrot discovers was a popular work of fiction in the 1870's, and Perrot not only shows how this lost subtext played a key role in the structure, plot and main themes of *The Turn of the Screw*, but he also demonstrates how the work had a latent influence on the work of James throughout his career. Similarly, Sergio Perosa, Professor Emeritus of Ca' Foscari University in Venice and author of dozens of landmark works of criticism on James and other authors, here brings to light unexpected connections between the works and characters of William Shakespeare and those of Henry James. ‘The Bard’ could then be seen as a slightly modified double of ‘the Master’, at least in the eyes of the latter, as Henry James would often portray Shakespeare in terms of his own nineteenth-century image of a writer of fiction, all the while using works of Shakespeare and especially a number of his heroines as key sources for his own. ‘Duplicity’ as presented in these two studies could then be seen in terms of a somewhat underhanded ‘duplication’, as well as in the ways James could be seen as attempting to, as it were, cover his tracks.

The six chapters included in Part II of our study, entitled “Duplicitous Characters”, seek to give us a more profound understanding of duplicity on the part of the protagonists in James's fiction, going far beyond the staging of deceitful and manipulative interactions—fraught with lies, half-truths and sins of omission—that were often key obstacles and/or vehicles for the plots of James's novels and tales, as described above. Thus, Thomas Constantinesco explores the unexpected ‘lesson of duplicity’ inherent in James's story “The Lesson of the Master”, by focusing not on the more obvious use of lies and manipulation on the part of the Master in the tale—who connivingly manages to separate the seemingly naïve would-be writer Paul Overt from the object of his physical desire, Marion Fancourt, so as to greedily keep her for himself—but instead on the duplicity of the supposed victim. Constantinesco proves that the manipulation goes both ways, that Overt dabbles in duplicity as much as the ‘Master’ and that James has played a clever game of mutual mystification, of doubling and of subjective projection. Similarly, in Chapter 7, Agnès Pokol-Hayhurst focuses on lying and manipulation by the characters in James's late work, *The Golden Bowl* (1903), also focusing on the ‘reciprocity’ of deceit among the characters. The notion of

'morality' in James's work is therefore explored, and enhanced, with the support of related psychoanalytical and sociological theories.

The four remaining chapters in Part II continue to explore the deceitful "relations" and "connections" between James's characters, all by focusing on the author's works of the mid- to late 1880's and the 1890's. Richard Anker, for example, uses cases of duplicity and deceit on the part of James's characters in a number of key tales and novels of that period (from "The Author of Beltraffio" of 1884 to *The Turn of the Screw* of 1898) so as to draw an unexpected parallel between James's narrative devices and related theories brought forth by Nietzsche in his 1887 *On the Genealogy of Morals*, showing how James skilfully employs and even exemplifies Nietzschean notions of "bad conscience" and "productive duplicity" through his plots and characters. In Chapter 5, Keiko Beppu specifically focuses on the art of lying among James's characters, focusing primarily on a lesser known tale of James that very openly draws this type of duplicity to the forefront, "The Liar" (1888). If in the story, the artist-protagonist could be said to use his art (in this case his portrait of the 'liar' in question, Colonel Capadose) to violently confront lies and reality, Beppu draws a parallel to James's literary method and to the amount of 'fibbing' that is inherent to all story-telling. John Holland then studies the notion of lying and more particularly the duplicitous and clouded transmissions of knowledge, facts and secrets in a selection of James's short works of the 1890's, including "Nona Vincent" (1892), "The Middle Years" (1893) and "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896). Holland manages to combine notions of psychoanalysis and market capitalism in his exploration of the "value" of the exchange of such tainted or even unspoken information. Finally, Angus Wrenn studies the lies and deception at work within the narratives of "The Private Life" (1892) and a few of James's other ghostly tales of the 1890's, through the prism of sociological theories put forth by Emile Durkheim, James's contemporary, in his 1914 study "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions". Wrenn thus establishes a key link between the two theorists, one social and one literary, a connection founded on the notion of "psychic dualism" and a possible key to James's use of ghostly doubles, as discussed above.

In Part III of this study, entitled "Duplicitous Representation", the work begun in previous chapters on acts of duplicity among characters is expanded to include other narrative elements within the author's works of fiction. The studies in this section also all focus primarily on the dense and often (for readers) more problematic works of James written in the early 1900's, just before or during what is called James's 'Major Phase'. Eric Savoy, for example, begins his analysis by outlining the key differences to

be found in James's representation of deceit and duplicity in his earlier and later works of fiction, when duplicity became part of a more "performative register" on the part of protagonists. He then draws a parallel to certain philosophical theories of Kierkegaard in order to better illustrate James's use of duplicitous speech acts and of doubling, in both *The Ambassadors* (1901) and "The Jolly Corner" (1908). Rebekah Scott then further explores the doubling and deceit at work in *The Ambassadors*, by analysing the meaning and repercussions of what the narrator claims to be Strether's "double consciousness", and by bringing in key uses of the same notion by the likes of George Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson and even WEB Du Bois so as to better understand James's literary use of what his brother called "the divided self". In Chapter 11, Madeleine Vala turns our attention to the duplicitous act of gift-giving as a key device of duplicity and reciprocity, focusing on its use not only within the novel *The Golden Bowl* (1903), but also in earlier works such as "The Story of a Masterpiece" (1868) and "Paste" (1899). Finally, Victor Geraldo Rivas-Lopez provides a careful examination of the use of duplicity in what is generally considered one of James's most enigmatic and inscrutable works, *The Sacred Fount* (1901), arguing that the inherent duplicity of the experimental novel, one nearly disowned by the author himself, is at play simultaneously on three levels: that of the symbolic, of the psychological and of the dramatic.

The fourth part of this study expands on the work of the previous section in two key ways, as it both concerns works written by James after 1905, and, more importantly, focuses on the self-reflective non-fiction work which comprised most of his literary output after age 62, and which included his late travel writings, his Prefaces for his collected works for the famed New York Edition, and his three consecutive autobiographies [*A Small Boy and Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) and *The Middle Years* (incomplete, 1917)]. These chapters thus demonstrate how the notions of duplicity (both in terms of deceit and of doubling) were at work on a far more personal (and perhaps more dubious) level, as they concerned James's own assessment of his life, his literary legacy and his personal loyalties. Paula Marantz Cohen, for example, focuses on the oft-mentioned, catastrophic failure of James as a London playwright in 1895 and on the effect it had on his later priorities and writing style. However, rather than focusing on whether or not James tried to use what he painfully learned about the dramatic art to sound new depths in his novel-writing, as many critics have done, Cohen instead elaborates on the notions of performative "self-help" as set forth separately by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the British physician/writer Samuel Smiles, and James's brother William, thereby presenting duplicity more as a vehicle for creativity than as one of

self-delusion. Then, Mhairi Pooler bridges the gap between duplicity in James's fiction and his non-fiction by doing a parallel study of two works by James's that share the same tell-tale title: 'The Middle Years'—that is, the short story of 1893 and the incomplete third and final volume of James's autobiography in 1917. Pooler shows that James's writing of fiction and of autobiography share many of the same devices and priorities, but she also demonstrates that it is not the similarities that matter nearly as much as the differences between those similarities. Then, in "The Rage of Wonderment", Collin Meissner takes a closer look at the divided self-image of James in his autobiographies, paying particular attention to the tension between James's world of aesthetics and the imposing world of capital and of art as business that characterized his time. Thus Meissner reveals some of James's "conjurer's tricks" that he used to bridge the gaps between art and business, and how this affected both his vision of what he saw as distinctly 'American' values and his vision of what a successful literary career should or must entail. Working off of that discussion of James's view of his long-lost homeland, Madeleine Danova focuses on James's controversial travel sketch concerning his return to the U.S. in 1904-05, *The American Scene*. Danova explores a connection between James's tendency to create doubles of himself (as he does imaginatively with Brydon and the confronted ghost in "The Jolly Corner") and the "ethnic ghosts" and doubles he creates in his descriptions of the new and changing American identities he discovered on his return, and the markedly changed face of America James described.

To complete the discussion of James's use of duplicity in his works of non-fiction, the final part of this study, entitled "Duplicitous Judgements", turns away from James's representation of himself and towards his often guileful assessments of other writers, artists and communities, focusing this time on statements made by James in certain biographies, reviews and travel sketches in which praise is often a vehicle for thinly veiled criticism, and, conversely, open criticism can suggest muted praise. Miraslawa Buchholtz provides a thought-provoking transition from Part IV to Part V of this study, as she adapts known theories concerning the duplicity, be it positive and negative, involved in both writing autobiography and the far less studied field of writing biography, before using these theories to explore the poetics of duplicity at work in two of James's biographies: *Hawthorne* (1879) and *William Wetmore Story and His Friends* (1903). In the following chapter, Tomoko Eguchi explores the intermingling of praise and criticism inherent in Henry James's assessments of Alphonse Daudet, showing how the author-critic's duplicity stemmed not only from his friendship with the French author, but also from his equally duplicitous

views of French realists and of realism in general, as well as his connection to John Ruskin's notion of ethical aestheticism. James's relation to John Ruskin's art criticism and aesthetic theories are at the very centre of the chapter provided by Rosella Mamoli-Zorzi, an analysis of duplicitous comments made by James in his two travel sketches on the citadel of Carcassonne in the southwest of France. Mamoli-Zorzi demonstrates how James's praise of recent architectural restorations made to the citadel was tempered, if not countered, by his praise for Ruskin's aesthetic views.

The final chapter of this study could be said to stand out for two very obvious reasons: firstly, it is the only study written in French, and secondly, it does not present the findings of a Jamesian scholar *per se* but of a recognized, working psychoanalyst, Johanna Lasry, who saw in the various methods of duplicity at work within James's 1891 tale "The Pupil" a way to make remarkable headway with one of her patients, an eleven-year-old girl suffering from chronic anxiety attacks. Lasry thus bridges the gap between judgements of James and judgements by James, between reality and fiction, and between the identification of techniques of duplicity in a literary work and the diagnosis and/or application of such tendencies in the real world.

Thus readers of any of James's works of fiction or non-fiction cannot but be overwhelmed, much like Laura Wing in our opening quotation, with a sense of "a curious duplicity." Though a "literal meaning" of the evasive notion seems impossible to pin down, we can attempt to trace its myriad forms and chase down its complex relations, keeping in mind Henry James's oft-quoted and consistently illustrated declaration that "really, universally, relations stop nowhere" (LC2 1041).

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AN *The Art of the Novel, Critical Prefaces, with an introduction by R.P. Blackmur.* New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.
- CL1 *The Complete Letters of Henry James, 1872-1876, Vol.1.* Ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
- CL2 *The Complete Letters of Henry James, 1872-1876, Vol.2.* Ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 2009.
- CNB *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James.* Ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- CTHJ *The Complete Tales of Henry James.* 12 Vols. Ed. Leon Edel. London: Hart-Davies, 1962-64.
- CTW1 *Henry James—Collected Travel Writings: The Continent, A Little Tour in France, Italian Hours, Other Travels.* New York: The Library of America, 1993.
- CTW2 *Henry James—Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America.* New York: The Library of America, 1993.
- HJA *Henry James, Autobiography.* Ed. F. W. Dupee. New York: Criterion Books, 1956.
- HJL *Henry James: Letters.* 4 Vols. Ed. Leon Edel. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974-84.
- LC1 *Henry James: Literary Criticism, Vol. 1. Essays on Literature, American and English Writers.* New York: The Library of America, 1984.

- LC2*      *Henry James: Literary Criticism, Vol. 2. French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition.* New York: The Library of America, 1984.
- LHJ1*      *The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I.* Ed. Percy Lubbock. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.
- LHJ2*      *The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II.* Ed. Percy Lubbock. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.
- LIL*      *Henry James: Life in Letters.* Ed. Philip Horne. London: Penguin Classics, 1999.
- SB*      *A Small Boy and Others.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
- TS*      *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources.* Ed. Robert Kimbrough. New York. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966.

**PART ONE:**  
**DUPPLICITOUS SUBTEXTS**



## CHAPTER ONE

### HENRY JAMES GAMBLING ON GHOSTS: THE “PRIVATE SOURCE” OF *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*

JEAN PERROT

#### ***The Bachelor’s “Game” of Letters: Turning “the key”, then the “screw”***

As a foreword to this article, we would like to quote a few lines describing the dramatic death of a little boy: “For Miles is dying [...]. Miles is dying [...]. Something beating in his heart, beats Hope down. Mighty throbs, like the strokes of a hammer, beat it down, down, crush it to nothing; and a terrible sinking comes into its place” (Florence M... 237-239). These words, as no doubt one will have guessed, are not from the governess facing Peter Quint’s ghost with young Miles in her arms in the final scene of *The Turn of the Screw*, but from some character in another story, the author of which will stand as the “figure in the carpet” of this essay. We will keep it undisclosed in our introduction, letting its knowledge be part of what Roland Barthes calls the “surprises” of the text and of the reader’s expectations and pleasure, sometimes based on “misunderstanding.” These sentences look like some parody over-emphasizing the denouement of what Henry James in his letter to H.G. Wells dated December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1898, several months after his book publication, presented as “essentially a pot-boiler and a *jeu d’esprit*” (*TS* 111).<sup>1</sup> They are extracts from the rambling speech made incoherent by “excitement and exhaustion” (Montgomery 276) of a boy raving from fever and about to die. And the author of that fiction, in which we will also find a governess,

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* and several related texts will be given from Robert Kimbrough’s Norton Critical Edition of *Henry James. The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources. Essays in Criticism*. In subsequent references, this work will be abbreviated as *TS*.

declared in her preface: “The following is not a child’s story. It is intended for those who are interested in children; for those who are willing to stoop to view life as it appears to a child” (2). How close to James’s literary design in *What Maisie Knew* and how unexpected a hero with the name of Miles! Could this be the real story of the “private source” of *The Turn of the Screw* mentioned in the *New York Preface* (1908) about which the American novelist wrote: “I wondered, I confess, why so fine a germ, gleaming there in the wayside dust of life, had never been deftly picked up” (TS 118). A “germ” which, as James’s *Notebooks* suggested, was sown by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but which in itself had a ghostly flavour, as the novelist in his Preface assumed it to be but “the shadow of a shadow,” “the withheld glimpse, as it were, of a dreadful matter that had been reported years before, and with as few particulars, to a lady with whom he had youthfully talked” (118). Not hiding our perplexity at such a sophisticated equivocation, and considering that the source we are going to disclose cannot be questioned, we will be induced to throw doubt on the sincerity of the statement James made when, on the same page of his Preface, he declared that for him *The Turn of the Screw* was “a perfect example of an exercise of the imagination unassisted, unassociated—playing the game, making the score in the phrase of our sporting day, off its own bat” (118). Unassisted, unassociated? Would not this assertion sound like a provocative hint at James’s own utter and genuine duplicity? Could not his “subject” stand “with secrets and compartments, with possible treacheries and traps”, like that of *The Wings of the Dove* evoked in the Preface to Vol. XVI to *The Art of the Novel* (AN<sup>2</sup> 289)? Or, more honestly, was not his declaration a perfect illustration of the ways in which the literary “game,” as the novelist called it, “was worth playing”? It was the game of letters, which he considered “an interesting thing, the imaginative faculty acting with the *whole* case on its hands” (TS 118). What he meant by putting the word “whole” in italics is just the matter we are going to investigate now...

More precisely, our present purpose is not only to point out a source of *The Turn of the Screw*, which has never been mentioned, but to show how this source had been exerting its latent influence on James’s writing all along the years from 1870-1871 to the end of the century and even later. This hypotext was published as early as 1869 and was warmly received by *The Saturday Review* in January 1870, three months before James returned to the United States. As its author again remarked in her preface it was

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<sup>2</sup> *The Art of the Novel, Critical Prefaces, with an introduction by R.P. Blackmur.* New York & London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962. Hereafter abbreviated as AN.

meant to highlight the children's lives "from their own little point of view" and "to enter for half an hour" into their "manifold small interests, hopes, joys, and trials." It came pat in time for the young bachelor Henry James to feed the imagination of Roger Laurence, who, in *Watch and Ward*, written in the last months of 1870, "had been born a marrying son" (*Novels 1871-1880* 7), would experience "the unexpugnable feeling of paternity," give way to the "restless ghost of his buried hope" in transgressing his "angry vow to live only by himself" and to "*turn the key on his heart*" (14, my italics). Roger, a bachelor, would adopt and educate Nora, but with the secret and perverse aim of marrying her. A strange duplicity for a young man! But James would reverse the scheme of his source story: it was the guardian who would fall ill, not the ward. And *Watch and Ward* would resort to the structural pattern of the dramatic death presented at the beginning of our essay, when Nora, during her guardian's illness, would cry: "He is dying! He is dying!" (110).

James's hidden source provided him with figures of speech, and particularly with synecdoches, as Tzvetan Todorov noted in his well-known 1969 introduction to James's *Tales* (Todorov 17), which set their imprint on the plots of many novels—the most important one being, as in our initial quotation, that of "the heart" in the central enigma on which Hugh Vereker planned his ironical game in "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896). In this novella, James with growing confidence, since readers did not take the bait when he hinted at his source in his former works, would articulate the reader's expectations on the deciphering of this image within the writer's strategy. Vereker, when asked whether "the heart" was "an element of form or an element of feeling", would say that he meant it to be taken as "the organ of life". With what duplicity again, when one thinks that his aim was to give his converser "a tip", a gift whose double meaning lay in the systematic use of the anamorphic style, which I have analysed in my 1982 essay "*Henry James, une écriture énigmatique.*"

The narrative uses and transformations of the hypotext were also a means for the novelist to express his views on education and society and at the same time, as we will see, a way of recollecting and scanning his past life and family links. Grounding *The Turn of the Screw* on it was of particular significance after the publication of *The Other House* (1896) and of *What Maisie Knew* (1897). For in both stories parents had been disqualified: in the first story Effie had been murdered and in the second one Maisie had freed herself from parental authority, just to fall into the grip of Mrs. Wix. And *The Turn of the Screw* would be a next step in this exploration of the fate of the Victorian child, as a case of possession resulting from the careless behaviour of an irresponsible rich uncle and of

a dubious governess. But it was also, considering “the tone of tragic, yet of exquisite mystification” brought into the fiction by Douglas, the novelist’s “young friend, the supposititious narrator,” as James called him (*TS* 120), a story of seduction, and even more of playful abduction. This leads us to wonder why James was confident enough to hint at his source and to give the boy of this tale the name of Miles. Was it simply a writer’s fad, just as when he later hinted at Balzac’s *Louis Lambert* in coining the name of Lambert Strether? Did he believe that his readers would be as blind to the links of his fiction with his source text as they had been before, when he had made a more moderate use of it in former tales? Or did he think that this fiction written by an eager moralist, who was “markedly pious in tone,” as the entry of *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* lets us know, and so distant from his own intentions, would be screened and protected by the apparitions seen by his perverse governess? In 1897 ghosts were the rage of the day in London, but James in his New York Preface was conscious that “the good, the really effective and heart-shaking ghost-stories (roughly so to term them) appeared all to be have been told” (118). In using Peter Quint or Miss Jessel as demons-spirits representative of “Portentous evil” (122), he wished to remedy the modern lack of, as he said, “a beautiful lost form” (118). Whatever the appropriate term, James’s gambling on the governess’s visions was an audacious “turn of the key” on his source plot. From the “key” to the “screw”, we will then enter James’s literary workshop through a devious door, which again is one side of the “surprises” granted by the critical approach. Paradoxically in tackling the subject, we will solely rely on internal evidence, for Henry James has always been eager to keep a deep secrecy when he was most wanted to speak, and, as he wrote in his Preface, his “values are positively all blanks” (123). Let us then, after the suspense of this dilatory introduction and like the narrator of “The Figure in the Carpet”, introduce the literary game of a gambling visionary.

### **I. *Misunderstood* by Florence Montgomery**

And here is the story, which has never been mentioned and stands at the basis of James’s fictions devoted to the description of children and to the problems of education: *Misunderstood* is a story in two parts by Florence Montgomery. It was published in 1869, both in a Richard Bentley English edition and in an American one by Anson D. F. Randolph. It was quite successful and there were many nineteenth-century re-editions of the book; one, 288 pages long, in 1872 was by B. Tauchnitz, and we will use it for our quotations. The Richard Bentley version, (1874, 1878, 1879 and